

Angels

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Introduction

People in many different cultures and religions believe in angels or spirit beings who serve as intermediaries between heaven and earth. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam explicitly call such spirit beings angels, some of which are good and others evil. In Hinduism and Buddhism they are called Devas (good spirits) and asuras (evil spirits, or demons). Stories of amazing and sometimes supernatural interventions of protection have circulated among these cultures and continue to do so. We are interested in the truth about angels, so we need to examine the Christian Scriptures to find that truth.

The Hebrew and Greek words for *angel* mean *messenger* and can refer to angelic beings, human beings, or to Jesus as the Messiah-Messenger from God. For example, in Malachi 3:1 the word *messenger* refers to someone who will *prepare the way* for the Lord Himself. Jesus identified that messenger as John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4). The word for *Messenger* in verse 2 refers to the Lord as *the Messenger of the covenant* who will *come to His temple*. That, of course, was Jesus, who often visited the Jerusalem Temple in the gospel accounts. Furthermore, Judges 6 describes *the Angel of the Lord* as the Lord Himself (vv. 11, 14, 16), as does Zechariah 3:1-2. In other Old Testament passages the context does not make it clear whether the *Angel of the Lord* is the Lord or an angelic creature from heaven, so we cannot always be certain.

Origin of Evil Angels

Originally, all angels lived in heaven with God (Rev. 12:7-9). But one-third of them (v. 4) followed a leader called the Devil or Satan, who actually started a war in heaven, resulting in their defeat and expulsion from heaven to the earth. This is the original “Star Wars” but was literal and not fictional. Ezekiel 28:12-19, under the symbolic type of the king of Tyre, speaks of a specific angel in heaven who originated sin in the entire universe right there in heaven. The expression *cherub who covers* (v. 14) refers to angels associated with God’s literal throne (Ezekiel 10; 11:22) and the manmade cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, which must have therefore represented His throne in the tabernacle and later temple (Exodus 25:18-22; I Samuel 4:4). Ezekiel 28:14’s reference to *the holy mountain of God* refers to heaven because a symbolic *mountain* symbolizes a kingdom (Daniel 2:35, 44-45); verse 13’s reference to *Eden*, meaning *pleasure*, must refer to heaven as a place of pleasure rather than to the Garden of Eden on earth (Genesis 2:8, 15). Isaiah 14:12-21 speaks about a being in heaven whose name was Lucifer (meaning *Day Star*) who was

disgraced and fell from heaven because he wanted the worship that was owed to God instead (vv. 13-14). By comparing Revelation 12, Ezekiel 28, and Isaiah 14, we deduce that Lucifer was the angel who turned himself into *Satan* (meaning *adversary*) and became the leader of the rebellion in heaven. Now only the good angels, the ones who remained loyal to God, are based in heaven, while the evil angels are now based on earth. Note that God did not create evil angels. He created all angels, but some of them turned themselves into evil angels by what must have been their free-will choice (Ezekiel 28:15).

Gabriel may have taken Lucifer's place by God's throne because Gabriel told Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, that *I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God* (Luke 1:19).

The Nature of Angels

First, angels are not the spirits of the dead in heaven as popular culture often portrays them, such as in the Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life* or in the television series *Highway to Heaven*. We know this because Ezekiel 28:15 tells us they were created as angels, and they existed in heaven before sin and death entered the world (Ezekiel 28:12-15), and it was Satan who introduced sin and death into the world (Genesis 3:1-6; Revelation 12:9).

Second, angels are spirit beings (Hebrews 1:13-14), with the word for *spirit* meaning *moving air* or *breath*. John 4:24 calls God a *Spirit*. But angels must be physical in their essential nature or else they would be gods. The reason for this is that a being whose essential nature is immaterial exists outside space and time and is therefore unlimited by space and time. And a being unlimited by time is by definition eternal. That means that God is the only eternal Being in the universe. So being called *spirits* must mean that angels are capable of becoming *temporarily* exempt from the limitations of matter and space. This explains the Biblical evidence concerning what they are capable of doing. For example, angels can move between heaven and earth in a matter of minutes, according to Daniel 9:21, where the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:19, 26 call Gabriel an angel) was sent from heaven to the prophet Daniel while he was praying in order to explain something to Daniel (Daniel 9:22). They can also move physical barriers without touching them, as when an angel opened the prison gate in Jerusalem in order to let Peter out of prison (Acts 12:5-11). Angels can also change their appearance into other forms. The two angels who visited Lot in the city of Sodom (Genesis 19:1) appeared as men (vv. 5, 8). Hebrews 13:1 tells us that sometimes we have encountered angels unknowingly when we entertained strangers. Also, the angel Gabriel appeared as a man to Daniel (Daniel 8:15-16; 9:21; and Luke 1:19, 26). Angels can not only change their appearance, but they can also make themselves invisible (II Kings 6:17 with Psalms 91:11 and Revelation 12:7). Finally, angels can inhabit bodies. For example, in Genesis 3:1-5 Satan (Revelation 12:9) inhabited a serpent. Then, of course, there are numerous examples in the New Testament gospels of unclean spirits inhabiting people. We can outline a summary of the known abilities of angels as follows:

