

Angels, Satan, and Demons

The Bible declares that there are multitudes of creatures in the universe known as the angels of God. Angels are mentioned almost three hundred times in the sixty-six books of the Bible. Modern liberal theologians have generally discarded belief in angels and demons. The Sadducees of New Testament times regarded angels merely as symbolic expressions of God's actions (Acts 23:8). But those who read the Bible seriously come to the conclusion that great hosts of angels actually exist.

1. Angels

a. The Creation and Existence of Angels

(1) The teaching of Jesus

Jesus spoke especially of little children when He said, "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). Jesus spoke of His coming again with the holy angels (Mark 8:38). During the wilderness temptation of Jesus, Matthew says that angels ministered to Him (Matthew 4:11). Jesus believed in the existence of angels. He was not, as some say, merely expressing a superstitious belief held by some Jews of His day.

(2) The teaching of the Apostles

Paul spoke of the Lord's coming in great power and glory, accompanied by angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7). John fell down before an angel (Revelation 22:8). Peter says that angels are subject to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:22). Numerous other references compel the student of the Bible to believe in the reality of angels. Perhaps you have never seen an angel or heard one speak; nevertheless, they exist, and they exert their influence all the same.

b. The Nature and Characteristics of Angels

(1) Angels are created beings

They probably preceded man in creation because Satan (a fallen angel) visited the Garden of Eden to tempt man. Colossians 1:16 specifically mentions "principalities and powers" as part of God's creation, and Ephesians 6:12 links "principalities and powers" with *spiritual hosts* in high places. Angels are innumerable (Hebrews 12:22) and are organized in rank and power. Michael is an archangel (Jude 1:9) and is called one of "the chief princes" (Daniel 10:13).

(2) Angels are spirit beings

They are called "ministering spirits" (Hebrews 1:14). At times angels take on bodily form, as when two angels came to Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:1), and when angels appeared at our Lord's resurrection (John 20:12). Such appearances, however, are the exception rather than the rule. Angels are *personal* beings in that they possess intelligence (1 Peter 1:12), feelings (Luke 15:10), and a will (Jude 1:6). Angels are eternal and never die; they are not subject to aging (Luke 20:36). The masculine gender is always used to designate angels. They are without power to reproduce after their kind (Mark 12:25).

(3) Angels are powerful beings

One angel caused the death of 185,000 enemy soldiers in one night (Isaiah 37:36). An angel rolled the heavy stone away from the tomb on the morning of Jesus' resurrection from the tomb (Matthew 28:2). However, angels are not almighty. They do not know when our Lord will return (Mark 13:32). There are some aspects of salvation which they do not understand (1 Peter 1:12).

(4) Angels are obedient beings

They "do" God's commandments (Psalm 103:20), and in the Lord's Prayer we pray that God's will might be done on earth as it is in Heaven (implying obedience in Heaven). Women are to wear veils (1 Corinthians 11:10) "because of the angels," that is, to be examples of obedience and submission.

c. The Work and Commission of Angels

(1) A ministry of guidance

God sent an angel to accompany Eliezer the servant of Abraham in his search for a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:40). Philip was guided by an angel to meet the Ethiopian eunuch on the way to Gaza (Acts 8:26). It seems that angels typically minister in the realm of the external and physical; the Holy Spirit ministers in the realm of the spiritual. Angels guard our bodies and guide our pathway; the Holy Spirit guards our minds and guides us in the right way.

(2) A ministry of protection

God sent an angel to protect Elijah when his enemies were bent on destroying him (1 Kings 19:5-7). An angel protected Daniel when he was in the den of lions (Daniel 6:22). Peter was twice released from prison by an angel (Acts 5:19; Acts 12:8-11). Jesus declared that little children are guarded by angels (Matthew 18:10). Behind the scenes, angels defend, protect, and deliver God's servants when it is within God's providence to do so (Psalm 34:7). What the angels did for Elijah when he was pursued by the enemy, and what they did for Daniel when he was thrown into the den of lions, and what they did for Peter when he was chained in prison, they will do for the saints even now. We have every right to ascribe our many safe journeys through darkness and storm to the oversight of the angels of God.

These invisible servants of God surround each believer day and night. All of us are in much closer touch with Heaven than we often imagine. We have no way of knowing how often our feet are directed in the right path, or how often we are protected from harm and danger (seen or unseen) by our invisible companions, the angels of God.

Some ask, "But if angels *protect* God's people, why then do little children sometimes meet with tragedy? And why do saints sometimes have to suffer persecution for their faith?" Several facts must be kept in mind: (1) There are evil angels whose purpose it is to resist the work of the good angels (Daniel 10:13). (2) If we forget the ministry of angels, and fail to thank God for them, and have no interest in angels—we have no right to expect God to find pleasure in sending them to our aid. (3) God's purposes are always for our good. Even testing and suffering work together for our welfare (Romans 8:28).

