

Angels

**God's Messengers
and Spirit Army**

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God's Messengers and Spirit Army

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Introduction

"Stars are the windows of heaven, where angels peek through," says a cute, old song.

Once a friend received an e-mail stating, "When you find a penny, an angel has tossed it to the ground when you're frowning to give you a smile." The message ended, "I hope that you feel as lucky as I do, as I am so very fortunate to be graced with angels such as you in my life."

This, too, would be viewed as cute or sweet by many people. But that does not mean it's *true*. Such sentiments tend to minimize the power and glory that angels possess.

Many people assume a lot when it comes to the angelic realm. They carelessly base their beliefs on *what they've always heard* or *what sounds good*.

Angels are found in the movies, on cards, everywhere—at least the *popular conception* of angels is. If you explore



Many people assume a lot when it comes to the angelic realm. They carelessly base their beliefs on what they've always heard or what sounds good to them.

the subject in books and on the Internet, most of what you'll find is based on fables, myths and popular suppositions. We hear stories about guardian angels, angelic protection in time of war, and people being helped by angels in various ways. They're depicted in movies like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Angels in the Outfield*, as well as TV shows like *Highway to Heaven*, *Touched by an Angel* and some animated programs (along with a number of darker, even immoral, presentations). People sell collectible angels, children's picture books on angels and sand pictures of angels.

There are some right ideas among the various portrayals and descriptions but also many misconceptions. What ought we to think about angels? What's the real story? Where can we turn to know for sure? For the truth about angels we must *turn to the God who made them*—and made everything else as well. And what He says is found in His Word—the Holy

Bible. What, then, does the Bible actually say about angels?

Spirit messengers, God's heavenly army

One of the most fascinating subjects of the Bible is that of God's servants in the spirit realm—His messengers and heavenly army.

The English word “angel” derives from a Greek word used in the original New Testament, *aggelos* (the double g or gamma pronounced here as a hard “ng” sound, as in “angle”). This word means “messenger.” The Old Testament Hebrew word *malak* means the same thing. These terms are used in Scripture of human messengers as well as spirit messengers. Context determines which is intended.

We read in God's Word about mankind's various encounters with these beings that are usually invisible to us—some of which are rather astonishing! We find elaborate descriptions of *cherubim* in the book of Ezekiel and another interesting depiction of *seraphim* in the book of Isaiah.

We see angels serving the physical needs of various men and women in stories throughout Scripture. We also see different levels of administration in the angelic realm.

In the pages of the Bible we find a number of recorded accounts of angelic visits or intervention. Jesus and the apostles Peter and Paul noted direct and indirect encounters with angels!

Battling spiritual foes

Angels play important roles throughout the letters of the New Testament up through the book of Revela-

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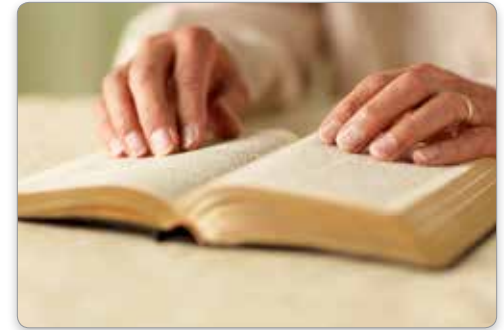
tion. We find examples of righteous angels fighting the wicked demons—evil angels who rebelled against God and are trying to thwart His plan.

As Christians, we know we are in a spiritual battle and our warfare is not against flesh and blood—as the apostle Paul warned (Ephesians 6:10-18). Deception is not accomplished through a stark contrast between blatant good and evil. There is often a dark side to the “cute” and “comical” of the world.



Each of us needs to beware of deception that can come in many forms—for our adversaries are powerful. People perceive Satan as a funny caricature with a pitchfork or as an ugly, fearsome-looking creature. Most images we have are from art and Hollywood. Yet the Bible says Satan appears as an *angel of light* to deceive (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Thankfully, God intervenes for us—including through sending His righ-



In the pages of the Bible we find a number of recorded accounts of angelic visits or intervention.

teous angels to protect and help us (see “Personal Stories of Angelic Encounters,” beginning on page 42.)

Though we don't see them, angels are there

Again, angels are *God's messengers* and His *spirit army*, and they are *very* numerous. Make no mistake, angels *do* exist! They exist to serve “those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:13-14). But because they are invisible, we tend to forget their role in carrying out God's purpose and plan.

