

Biblical Teaching about Angels

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NOTE: Scripture references are illustrative, not exhaustive. Quotes are from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.

I. What is the nature of angels?

- A. Angels do exist. (Angels are “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.” Hebrews 1:14)
- B. Angels normally lack bodily form and are usually invisible, except when taking on human appearance at times. (Hebrews 1:14, Genesis 18:1-2, Mark 16:5, Matthew 28:2-7)
- C. Angels are not on the same level as God or any of the three Persons of the Godhead; they are created beings. (Psalm 148:5, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1 and 2)
 - 1. Jesus is superior to the angels. (Hebrews 2: 5-9)
 - 2. We should not attribute to angels the glory that is due only to God.
 - 3. We must not ever worship angels. (Revelation 19:10, 22:8-9)
- D. Angels are limited.
 - 1. They are limited with regard to space; they are not everywhere present. (Cf Genesis 28:12, Daniel 9:21, Revelation 14:6)
 - 2. They are not all powerful. (Psalm 103:20)
 - 3. They are limited with regard to their knowledge. (1 Peter 1:10-12)
- E. Holy and Unholy angels are distinguished in Scripture.
 - 1. The original Hebrew and Greek words for holy in the Bible mean set apart for God’s purposes.
 - 2. Angels who serve God are holy to Him and sinless.
 - 3. Satan and his demonic followers are fallen angels. (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:1-12)
 - 4. They include “the principalities and powers.” (Ephesians 6:12)

F. Angels have a special status before the Lord, as is seen in their designation as “sons of God.” (Job 1:6, 38:7, Psalm 29:1) But they are **not** *only begotten* sons. Only Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God (e.g., John 3:16), the Greek term only begotten, μονογενής (*monogenēs*), signifying Jesus Christ being of the same substance as the other two Persons of the triune God (the Father and the Holy Spirit).

G. At least three groups of angels can be identified.

1. Seraphim and Cherubim are portrayed in the Bible and in later Jewish literature as having the status and functions of angels, and both have to do with the dwelling places and worship of God.
 - a. Seraphim (singular, Seraph) are referred to only in Isaiah 6:1-7 and are portrayed as serving God at His throne.
 - 1) They are seen as having six wings.
 - 2) They proclaim God’s holiness and assist in the cleansing of a human’s sin and guilt.
 - b. Cherubim (singular, Cherub) assist in enabling people to see the throne of God in a proper perspective. (Cf Genesis 3:24, Exodus 25:17-22, Isaiah 37:16)
2. The word archangel means “chief angel.” However, we must be careful in our interpretation of the Bible to use proper exegesis (to let the text speak for itself) instead of eisegesis (to read into the text). We should not read with the perspective of our human tendency to rank and establish hierarchies of power. (Cf Matthew 20:25-28)
 - a. The Bible gives no indication that angels were organized in ranks.
 - b. By contrast in the first century A. D. the Jews had a highly developed belief in angels. Everything had its angel, even a blade of grass. According to the rabbis there were three ranks of angels:
 - 1) First (highest): thrones, cherubim, seraphim
 - 2) Second: powers, lordships, mights
 - 3) Third: angels, archangels, principalities

H. Angels are different from theophanies. We need to keep the difference in mind. A theophany (a visible manifestation of God) is identified as God (Genesis 18), receives worship (Joshua 5:14), and speaks with underived divine authority (Judges 2:1-5). (W. Broomall)

II. What are the functions of angels?

A. In both the Old and New Testaments the word translated angel (OT: *mal'akh* and NT: *aggelos*) means messenger. An angel is therefore one who speaks and acts in place of the Lord who sends him. (We don't read of female angels.) See Exodus 23:20-22. Angels are God's ambassadors or envoys, speaking and doing only what He wants them to do, but this does not mean that they are simply celestial automatons or robots. We need to avoid two extremes.

1. Angels are not "low level gofers."
2. They do not function on their own, but we cannot view the relationship between God and the angels as on a business model, where God is the CEO and the angels are department heads to whom He has granted significant authority to run their department as they see fit in order to "get the job done." (A. J. Bandstra)
3. They do not appear regularly throughout the Biblical account of the history of salvation but at strategic points and as ambassadors of God, speaking and acting in His name, not on their own, and never in opposition or contradiction to His will.
 - a. In the OT angels appear prominently in establishing the seed of Abraham (Genesis 16), in Israel's exodus from Egypt (Exodus 3:2), and in the return of Israel from exile in Babylon (Zechariah 1-6).
 - b. In the NT angels appear prominently at the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38), the Resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1-7), and in the passages pertaining to Jesus' Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