(3) A ministry of comfort

Angels are sometimes employed to throw comforting thoughts into the hearts of God's people. In the midst of the crisis on the Mediterranean Sea, Paul was cheered by an angel during the nighttime hours

(Acts 27:23). During His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was strengthened by an angel (Luke 22:43). In the hour of death, angels bear God's children to Heaven (Luke 16:22).

Jesus describes the death of two men in Luke 16. He speaks first of the death of the ungodly rich man. He was buried and in "hell" (*Hades*) he lifted up his eyes. Jesus also describes the death of the other man, and in verse 22 He says that that when the beggar died, he was "carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

When our saved loved ones pass into the place where our voices can no longer reach them, and where our hands can no longer minister to their needs—we can be assured of this—the angels of God, with tender hands, bear their souls in triumph into the blessedness of the Father's house. Those who live for Jesus will not "cross Jordan alone."

(4) A ministry of concern

Angels are concerned with the church and its activity. When God's people assemble, the angels are looking on. They observe how faithfully we keep the commandments. They see our worship and order and conduct in the house of God. First Timothy 5 mentions the care of widows and the washing of the saints' feet. Verse 21 reminds readers that angels are looking in on the service. When even one sinner repents and receives Jesus Christ as Savior, there is rejoicing "in the presence of the angels of God" (Luke 15:10). This is further evidence of their concern.

(5) A ministry of judgment

God will also use the angels to pour out His wrath upon the wicked. God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was executed by two angels (Genesis 19:13). An angel brought judgment on Jerusalem in David's day (2 Samuel 24:15-16). Angels will act as the reapers at the end of the age and will separate the righteous from the wicked (Matthew 13:41-42). Verse 39 says that "The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels."

d. Summary

There is another realm above the world in which we live—invisible to human sight—in which there are great hosts of inhabitants known only through the revelation in the Word of God. The Bible calls those beings "angels." The Bible says that angels held the flaming sword that guarded the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). Angels took the family of Lot to safety, and smote the wicked men of Sodom with blindness (Genesis 19). Angels drove the chariots of fire through the sky, and picked up the prophet Elijah and took him to glory (2 Kings 2:11). Angels walked into prisons and released the Apostles of the early church (Acts 5:19; 12:7-10).

Angels will blow their trumpets in the day when Jesus returns to bring a conclusion to life on earth as we know it today (Matthew 24:31). The redeemed of God will enjoy the society of angels forever in the eternal world (Revelation 5:11-14). Surely, believers will want to know all they can about the angels.

Angels are *not gods*; they are *not mediators* between man and God. Human beings are not to worship them (Colossians 2:18). Angels are spirit beings created by God to serve Him (Hebrews 1:6,14). There is no Scriptural warrant for the idea that humans become angels after they die, or that angels are little girls, or that babies become angels at the time of death. Distorted paintings, varied superstitions, and ignorance of the Bible all contribute to such widespread notions about angels.

2. Satan

a. The Existence and Personality of Satan

Throughout the Scriptures, Satan is set forth *as the great enemy of God and man*. Satan has often been made the butt of a joke, but in reality he should be taken seriously. How the Devil came to be the Devil is not quite as clear in the Scriptures as is the fact that he definitely exists. It is clear that Satan was once in the truth, but fell from it (John 8:44). Jesus saw Lucifer fall from Heaven (Luke 10:18).

(1) The existence of the Devil

Jesus taught that the Devil is real (Matthew 13:39). The Apostle John writes about the Devil (John 13:2). Paul speaks of “the wiles” of the Devil (Ephesians 6:11) and of “the devices” of the Devil (2 Corinthians 2:11). D. L. Moody used to say there were two reasons why he believed in the Devil’s existence. First, the Bible says so, and second, he had done business with him!

(2) The personality of the Devil

Satan is a spirit being without a physical body. Personality can exist without a body. The Devil has the characteristics of personality—intelligence (2 Corinthians 11:3), emotions (Revelation 12:17), and a will (2 Timothy 2:26). The Apostle Peter uses a personal pronoun when describing the Devil (1 Peter 5:8). However, the Devil is merely a creature, and therefore he has limitations (Job 1:2).

b. The Names and Character of Satan

The word “*Satan*” means “adversary” or “opponent” (1 Peter 5:8). Numbers 22:22 describes the word “adversary” as one who takes a stand against another.

The term “*devil*” speaks of “an accuser” or “a slanderer” (Revelation 12:9-10). Satan slanders God to man (Genesis 3:1-5); he also slanders man to God (Job 1:9-11).

The word “*tempter*” implies that Satan tempts humans to sin (1 Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4:3). He is cunning and subtle, and tempts humans in their weak moments (Luke 22:40-46). Sometimes he suggests the use of right things but in the wrong way (Matthew 4:1-11).