We've all heard stories of supernatural intervention—some of them may even be *your* stories! *Many* angels have been given the duty of serving our needs, and their responsibilities and assignments may change with circumstances.

So let's take a look in our Bibles and examine some of the interesting and profound verses that give us insight into these servants of God. The Scriptures have much to tell us on the fascinating subject of angels!

The Origin of the Spirit Realm

How long have angels existed? Far longer than man, Scripture tells us—yet not as long as God, who is eternal. Unlike God, who has always existed, angels are *created* beings. They were created by God. As Hebrews 1:7 tell us, “And of the angels He says: ‘Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers [or servants] a flame of fire’” (quoting Psalm 104:4).

And like everything else, they were created *through* the divine Word who became Jesus Christ: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).

When were these beings brought into existence?

Before the world existed

The angels’ beginning was far back in time, before mankind was created—before the earth was even formed. Genesis 1:1 tells us that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” However, the Bible doesn’t tell the whole story in one or even several verses. We learn later in the Bible that there are *three* heavens from an earthly perspective: first, the atmosphere of the birds and the clouds; second, outer space of the sun, moon and stars; and third, the spiritual heaven of God’s throne, actually called “the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2). Yet though it is third in positional relation to us, this spirit realm was actually created first.

God and the Word—the divine Being who would later be born in the flesh as Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14)—formed other spirit beings to inhabit this realm with Them. These beings were the angels, who existed before our world was created. This is clear from a fascinating, eye-opening passage in the biblical book of Job.

When Job, beset with terrible calamity and suffering in spite of being a very devout follower of God, began to question God’s judgment, God responded with pointed questions to help him realize he didn’t have the wisdom to question God. In His response, in the form of questions to Job, God revealed some details about His creation of the physical world:

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: ‘Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where

were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, *when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*” (Job 38:1-7, emphasis added throughout).

The “sons of God” here is a designation for the angels—called “sons” or children by virtue of their having been *created* by God. The “morning stars” seem to refer to the angels as well, as they are later symbolized by stars (see Revelation 1:20; 12:4).

The New International Version puts Job 38:7 this way: “. . . while



The angels’ beginning was far back in time, before mankind was created—before the earth was even formed.

the morning stars sang together and *all the angels* shouted for joy?” The New Revised Standard Version translates it as “. . . when the morning stars sang together and *all the heavenly beings* shouted for joy?”

In this passage, God reveals information no man could have known, since no human being was present at creation. God described the earth at its creation as a dazzlingly beautiful jewel floating in space. The creation events were so magnificent that all the angels sang and shouted in exultation. They were in perfect harmony and agreement at that time.

We see here that angels have emotions. They were joyful. In other places we find them extolling God the Father and Jesus Christ in ongoing praise (Psalm 148:2; Luke 2:13-15; Revelation 5:11-12). We also see God’s angels later having great joy over a person who repents of sin (Luke 15:10). And in various places we see them displaying care for God’s people (1 Kings 19:5-7; Psalm 34:7; 91:11; Daniel 3:28; Matthew 2:13, 19-20; 4:11; Luke 22:43; Acts 12:7-10). Thus they are thoughtful, feeling beings.

Created with free moral choice, they were also capable of wrong thoughts and feelings, and some succumbed to these, which is how evil spirits or demons, led by Satan the devil, came into the picture. We’ll go into this more later (see “What Is the Origin of Satan and Demons?” beginning on page 24). Thankfully, many more angels made the right choice to remain faithful to God.

Let’s delve further into what Scripture reveals about the great number of heavenly angels, their appearance and the roles in which they serve.

The Vast Multitudes of Heaven's Armies

Scripture says that God was accompanied by myriads of angels as He led the Israelites from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land. Moses recorded in a special song for the nation: “The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir [in Edom as the Israelites traveled through]; He shone forth from Mount Paran [nearby], and He came with *ten thousands of saints*; from His right hand came a fiery law for them” (Deuteronomy 33:2). The word translated “saints” here, meaning “holy ones,” can refer to people or angels. The Living Bible says the Lord came “surrounded by *ten thousands of holy angels*.”