- Angels can move between heaven and earth in a matter of minutes.
- Angels can move physical barriers without touching them.
- Angels can change their appearance into other forms.
- Angels can make themselves invisible.
- Angels can inhabit bodies.

Some have claimed on the basis of Luke 20:36 that angels are eternal and/or immortal. That text reads, *nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection*. First, as we said earlier, only God is eternal because His essential nature lies outside time and space—although He certainly projects a visible image into time and space so that His creatures in heaven can see and interact with Him at a personal level. Second, since God only created perfect life, originally all angels would have been immortal. But since God alone has life inherently within Him, the angels’ immortality must have been conditional, like Adam’s & Eve’s (see our paper entitled “The State of Man in Death”). The context of Luke 20:36 equates these angels with *people* who are *sons of the resurrection* in contrast to the *sons of this age* (vv. 34-35). Those angels who did not rebel in heaven never sinned, so they never lost their immortality as must had the evil angels. Therefore, it is not inherent in angelic nature to be immortal.

Demons

The New Testament uses terms like *unclean spirit(s)*, *spirit(s)*, and the Greek word for *demon* (*devil* in the King James’ Version) to describe intelligent beings who sometimes inhabited people. These must therefore be evil angels, the ones who followed Satan. Note that Matthew 17:14-21’s story of a *lunatick* (v. 15, King James’ Version; literally *moonstruck*) being a *demon* (v. 18, *devil* in the King James’ Version) does not mean that all crazy people are demon-possessed. Examples of such demon-possessed people are found in Matthew 8:28-34, 12:43-45, 17:14-21; Mark 1:21-28, 3:11-12, 5:1-20, 6:13, 9:14-29, Luke 4:31-37, 6:18, 8:26-39, 9:37-42, 10:17, and 11:24-26.

Many wonder why there are not demon-possessed today as they were in the New Testament times. First, there may have been more demon possession in Jesus’ day because Jesus’ presence may have irritated evil angels to the point of using possession as a form of interrupting His ministry. Second, some who are diagnosed with multiple personalities and certain other mental disorders today may in fact be demon-possessed but certainly not all. Third, why would Satan and his demonic angels show their possession of people with erratic, crazy behavior if people in this modern era won’t give them credit for it? Although we cannot be certain, it might be that there are as many cases of demon possession but that (1) our modern scientific era does not acknowledge the possibility of demon possession and (2) the demons do not cause erratic, crazy behavior in the people they possess like they used to.

The New Testament does not provide a ritual or ceremony for performing exorcisms as has been the case for post-Biblical exorcisms in Christianity and other religions, like Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Furthermore, there is no such Church office or spiritual gift as an exorcist or exorcism. If a Christian encounters what he thinks might be a case of demon possession, the only Biblical approach is to pray in the name of Jesus. Casting out demons is a miracle, so unless a believer has the spiritual gift of healings or of miracles (I Corinthians 12:9-10, 28), he should attempt to stay away from exorcisms and situations in which demon-possession is more likely to exist.

Orders of Angels

The Bible seems to explicitly mention four orders of angels. Christian angelology identifies nine different orders of angels, which are deduced from Isaiah 6:2-6, Ezekiel 10, 11:22, 28:14-15 (cf. Exodus 25:18-22; I Samuel 4:4), Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12, and Colossians 1:16 and from various Jewish apocryphal books like Tobit, Enoch, III Enoch, and II Esdras (IV Esdras in the Latin Vulgate Bible). Four names of archangels are found in parts of Daniel, Jude, and Revelation (Michael, in Daniel 10:13; 12:1; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7), Tobit (Raphael), II Esdras and the Book of Enoch (Uriel), and III Enoch (Metatron). The other name of an angel in the Bible is Gabriel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). The nine orders in traditional Christian angelology, listed in the traditional order from the highest to the lowest orders, are as follows:

- *Seraphim*—Isaiah 6:2-6...associated with God's throne
- *Cherubim*—Ezekiel 10; 11:22; 28:14-15; cf. Exodus 25:18-22; I Samuel 4:4...associated with God's throne
- *Thrones*—Colossians 1:16...In traditional angelology, usually associated with God's throne in connection with its "wheels" (Ezekiel 1:15-21), the Book of Enoch says these are the angels who guard His throne.
- *Dominions*—Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:16...Traditional angelology says they regulate the duties of certain other angels.
- *Virtues*—Ephesians 1:21 (*might*)...The name comes from the Greek word from which the English word *dynamite* is derived. Traditional angelology says they are responsible for the signs and miracles performed in the world.
- *Powers*—Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; Colossians 1:16...The name comes from the Greek word for *authority*. Traditional angelology says they are the ones who keep the cosmos in order.

- *Principalities*—Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; Colossians 1:16...Also called *rulers*, traditional angelology says they protect and guide groups of people, including nations and institutions.
- *Archangels*—I Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9; cf. Daniel 10:13
- *Guardian Angels*—Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:15

Ephesians 6:12 suggests that principalities, powers (authorities), and rulers in the spiritual realm represent demonic spirits. However, whether they are merely synonyms of each other or represent three specific orders of evil angels is debated by scholars. We suggest they are synonyms of each other because the words *powers* (*authorities*) and *rulers* seem to be synonymous. In turn, this suggests that other spiritual beings mentioned in Ephesians and Colossians are also synonymous terms rather than specific orders of angels. After all, these passages do not explicitly describe them as personal beings like those Scriptures that describe seraphim, cherubim, archangels, or guardian angels. In addition, the apocryphal sources for much of the information on angelology are not part of the Scriptures, so they should carry no weight about the subject. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that Colossians 2:15 names *principalities* and *powers* as having been disarmed by Jesus at the cross. Since Jesus would not have disarmed only two specific orders of evil angels, we conclude that there are only four orders of angels that we know of, which allows for the possibility of course that God may have more orders that He has not revealed to us. Those four orders are discussed below.

Seraphim

The Hebrew word *seraphim* means *burning* and thus refers to the brilliance of these angels. Seraphim are angels associated with God's throne and have six wings (Is. 6:1-7). Nothing else is said in Scripture about these angels.

Cherubim

The Hebrew word *cherubim* comes from a root meaning *to bless, praise, or adore*. Cherubim are associated with God's throne and are said to *cover* (Ezekiel 28:14), presumably God's throne, including His movable chariot-throne (Ezekiel 10; 11:22). Lucifer was called a covering cherub in Ezekiel 28:14 (cf. Is. 14:12-17). Manmade cherubim were part of the covering of the Ark of the Covenant in Israel's tabernacle (Exodus 25:18-22; I Sam. 4:4). According to Ezekiel 10:20-21 cherubim have four wings.

Archangels

The Greek word for archangel means *chief angel* or *chief messenger*. The term chief princes in Daniel 10:13 seems to be synonym for an archangel, and its plural form suggests this term designates an entire class or order of angels. I Thessalonians 4:16 refers to *an* archangel (in the Greek text), also suggesting there is more than one archangel. At the same time, Jude 9 suggests that archangels have a chief of the chief messengers because there Michael is called *the* archangel. The name Michael as applied to a spiritual or heavenly being is mentioned four times in Scripture: (1) Daniel 10:13; (2) Daniel 12:1; (3) Jude 9; and (4) Revelation 12:7. These verses, compared to other Scriptures, supply sufficient information to specifically identify this Michael. First, Daniel 12:1-2 says that when Michael stands up to defend His people at *the time of the end* (Daniel 11:40; 12:1) world history's worst time of trouble against the wicked will begin. According to Revelation 16, in the end-time context, that terrible time of trouble will be the Seven Last Plagues. Then Daniel 12:2 says there will be a resurrection as well. All this suggests that Michael is a divine Being. Second, a comparison of Jude 9 with Zechariah 3:1-5 has Michael (in Jude 9) and the Angel of the Lord (in Zechariah 3:1-5) saying the same thing to Satan: *The Lord rebuke you!* In Zechariah 3 the Angel of the Lord is also called the Lord Himself. Third, Revelation 12:7 identifies Michael as the head of the angelic army in heaven that remained loyal to God, and Revelation 19:11-16 name Jesus as the head of heaven's armies. Finally, I Thessalonians 4:16 strongly suggests that it is Jesus' voice that is *the voice of an archangel* when He returns in glory. Therefore, we conclude that Michael is Jesus, particularly in His capacity as the leader of heaven's army. However, this does not mean He is angelic in nature. He is Divine but the Divine *messenger* from the Father. No wonder He is called *the* archangel (Jude 9).