John 8:44 indicates that the Devil is an evil liar and murderer. He is “the serpent,” “the god of this world,” and “the prince of the power of the air.” In order to promote his evil work he can appear as a serpent (Revelation 12:9), as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), or as an attractive angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). These abilities make him more deceptive in carrying out his program of evil.

c. The Work and Activity of Satan

(1) Toward Christ

Satan tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan tried to sidetrack Jesus from His mission on the Cross (Matthew 16:22-23). He had part in the betrayal and the arrest of Jesus (John 13:27).

(2) Among nations

Satan deceives the nations (Revelation 20:3). Demons are sometimes placed in charge of the various nations (Daniel 10:13,20), and are responsible for turmoil within world governments. They account for

national hatreds (for example, Hitler's deeds against the Jews). Revelation 16:13-16 tells us that in the endtimes Satan will gather the nations together to the Battle of Armageddon.

(3) Among unbelievers

Satan blinds the minds of the unsaved so that they will not accept the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). He often does this by making them think that there are many ways to Heaven and that one way is as good as another. Also, when the Word of God is planted, then Satan comes and snatches it away (Luke 8:12). He takes away the Word from their hearts so that they will not believe and be saved.

(4) Among believers

Satan will hinder the Christian's work for God in any way possible (1 Thessalonians 2:18). He tempts the believer to commit acts of immorality (1 Corinthians 7:5). He sows tares among believers in order to dampen their testimony (Matthew 13:38-39). Sometimes he incites persecution against believers to discourage them (Revelation 2:10). He causes strife and confusion among Christians to stifle their impact (James 3:15-16).

3. Satan's Host of Demon Helpers

Satan was not alone in his fall from an exalted position. Many angels were involved in the rebellion and likewise fell. Some were confined immediately to judgment (Jude 1:6); others were given freedom to oppose God and His people (Revelation 16:14). The details of their fall are shrouded in mystery.

a. The Existence and Nature of Demons

Demons are very real (Deuteronomy 32:17; James 2:19). Jesus rebuked them (Mark 5:8) and spoke of their final doom (Matthew 25:41). Demons are spirit beings. The demon in Matthew 17:18 is called "an unclean spirit" (Mark 9:25). Demons have intelligence. They knew Jesus (Mark 1:24); they know their own eventual doom (Matthew 8:29); they promote a system of their own doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

b. The Work and Activity of Demons

Demons extend Satan's activity. Their sheer number (Mark 5:9) makes Satan *seem* omnipresent. Satan is a created being and is not omnipresent, but because of the large number of helpers, his activity can be worldwide in scope at any given time. They can inflict infirmities (Matthew 9:32-33), subject human beings to temptation (2 Corinthians 11:3), and seduce people into believing false teachings (1 Timothy 4:1).

c. The Worship of Demons by Human Beings

It hardly seems possible that humans would worship the devil, but some do worship demons. Men and women can be found in actual conscious submission to evil spirits. Adherents to *the Satanist cult* live on every continent. Their beliefs center on lust, vengeance, and greed. Their principles include statements like the following: "Be kind only to those who deserve it; seek vengeance when necessary, rather than turn the other cheek; put yourself first and others second."

d. Some False Concepts Incited by Demons

Necromancy is the belief that the spirits of the dead communicate with men. Attempts to communicate with the dead are expressly forbidden in Isaiah 8:19. God told Joshua to annihilate the Canaanites who practiced necromancy (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

Astrology is the belief that if the moon influences the mighty oceans, then surely the stars and planets affect the tides of men's lives. Astrologers claim that when a person discovers his place in the course of the stars, there will be a sense of order and peace in his life. Astrologers are ridiculed in Isaiah 47:12-13. Astrology amounts to Satan's prognostication substituted for faith in a heavenly Father.

4. Our Defense against Satan and Demons

Satan knows his doom is coming soon, so he works hard to deceive as many as he can. What are our resources against his onslaughts?

a. Know his Limitations and Destiny

Satan received his deathblow at Calvary (John 16:11), but he continues to writhe until the last judgment (Revelation 20:10). Satan's judgments will have occurred in various stages. We must remember too that Satan is not all-powerful. He had to get God's permission to try Job. Likewise, the demons asked Jesus to allow them to enter the bodies of pigs (Luke 8:30-33).

b. Be Alert to his Devices

He uses the device of lying, telling partial truths, hiding his real character, showing the glitter and attraction of sin without revealing its final outcome, and similar tactics. We must be aware of his strategy (2 Corinthians 2:11).

c. Resist his Wiles and Strategies

We must be sober and watch (1 Peter 5:8), refusing to give him a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). We must crowd him out, let no room for him, and instead become preoccupied with wholesome activities. We can resist Satan by using the weapons Jesus used (Matthew 4:4), and we can overcome his attempts to mislead us by being careful to think often about the blood of Jesus shed on the cross of Calvary (Revelation 12:11).

The Christian should be aware of Satan's presence and influence, but our major attention and concern must center on Jesus Christ and His work. We must avoid becoming *preoccupied* with Satan and with demonism. The Apostle John encourages us with this thought: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

-Harold S. Martin