King David tells us of angelic chariots accompanying God and Israel in the wilderness: “O God, when [You did] go forth before [Your] people, marching across the wilderness, earth trembled . . . Twice ten thousands were God's chariots, thousands upon thousands, when the Lord came in holiness from Sinai” (Psalm 68:7, 17, New English Bible)—or when “the Lord came from Sinai into the holy place [or Holy Land]” (New Revised Standard Version). Yet this is only part of the picture.

The host of heaven

A name for God that repeatedly occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures is *YHWH Sabaoth*, the Lord (or Eternal) of hosts—also referred to in the New Testament (Romans 9:29; James 5:4). “Hosts” here is a reference to *armies* or *multitudes*. We see “LORD of hosts” used in parallel with “the God of the armies of Israel” (1 Samuel 17:45). So the “hosts” can refer on one level to the people of God on earth.

But another host of God is the “host of heaven.” This is sometimes a reference to all the celestial bodies God created—the sun, moon and stars throughout the universe (Genesis 2:1; Deuteronomy 4:19). Yet “host of heaven” is also a description of the multitudes of angels with God who worship and serve Him, including serving as His heavenly army (2 Chronicles 18:18; Nehemiah 9:6). God said that the host of heaven could not be numbered—a reference to the physical stars and the throngs of angels who are represented as stars (Jeremiah 33:22).

But just how many angels are we talking about?

Ten thousand times ten thousand—an innumerable company

Consider what the prophet Daniel witnessed in vision: “I watched till

thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days [God] was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. *A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand* stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9-10).

The prophets of old were given amazing visions about God and His angels! Daniel here says he saw a total of *millions* serving God—even *100 million* before Him. These were just those at His throne!

The apostle John also witnessed a countless number of angelic beings, as recorded in the last book of the Bible: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was *ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain [Jesus Christ] to receive



The prophets of old, such as Daniel, were given amazing visions about God and His angels!

power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:11-12). This is essentially the same number that Daniel mentioned, yet with 100 million listed first.

We should also note that the writer of Hebrews states that there are too many angels to count—an innumerable number: “For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire [that is, Mount Sinai], and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore . . .

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, *to an innumerable company of angels*, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant . . .” (Hebrews 12:18-24).

An *innumerable* number of angels, it states in verse 22! The Jerusalem Bible puts it this way: “. . . the heavenly Jerusalem where *millions* of angels have gathered.”

When we put all of these scriptures together, the numbers of angels might be in the hundreds of millions, but this could be used to indicate a huge number even greater that is beyond our individual ability to count—"an innumerable multitude" or, as some translations put it, a "countless number."

As the passage in Hebrews shows, through Jesus by His sacrifice and role as "Mediator of the new covenant," we may now come directly before the throne of grace (compare Hebrews 4:16), the heavenly Jerusalem, to the ultimate Holy of Holies, right where those angels are! And in times of need, God sends some of these angels to us—right where *we* are. In fact, His angels are among us already, as we will see!

Twelve legions on hand if asked for

Remember the words of Jesus to His disciples? "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with *more than*

twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

This was in response to Peter trying to defend Him with a sword, so perhaps the idea was that Jesus could have a lot more than His 12 *disciples* to defend Him. He could have 12 *legions* of defenders—a vast, invincible force. So while the number may not have been meant literally, such a force was certainly available to Him.

A typical Roman legion of this period had 5,120 legionaries along with auxiliaries, possibly totaling 6,000 fighting men or even more. Yet some legions were smaller, perhaps 3,000. The *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* notes on this verse that "the entire Roman province of Syria (which included Judea) normally had only three legions altogether (Josephus *Antiquities* 17.286)." Assuming a figure of about 5,000 per legion, 12 times that would have meant around 60,000 angels coming to rescue Jesus. And we've already seen that God has many more angels to send than that.

Should We Worship or Pray to Angels?

Sometimes people want to give angels extra credit. It's as if people want their own angel to lift them from adversity or to do their own bidding in personal affairs. They often look to angelic aid without ever calling on *God* for help. Some people look to angels almost as their own personal genies.

Some believe that we each have our own "guardian angel" assigned to us. It's true, as Jesus said of those who come to Him in child-like faith (Matthew 18:4-6), "that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (verse 10). Yet this does not necessarily mean one angel to a person. It could mean a plurality of angels to each person or to the believers collectively, with assignments shifting.