Guardian Angels

Some good angels belong to *little ones*, for they are called *their angels* in Matthew 18:10. Apparently a heavenly angel is assigned to each person at birth. It is not reasonable to suppose that such an angel would leave when a child becomes an adult. Therefore, it is probable that everyone has a guardian angel for their entire life. This is suggested by Acts 12:15, which refers to an angel as Peter's angel. Moreover, this is also suggested by Malachi 3:16, which refers to God listening to people and that those things are *written before Him* in a *book of remembrance*. The fact that this book is *written before Him* means that someone else is doing the actual writing (the Hebrew word for *before* means *in the presence of*); since those whose home is heaven are angels, it appears that they are recording angels. The book of remembrance is apparently one of the books used in the pre-Second Advent judgment pictured in Daniel 7:9-10. Since each person has his own guardian angel, it is probable, but not proven, that each guardian angel acts as that person's recording angel to record what he says and does because there would appear to be no need for any additional angels. The fact that guardian angels *always see the face of My Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 18:10) must mean they always have access to God. Perhaps it is in

this sense that they are said to record things in His presence. In any case, written records of those who fear the Lord (Malachi 3:16) indicates those being recorded are well beyond the years of little children, thus confirming that a guardian angel is assigned to a person for his lifetime.

In Ezekiel 9:3-4 Ezekiel saw an angel with a writer's inkhorn at his side, whom the Lord told to use to mark the people God wanted to protect before Jerusalem was to be destroyed. This does not indicate that there is a separate order of recording angels because Ezekiel saw this in vision, and the mark was not literal.

What Angels Do

Good angels protect people (Psalms 34:7; 91:11) and otherwise *minister* (or *serve*) the saved; they are called *ministering spirits* (Hebrews 1:13-14). Some of the protection and service provided by angels are specified in the Scriptures. One is that they sometimes blind enemies in order to protect, as two of them did at Lot's house in Sodom (Genesis 19:1, 11). In extreme cases angels can inflict God's punishment of death on people, as when an angel almost did to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (II Samuel 24:17). A third service that angels provide is to sometimes explain God's messages to prophets, as Gabriel did for Daniel (Daniel 8:16-19; 9:21-27). Angels also sometimes proclaim heavenly messages to His people, as Gabriel did to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-20), and to Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). An angel also announced the birth of Jesus to certain shepherds in the hills around Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-15). Angels ministered to Jesus immediately following His temptation experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13), probably by giving Him food and water, although no details are given in Scripture. A sixth service is to aid God's people to escape problem situations, as one did in miraculously freeing Peter from prison in Jerusalem (Acts 12:5-11). In addition, according to Revelation 7:1, at least four angels are influencing people so that human strife does not get beyond the bounds that God is willing to allow at any given moment. Finally, angels also serve as God's army (Revelation 12:7).

Other Names for Angels

Angels are sometimes called *stars* and *sons of God*. Job 38:7 identifies *the morning stars* as being with God at the Creation of the earth and also calls them *sons of God* (vv. 4-6; cf. Job 1:6 & 2:1). In this context, they must be angels. The star that guided the wise men to Jesus stopped over the very house Jesus was in, according to Matthew 2:9-11). This means it could not have been a literal star or any other astronomical body. However, a group of angels may well look like a star from a distance.

Angels are also sometimes called *clouds*. Acts 1:9 says Jesus ascended back to heaven with a cloud and that He would return in same manner (v. 11). According to Matthew 24:30, 26:64, and

Revelation 1:7, Jesus will return on or with *clouds*. In Matthew 24:31 and 25:31, *angels* are the apparent parallel to *clouds*.

Finally, angels are sometimes said to be part of a *host*. Joshua 5:13-15 describes an encounter that Joshua, the leader in Israel who succeeded Moses, had with someone who identified himself as the *Commander* (or *Captain*) of the *army of the Lord* (v. 14). The Hebrew word for *army* is translated as *host* by the King James' Version (KJV) and means *a mass of people*, with the context determining what kind of people. In this context, it is clearly an army. Compare with Revelation 12:7 and 19:14, where the armies in heaven are angels. In Luke 2:13-15 the heavenly host is identified as a group of angels who are praising God to the shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth.

