

## Examining Christian Doctrine

### Lesson 32: The Doctrine of Supernatural Beings Part 2 – Angels

The study of angels is a fascinating study. The word ‘angel’ is found almost 300 times in the Bible, with around 120 in the Old Testament and 180 in the New Testament. Although much of the Biblical narrative is set within the natural world, angelic activity is seen as pretty common and normal throughout the Bible.

#### About Angels

- The term *angel* comes from the Greek *angelos* and the Hebrew *mal'akh*, both meaning "messenger." They were created to worship God and serve His purposes, including conveying messages and performing God's will (Hebrews 1:14).
- Angels, like everything else in the universe were made by God. According to Scripture, they're part of the universe God created. In a passage that refers to angels (the "host" or "armies" of heaven), we read, "*You are the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host . . . and the host of heaven worships you*" (Nehemiah 9:6).
- Angels are spirit beings, and do not have physical bodies. However, even though angels are spirit beings, they are finite beings and not omnipresent or omnipotent like God. As spiritual beings, angels do not experience death as humans do. However, the Bible does indicate they are subject to judgment (Matthew 25:41) and that the devil and rebellious angels will face eternal judgment.
- Angels are not usually seen unless God gives the ability to see them (such as when Elisha prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened) or unless angels manifest themselves. When they are seen, they can often appear as and were mistaken for men because they manifested themselves in human-like appearance. Such as in Genesis 18-19 when angels visited Abraham and later appeared to Lot in Sodom. Also, Hebrews 13:2 implies that angels may take on human form, as people could entertain angels without realizing it.
- The Bible doesn't tell us how many angels God created. But apparently, there are a lot of them. Here are a few of the ways the Bible tells us how many angels there are: On Mount Sinai, God "*came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand*" (Deuteronomy 33:2). We also learn that, "*the chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands*" (Psalm 68:17 NIV). When we come to worship, we come into the presence of "*innumerable angels*" (Hebrews 12:22).
- Jesus taught that in the resurrection people "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30, see also Luke 20:34–36). This clearly suggests that angels don't marry. No other passages address relationships between angels, so anything beyond this is simply speculation.
- The Bible implies that angels do have some degree of free will, as some chose to rebel against God. Scripture indicates that some angels rebelled, led by Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-17), resulting in the creation of demons or fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). Angels appear to have the capacity for choice, but those who remain faithful to God are fully aligned with His will.
- Angels in the Bible appear to have a rank and order. The angel hierarchy is supported by Jude 9, when the angel Michael is called an "archangel"—a title that indicates rule or authority over other angels. Only Michael and Gabriel are the only angels named in the Bible.
- Angels are very powerful. Angels are called "mighty ones who do his word" (Psalm 103:20). They are certainly "greater in might and power" than humans (2 Peter 2:11, see also Matthew 28:2). Angels use their power to battle against Satan's demonic forces (Daniel 10:13, Revelation 12:7–8, 20:1–3).
- Angels are not to be worshipped. "Worship of angels" was one of the false doctrines being taught at Colossae (Colossians 2:18). In the book of Revelation, an angel warns John not to worship him: "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God" (Revelation 19:10). Moreover, Scripture gives us no warrant to pray to or to seek the appearance of angels.

## Roles of Angels in the Bible

**1. Messengers of God:** Angels primarily act as divine messengers, delivering important messages from God to His people, especially during critical moments in salvation history. As messengers, they announce events, warn of coming judgments, and provide divine guidance.

- An angel visited Abraham to announce Isaac's birth and warn of Sodom's destruction (Genesis 18).
- The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, initiating his call to lead Israel (Exodus 3).
- An angel appeared to Daniel to explain his visions about future events (Daniel 8-9).
- The angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive Jesus, the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38).
- Gabriel also appeared to Zechariah to foretell the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-20).
- Angels at the tomb announced Jesus' resurrection to the women, declaring, "He is not here; He has risen" (Matthew 28:5-7).

**2. Protectors of God's People:** Angels are depicted as protectors, guarding God's people in times of danger or distress, and intervening to provide safety and deliverance.