Some people have a near obsession or near worship of angels. Angels are real, but one must be cautious about giving the credit to angels when *the real credit* for miracles and answered prayers *should go to God!*

Christians are to diligently follow the Ten Commandments, and the first is very clear: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

Interestingly, angel worship has been around

a long time. Gnosticism, a philosophical-religious movement that was beginning to infiltrate the Church in the first century, falsely taught that angels are necessary intermediaries between God and each of us.

The apostle Paul referred to this in Colossians 2:18: "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels . . ." The *Holman Bible Dictionary* states that this incorrect teaching claimed that knowing about angels enabled "one to gain blessings in this life and attain the level of divine in the next."

We mustn't forget that Jesus Christ alone is our necessary Mediator with God (1 Timothy 2:5). Yet angels have served in intermediary capacities in certain respects, and people are drawn to that, thinking they can communicate with angels to have an "in" with God. (We see a similar problem among those who pray to various saints. But praying to saints and angels is really an adoption of the pagan methodology of approaching the spirit realm through lesser deities.)

And we should remember this: *True angels don't take our focus away from God and point it at themselves.* Angels are careful not to

develop a relationship with us. Why? Because a person would then start to *rely on the angel* rather than on God. And it seems that *different* angels may minister to the same person so that this kind of relationship is not developed. Again, the Bible does not state that we each have our own angel.

The apostle John records an encounter with an angel who pointed John toward God alone and cautioned about bowing down to or giving more credit to angels (or anyone) than is due: "Then he [the angel] said to me, 'These words are faithful and true.' And the Lord God of the holy prophets *sent His angel* to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 'Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'

"Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, *I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel* who showed me these things. Then he said to me, '*See that you do not do that.* For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. *Worship God!*'" (Revelation 22:6-9; see also 19:10).

We are not to worship angels. We are to only worship God, and angels are very sensitive to this! We should also direct our prayers only to

God, as Scripture directs.

Some have claimed to be communing with angels. If they are indeed having such encounters, these are not God's holy angels they are engaged with—but rather evil spirits (demons) perhaps posing as righteous angels to gain influence in people's lives.

We are to worship and revere God, not His angels. The angels are God's messengers, His ministering spirits, who serve God's people. They appear to mankind when necessary to pass on a message or take care of a duty for God.

We do see the prophets Daniel and Zechariah each referring to an angel as "my lord" (Daniel 10:16-17, 19; Zechariah 6:4). However, this was just a term of respect—comparable to John calling an angel "sir" (Revelation 7:14). This was not in the sense of addressing one's true lord and master. (Consider that our English word *mister* today derives from "master," but we don't mean an actual master when we say "mister.")

If you wish to express thanks for what God's holy angels do for you and all of us, give thanks to God. They act at His command. But never seek to thank or praise the angels directly. This goes against what God directs—and will expose you to serious spiritual dangers.



Of course, Jesus did not pray for such intervention, instead humbly submitting to His role as the sacrifice to deliver all of *us*. Yet amid His anguish just before this, an angel had come to help strengthen Him (Luke 22:41-44), as some also did when He struggled against Satan's temptations at the outset of His ministry (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13).

Those with us are more than those with them

This same kind of help is available to all of God's people. And it might even involve angel armies. It was not only for

Elisha prayed that God would open the young man's eyes to see this reality. God did so. And what did the young man see? "And behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Jesus or the nation of Israel at large that God would send such aid.

Consider the case of the prophet Elisha and his servant, who were surrounded by an entire Syrian army. The terrified servant asked Elisha what they should do, and Elisha told him they had no need to worry, saying, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha prayed that God would open the young man's eyes to see this reality. God did so. And what did the young man see? "And behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:11-17). Then further amazing events followed in this account.

As large as this heavenly army was, it represents just a small part of the vast spiritual forces God has available to carry out His will and assist His people! And remember that God the Father and Jesus Christ, who rule these hosts, are omnipotent or all-powerful in Their own right. Truly, there is no reason to fear!

We have much to be grateful for in terms of what the angels do for us. Yet our focus must always be on God who sends them. (See "Should We Worship or Pray to Angels?" beginning on page 10.) We should, of course, look at what God reveals about the angels, just as we are now doing.

Appearing in Human Form

What do angels look like? First we need to distinguish between their *actual* form and how they have *appeared* to people in vision or in person. Their true and actual form has not been fully revealed to us, though we glimpse some aspects from visions of them recorded in the Bible.