Did Evil Angels Produce Children with Women?

Perhaps the most perplexing concept to some of us that most Jewish and Christian scholars have is that certain evil angels impregnated women before the global Flood and produced a race of giants as a result. The account on which this idea is based is found in Genesis 6:1-4, which reads in part, *the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose* (v. 2). *There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown* (v. 4).

The interpretation that the sons of God were evil angels is first documented in the *Book of the Watchers*, a third-century B.C. pseudepigraphical work allegedly (but not truly) written by the Biblical character named Enoch (Genesis 5:18-24). From there it became a strong, widespread tradition in both Judaism and Christianity. The primary Christian defense for this view is that term *sons of God* in Genesis 6:2 refers to angels, as we have seen it does in Job.

However, first, Genesis 6:2 says these *sons of God* took wives, not merely had sexual relations, which means they married. Yet Jesus said that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:40). The natural assumption of this is that they cannot produce offspring either, although some deny this assumption. However, angels are a different form or kind of life from humans; and Genesis 1:21, 24-25 says God created all creatures according to their *kind*. This implies, and science confirms, that they only produce according to their own kind. Therefore, even if angels reproduced, they could not do so with human beings. Some say they took the form of men and then married and produced children. Others say they produced children through demon possession of women. But if their essential nature is that they do not have a sexual function, then angels cannot create functioning sex organs because they are not God and cannot impregnate a woman through any spiritual process (as the Holy Spirit did in Mary, the mother of Jesus, according to Matthew 1:20).

As for the children born of unions between these sons of God and women, the Hebrew word in Genesis 6:4 is *Nephilim*, which comes from root meaning *to fall*. This means that the Nephilim are either *fallen ones* or that they are *fellers*, those who cause others to fall. The translation of *giants* is taken from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the implication in Numbers 13:32-33 that Nephilim were giants in comparison to the size of the Israelites. Genesis 6:4 also identifies them as *mighty men & men of renown* (heroes). Thus they are *fellers*. Numbers 13:33 also suggests that the Nephilim there were descendants of Anak, obviously a man, whose descendants were known for their great height (Deuteronomy 9:2; Joshua 15:13-14; 21:11; Judges 1:20). Some of Anaks' descendants lived in Gad (Joshua 11:22), and you might remember that Goliath was very tall and was from Gad (I Samuel 17:4). But this does not mean that all Nephilim were giants. The common denominator is that they seem to be heroes or mighty men/warriors. There is no evidence in Genesis 6 that these were giants in size. Therefore, the term does not mean they were supernatural beings and descendants of angels.

In Scripture, God's people are called His children or His sons and daughters (Deuteronomy 14:1; Isaiah 43:6; Malachi 2:10; II Corinthians 6:18; Philippians 2:15; I John 3:1). II Samuel 7:14 is particularly instructive for Genesis 6:2, for David is there called God's *son* in contrast to *the sons of men*, as in the righteous versus the wicked. Genesis 4:16-24 contains a genealogy of Cain, and Genesis 5:6-32 is a genealogy of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:25). This strongly suggests a contrast between these two groups of descendants, with those of Cain tending toward evil like Cain and with those of Seth tending toward righteousness. Thus, *the sons of God* in Gen. 6:2 are male descendants of Seth, and *the daughters of men* are female descendants of Cain.

Secondarily, II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6-7 are understood to refer to these angels from Genesis 6 who left their own *domain* or *abode* and committed sexual immorality just as people of Sodom and Gomorrah did (*strange flesh*, Jude 7). However, II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 are each part of a series of Old Testament people who were eternally lost. Furthermore, neither II Peter 2:4 nor a careful reading of Jude 6-7 shows any direct connection between the wicked angels and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Evil angels left their own domain or abode in heaven when they were expelled from heaven (Revelation 12:7-9). II Peter 2:4 says these angels were cast down to *hell*. The Greek word for *hell* here is *Tartarus*, which was the pagan Greek place of darkness for the dead and the only occurrence of that word in Scripture. Both II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 tell us they are reserved for judgment under *darkness*. Compared to the glories of heaven, earth must seem like a place of darkness. Therefore, these passages do not teach that a certain portion of evil angels had sex with human women.