- Angels accompanied the Israelites during the Exodus, guiding and protecting them on their journey (Exodus 23:20).
- An angel surrounded Elisha and his servant with a heavenly army to protect them from enemy forces (2 Kings 6:15-17).
- An angel closed the mouths of the lions to protect Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6:22).
- An angel protected Peter by rescuing him from prison, guiding him safely past the guards (Acts 12:6-11).
- Angels ministered to Jesus in the wilderness after His temptation, strengthening and sustaining Him (Matthew 4:11).

**3. Guides and Providers:** Angels often guide people in their mission or provide practical support during critical times, underscoring God's provision and guidance.

- An angel guided Hagar in the wilderness, providing water and encouragement for her and her son (Genesis 16:7-12; 21:17-19).
- An angel provided food and water to Elijah, sustaining him as he fled from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:5-7).
- An angel directed Philip to meet the Ethiopian eunuch, leading to the eunuch's conversion (Acts 8:26).
- An angel appeared to Cornelius, instructing him to seek out Peter for the gospel message (Acts 10:3-6).

**4. Executors of Divine Judgment:** Angels are often sent as agents of judgment, carrying out God's justice on individuals or nations in response to sin or rebellion.

- Angels destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah as an act of divine judgment (Genesis 19:1-29).
- The angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, delivering Jerusalem from siege (2 Kings 19:35).
- An angel brought a plague on Israel after David's census, as an act of judgment (2 Samuel 24:15-17).
- An angel struck down Herod Agrippa for his pride, leading to his death (Acts 12:23).
- In Revelation, angels carry out a series of judgments, releasing plagues and natural disasters (Revelation 8-9).

**5. Worshipers of God and Participants in His Heavenly Court:** Angels are seen worshiping God and participating in His heavenly court, continually praising His holiness and glory.

- In Isaiah's vision, seraphim surround God's throne, worshiping Him with cries of "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:1-3).
- Job depicts angels (the "sons of God") gathering before God's throne, symbolizing their role in His heavenly court (Job 1:6).
- In Revelation, angels surround God's throne, worshiping Him and the Lamb with loud praises (Revelation 5:11-12).
- The angels announce the birth of Christ to the shepherds with praises of "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:13-14).

**6. Witnesses of Human Affairs:** Angels often act as witnesses to human actions and divine covenants, observing and recording events as part of God's oversight.

- Jacob invoked God and His angel as witnesses to his covenant with Laban (Genesis 31:49-53).
- Deuteronomy 32 suggests that the "heavenly host" observes the nations, reflecting an angelic awareness of human affairs.
- Jesus says that "the angels in heaven" rejoice when a sinner repents, suggesting their active awareness of human redemption (Luke 15:10).
- Paul refers to angels as present observers in the life of the church (1 Corinthians 4:9).

### What about Guardian Angels?

The belief that each person has a specific angel assigned to watch over them, has roots in both Judaism and Christianity, but has often been debated and perspectives vary on its scriptural basis and theological implications.

Biblical support:

- **Matthew 18:10:** "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."
- **Hebrews 1:14:** Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?
- **Acts 12:15:** When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

Early church figures like Origen and Jerome advocated for the belief in guardian angels, seeing them as part of God's provision for humanity. Thomas Aquinas later elaborated on the idea, arguing that each person has a guardian angel assigned from birth, based on passages like Psalm 91:11-12, which speaks of God commanding his angels to guard believers in all their ways.

Critics argue that believers are collectively served by angels in general, and that there are often multiple angels aiding one person at the same time. This is seen in the band of angels that carried Lazarus to heaven (Luke 16:22), the army of angels that fought for Israel (2 Kings 6:17), and the angels commanded by God to protect those who seek shelter in the shadow of the Almighty (Ps. 91:11). How this works, for whom it works, and when it works, the Bible does not indicate specifically. However, while Scripture clearly says that angels are ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14), it does not say that there are individual guardian angels for each person alive in the world at one time.

Some theologians, particularly during the Reformation, argued that the concept of individual guardian angels detracts from the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit as protectors and intercessors for believers, emphasizing that believers are ultimately under Christ's care and protection, reducing the need for a personal angelic protector. The role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and protecting believers could also be seen as fulfilling any need for individual attention, making the idea of guardian angels somewhat redundant. There is a risk that the idea of guardian angels could lead to excessive attention on angels or a form of spiritual dependence on them, which could detract from the centrality of Christ in the believer's life.