One thing you *won't* find in Scripture is the typical image of angels as two-winged people with halos and harps sitting on clouds. Nor will you find the other common conception of them as cute winged babies or children—as popular artists have often depicted them since the Middle Ages. The Scriptures nowhere indicate that they look anything like this. (For more on these ideas, see "Popular, But Wrong, Ideas About Angels" beginning on page 16 and "Where Did the Idea of Angels as Babies Originate?" on page 19.)

So what does the Bible reveal?

Made visible as young men—and not with wings

As in the account with Elisha and his servant, angels are spirit beings that are typically invisible to people unless supernaturally manifested. Numbers 22 tells us of the false prophet Balaam not being able to see an angel with a drawn sword right in front of him on the road—while his donkey could (verse 23). Then God, after causing the donkey to speak, opened Balaam's eyes to see the angel (verse 31).

When angels *are* seen in Scripture, they usually appear in the form of human beings, specifically as men—adult males, not women or children. When apparent age is indicated, it's that of *young* men. Yet this does not mean these angels are truly male, just as they are not actually *human* in their true, glorious form in the spirit realm—and they are certainly not young by human years, having lived from before the world began.

The fact that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:30) seems to indicate they have no sexuality or means of reproduction. They are referred to with masculine pronouns, "he" and "him," and as created "sons," as previously noted (Job 38:7)—but, per the grammar of the original biblical languages, this is also the way human beings in general are referred to, including women when they are lumped together with men. Female pronouns and terms are used only when those referred to are exclusively women. (For the common but wrong notion that angels at one time interbred with human beings, see

“Did Angels Interbreed With Women to Produce Giants?” below.)

What about angels having wings? Interestingly, when the Bible describes angels appearing to people in person, they are never described as having wings. There are a few visions in which some angels are presented with wings. Yet in these cases, it's *four* or *six* wings, not two. We will see more about these later.

While the massive gold-plated olive-wood carvings of two cherubim with outstretched wings spanning the Holy of Holies of Solomon's temple appear to have each had only two wings (see 1 Kings 6:23-28), it's possible that these sculptures had other wings that were not extended.

Abraham and Lot—hospitality to angels without first realizing

Notice the description in the accounts of angels visiting the biblical patriarch Abraham and then moving on to bring judgment on the depraved city of Sodom and encountering Abraham's righteous nephew Lot who was living there. Here we see that Abraham initially did not recognize his divine visitors for who and what they really were.

Did Angels Interbreed With Women to Produce Giants?

Genesis 6 tells us this of the days before Noah's Flood: “Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose . . . 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” (verses 1-2, 4).

Some have taught that this refers to fallen angels interbreeding with human women to produce half-demon giants. But there's a more rational explanation.

Halley's Bible Handbook, a popular study resource, states that “the ‘sons of God’ (v. 2) are thought to have been either fallen angels . . . or leaders in Sethite families [those descended from Adam's son Seth] who intermarried with godless descendants of [Adam's

son] Cain” (25th ed., 2000, p. 96).

The first possibility offered here is not really a possibility at all, even though angels are referred to as “sons of God” in Job 38:7 because God is their “Father” through creation. Angels are spirit beings (Hebrews 1:7), not fleshly creatures. They neither marry nor sexually reproduce (Luke 20:34-36). Also, this explanation would violate the principle made clear in Genesis 1 that each living kind reproduces only “according to its kind.” Furthermore, the risen Jesus explained that fallen angels, or demons, are not able to manifest themselves materially like He and the righteous angels can (Luke 24:39; compare verses 40-43; Genesis 18:1-8, 16; 19:1). Rather, we see demons in Scripture only possessing individuals or appearing as ghostly apparitions.

The second explanation in *Halley's* is far more reasonable. Genesis 4 gives the story of Cain and Abel and follows with the genealogical descent from Cain. Genesis 5 is called “the

“Then the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, *three men were standing by him*; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.’ They said, ‘Do as you have said’ . . .

“So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree *as they ate* . . . Then the *men* turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood *before the LORD* . . .

