

Angels — God's Ministering Spirits

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Luke 2:1-20

I think that it would really be some thrill to have witnessed such a sight as the visitation of the angels to the shepherds in the field. But, does the fact that we don’t see angels in such a demonstrative way today mean that they don’t exist? No, I’ve never been to London, but there is indisputable proof that it exists. Personal observation is not necessary to believe in, or understand, angels. The Bible reveals to us many things about angels for our understanding.

Sometimes, though, mistaken ideas hinder clear understanding. Artists put on canvas their own personal thoughts about angels, which many viewers incorrectly accept as fact.

Pictures you see of angels are merely artist’s impressions. Fairy tales intended to interest and entertain children also contribute to a misunderstanding of angels. Fairy tales deal with a world of imagination and fantasy.

We should remove from our minds the image of angels as viewed through non-authentic pictures and childhood fairy tales. We should turn instead to the inspired pages of God’s word, and then we shall be able to obtain a clear picture of what angels really are, and how they really act.

Their origin

Where did angels come from? They are not God, yet they are not man. They are real, live beings who occupy a unique position. Heb. 2:7, *“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands.”*

Jesus left the presence of God and took unto himself a human form. Since in taking a human form, He took a form lower than the angels, we understand that angels occupy a position between God and man. They are not God, they are not man, but they are in a position in-between.

Many people view angels as being glorified human beings; that is, as a righteous person dies he becomes an angel. Regardless of how pleasing this idea may seem to humans, it has no basis in scripture. The Bible tells us that angels are created beings, and are

not elevated positions to which righteous humans might attain. Neh. 9:6, *“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, ...”*

We note in this verse that the hosts of heaven were made by God.

Also consider Col. 1:15-17, *“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”*

We conclude from these verses that angels are created beings: Psalms 148:2, *“Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts.”* Psalms 148:5, *“Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.”*

From these scriptures it should be evident that angels, like man in this respect, are created beings.

Their nature

Angels are to worship, not to be worshipped.

Angels are lower than God and Christ.

- 1 Pet. 3:22, *“Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”*
- Heb. 1:6, *“And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.”*

Since angels are higher than man, should they be worshipped by man? Col. 2:18, *“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,”*

John learned it. Rev. 22:8-9, *“And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.”*

John was in error when he intended to worship an angel.

We observe, therefore, that angels are inferior to God, that they are not to be worshipped, but that they are to worship God, even as we humans.

Angels are individual in nature.

Another characteristic describing the nature of angels is that they have individual identity. An angel is not just one of a great, indistinguishable number, but they are individuals, just as we humans are individuals.

Luke 1:19, *“And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.”*

Here an angel is called by name to Zacharias, who was to become the father of John, the Baptist.

Consider the following:

- Jude 1:9, *“Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”*
- Judges 13:15-21, *“And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.”*

This angel had a name, but he said it was a secret.

- *“Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret.”* (KJV).
- *“Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding”* (NIV).

The Hebrew word translated as “secret” also means “too difficult”.

Some angels occupy a higher position than others.

In addition to names signifying individual characteristics, the Bible further tells us that certain angels are distinguished according to their rank.

In Jude 1:9 above, Michael was called the archangel.

Angels are numberless.

Matt. 26:53, *“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”*

A legion was about six thousand. If God would have sent twelve legions of angels to Jesus’ aid, then the number would be about 72,000 angels.

- Luke 2:13, *“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, ...”*
- Rev. 5:11, *“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;”*

$10,000 \times 10,000 = 100,000,000$

$1000 \times 1000 = 1,000,000$ for every 1000×1000 .

So the number of angels around the throne of God exceeded 100,000,000 plus 1,000,000

Heb. 12:22, *“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,”*

Angels are spirit beings.

Angels are not of flesh and bone and material substance as are humans, but they are spirit beings. Since they are spirit beings, they are not limited in flight or presence or by the material needs of a physical body.

Angels may at times appear invisible. Num. 22:27-31, *“And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam’s anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I*

ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.”

There was an angel which at first appeared invisible, but was later able to be seen by Balaam. Gen. 19:1, “*And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;”*

Lot’s neighbors mistook the angels for men. Gen. 19:5, “*And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.”*

The angel at Jesus’ tomb is described in Mark 16:5 as “*a young man.*” Judges 13:16, “*And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.”*

At the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:10-11, angels appeared as “*two men ... in white apparel.*”

Thus, angels may be visible, they may remain invisible, or they may even take human form.

Angels do not marry or bear children.

Mark 12:18-25, “*Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man’s brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.”*

In these verses Jesus explains that angels do not have marital relationships, as do humans.

Angels are not subject to death.

Another characteristic uncommon to man is that angels are not subject to dying. Luke 20:34-36, *“And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.”*

Angels can sin and be lost.

Peter states in 2 Pet. 2:4, that *“God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto Judgment.”*

Angels have sinned and have been cast down. Jude 1:6, *“And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”*

Such passages clearly indicate to us that some angels sinned, rebelled against God, followed their own will, and were rejected by God. If this condition could exist among angels, then why should some think that Christians cannot sin and be lost?

Rev. 12:7-9, *“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”*

Note that this passage states that the devil has angels of his own. Angels are subject to falling from a favored position before God, and being cast away from His presence, and being lost.

Mission and work of angels who serve God.

Heb. 1:13-14, *“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”*

Angels serve as messengers.

One way in which angels minister for God and serve humans is when they function as messengers.

- In Luke 1:11-20, an angel delivered to Zacharias the message that he would have a son who was to serve as the forerunner of Jesus, the Christ. This son, of course, was John, the Baptist.
- In Luke 1:26-37, the angel Gabriel informed Mary that she would give birth to a Son who would be called Jesus, and who would reign over a kingdom which would have no end.
- In Luke 2:8-13, the shepherds were also informed by an angel of the birth of the Christ.
- Angels also served as messengers in announcing the resurrection in Matt. 28:1-7.
- There were times where an angel appeared to Paul to give him a message. Acts 27:22-24, *“And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.”*

Angels serve with physical action.

You recall the episode in Daniel’s life which involved his being cast into a den of lions. In Dan. 6:22, after he had been delivered, Daniel said, *“My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lion’s mouths that they have not hurt me.”*

In Acts 12:7-10, an angel served in releasing Peter from prison.

In Luke 16:22, angels are referred to as carrying righteous Lazarus after his death into paradise.

Such passages as these demonstrate the meaning of Psalms 34:7, *“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”*

There appears from several passages to be a personal closeness between angels and the humans to whom they minister.

- Matt. 18:10, *“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”*

- 1 Cor. 11:7-10, *“For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.”*

What is meant by the words, *“because of the angels?”* One commentary states: *“To understand the verse in question, it would be well that we first understand two others: Luke 15:7 and Eph. 4:30. Jesus states in Luke, “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” and Paul in Ephesians says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.”* If joy exists in heaven when a sinner repents, and if grief to the Spirit of God results from disobedience, so must the angels who minister unto us be made joyful when we obey God and grieve when we disobey. When Christian women wear their hair improperly, and thus disregard God’s will, it surely brings grief to their ministering angels. Because of this and in appreciation of God’s kindness in providing angels to minister to us, Christians should carefully adhere to Scriptural teaching regarding their hair.”

According to the word of God, angels could appear to us in the form of humans, and we wouldn’t know it. Heb. 13:2, *“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”*

Conclusion.

Since angels are not normally seen with our physical eyes, we might tend to overlook their presence and their significance. Perhaps, after this study we will have a greater awareness of the angels, those ministering spirits who serve God’s purpose in our lives.