B. Angels praise the Lord. (Psalm 148:1-6, 13 [reasons for praising God]; Revelation 4, 5)

C. Angels function as guardians of believers. (2 Kings 6:8-23, Psalm 34:7, 91:11-12, Matthew 18:10)

1. Acts 12:15 does not teach that everyone has his or her own special guardian angel, and this concept is not supported by any other text in the Bible. Such a concept is possible but must be left an open question. In either case it is imperative to "remember that it is really God's care through the angel that gives us security." (A. J. Bandstra) [See Calvin, *Inst.* I.Xiv.7.]
2. We must also keep in mind that the reality of God's care through angels should never be a reason for us to relax our care or act irresponsibly. (Cf. Matthew 4:7)

D. Angels encourage believers to obey in at least three ways.

1. Angels themselves model obedience. Hence, Mephibosheth observes that King David is “like an angel of God” (2 Samuel 19:27), indicating that he believed that David would do rightly, just as an angel would.
2. Angels’ activities in heaven remind us of what is appropriate behavior in the Lord’s sight. (Matthew 6:10)
3. Angels’ presence in worship and in other aspects of our lives is a motivation for acting in ways that will respect them. (1 Corinthians 11:10; Hebrews 13:2)

E. Angels administer justice.

1. They administer justice in this world. (Genesis 19:12-25; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23; Revelation 12:7-12)
 - a. The angels were involved in the giving of the law. (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53, Hebrews 2:1-3)
 - b. The angels put the law into effect to expose transgressions. (Galatians 3:19) Angels and the law are not to be taken lightly. Angels, or at least a division of them who stand behind the law, insist on obedience to the law.
 - c. Angels are present in the rejoicing in heaven over the repentance of even one sinner (Luke 15:7,10), and never “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) Such separation would be the exact opposite of their God-given purpose. They help and do not hinder in God’s plan of making a sinful human fit for fellowship with the holy, righteous and just, God.
2. They administer justice at the end of this world. (Matthew 25:31; 1 Thessalonians 3:13)

III. How are we to view and relate to angels?

A. We should believe the existence of, take seriously, respect, appreciate, and value, but never worship, angels.

1. To deny the existence and function of angels is to deny an important part of the providence of God.
2. To worship them is to sin, breaking the first commandment. (Exodus 20:3; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:9-10)

B. We need not fear the evil angels, called by such terms as demons, principalities, and powers in the Bible. (I John 4:4) “These angels and their leader [Satan] were defeated at the cross (Colossians 2:15) and will finally be brought to condemnation (Matthew 25:41).” (G. W. Bromiley)

- C. As we love, value, appreciate, learn from, and enjoy brothers and sisters in Christ from other nations, cultures and races in the global church and our in own local church, we make known “the manifold wisdom of God...to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:10-11) In so doing the church witnesses not only to human beings but to the powers hostile to God concerning God’s plan for reuniting all things under the lordship of Jesus Christ who “himself is our peace, who has...destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” (Ephesians 2:14) As Bandstra has written, “What a glorious, exciting, challenging calling God has given to us, the church!” (*In the Company of Angels: What the Bible Teaches What You Need to Know*, p. 110)
- D. Express gratitude to God for the blessings he provides for us through the functions of his angels. Angels still function in all the ways we have considered, except for the first, as messengers. The Word and the (Holy) Spirit who dwells within (believers in Christ) now perform the function of revelation from God.
- E. Compare and contrast all reports of angelic activity with the Bible. (1 John 4:1-4) The Bible does not contradict itself. God would never send angels to do or say anything in opposition to what he has said in his Word.
- F. Enjoy and be encouraged with experiences believers have with these wonderful agents of God’s providential care of you and so many others, such as that of Rev. John G. Paton, a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands (now Vanuatu).

John Paton was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave.

A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, “Who were all those men with you there?”

Paton knew no men were present—but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.*

* [*Today in the Word*, MBI, October, 1991, p. 18.](#) Cf. 2 Kings 6:8-23. See also the story of the missionary to Africa, who was on furlough in Michigan, as recounted on the first page of the essay, Who is God, and what is he like? Part 20: What is God’s Relationship to the Angels? a: Who are the good angels and how does God work through them?

For further Information on Angels

1. [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity](#) (a PowerPoint presentation)
2. [Who is God? Part 20: What is God’s Relationship to the Angels? Part a: Good angels](#)
3. [Who is God? Part 21: What is God’s Relationship to Angels? Part b: Evil Angels](#)

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