“Now the *two angels* came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground . . . They turned

book of the genealogy of Adam” (verse 1). It starts with God's creation of Adam and how Adam's line continued through Seth. As with the angels, Adam was a “son of God” by creation (compare Luke 3:38)—though even more so since Adam was made in God's image (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-3). Of this family line through Seth it is stated, “Then men began to call on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26)—which could also be rendered “. . . began to be called *after* the name of the LORD.” Then, in the next chapter, Genesis 6, we see “the sons of God” (men of Seth's godly line in this explanation) intermarrying with “the daughters of men” (women of Cain's ungodly line).

There is also another sensible way to understand what Genesis 6 is describing, in which the phrase rendered “sons of God” should actually be translated “sons of the gods,” as the Hebrew word *elohim* here, plural in form, can sometimes refer to false gods instead of the true God. In this explanation, wicked men referred to as sons of the gods (either pagan worshippers or perhaps men purported to be demigods, as ancient rulers often claimed of themselves) forcibly “took” innocent women

as wives—an example perhaps of the evil conduct of the day.

In any event, human beings were clearly the problem here—not angels. God says amid the verses of Genesis 6 quoted above, “My Spirit shall not strive with *man* forever” (verse 3) and “I will destroy *man* whom I have created from the face of the earth” (verse 7). Thus, the “giants” mentioned must have been human also—descendants of Adam and Eve (compare Acts 17:26).

It's possible that the word translated “giants” here, *nephilim*—from a root meaning to fall or make to fall—could refer to tyrants. But the word is used of people of giant stature later in Numbers 13:33. So the very powerful, and possibly very tall, people of Genesis 6 were destroyed in the Flood. But there would be other giants following the Flood, who were descended, just as everyone else in the post-Flood world, from Noah—again, not angels (compare Deuteronomy 2:20-21; 3:11). Consider Goliath, whom David slew. He was more than nine feet tall (1 Samuel 17:4). But he was still just a man (verses 24-25, 33)—not some human-demonic hybrid.

Popular, But Wrong, Ideas About Angels

People have a number of ideas about angels that do not accurately reflect what we see revealed in Scripture. For instance, there is no mention of wings in most appearances of angels in Scripture, while they do occur in some visions—though not with just two (see discussion on page 14). There are other common misconceptions too.

Halos of light

A typical feature of angel costumes in children's Bible plays is a glittery halo—representing a supposed ring of light over the head denoting holiness. This recalls a lot of medieval art, where saintly Bible characters are depicted with a halo or glowing golden disk over or behind the



The idea of portraying angels and biblical personages with halos can be traced back to ancient Egypt. There the sun god Ra and other Egyptian deities were depicted with a solar disc (representing the sun) atop their heads.

head. In fact, this image—also known as a nimbus, aureole, glory or gloriole—has been



Angels do not have halos, which can be traced to ancient depictions of false gods.

used in the sacred art of many religions.

We find it among the Greeks and Romans. The rayed crown of the sun god Helios was depicted in the Colossus of Rhodes (and later copied for the Statue of Liberty). It was used in images of Hellenistic and Roman rulers. This may have been associated with the Zoroastrian divine luster that marked Persian kings. The halo also occurs in ancient Hindu and Buddhist art.

And it goes back much further. “Sumerian religious literature frequently speaks of . . . a ‘brilliant, visible glamour which is exuded by gods, heroes, sometimes by kings, and also by temples of great holiness and by gods’ symbols and emblems” (Wikipedia, “Halo (religious iconography)"). Indeed, we see it prominently as the solar disc of Ra, the Egyptian sun god.

As the editors of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* point out: “Because of its pagan origin, the form was avoided in Early Christian art, but a simple circular nimbus was adopted by Christian emperors for their official portraits. From the middle of the 4th century, Christ was also shown with this imperial attribute . . . In the 5th century it was sometimes given to angels, but it was not until the 6th century that the halo became customary for the Virgin Mary and other saints . . . The halo was used regularly in representations of Christ,

the angels, and the saints throughout the Middle Ages” (Britannica.com/art/halo-art). While Christ and the angels do have glorious radiance—with brilliant, shining faces—this does not correspond to the halo and its origins as a pagan sun symbol.

Sitting on clouds

The idea of angels lolling about on clouds—and that people will do the same after they die—probably comes from a combination of archaic imagination and misapplied scriptural mentions of clouds in association with heaven. Satan in his rebellion said of his assault on heaven, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14). Yet this was not ascending into some “Jack and the Beanstalk” kingdom of giants on the clouds, but rising out of the earth’s atmosphere and traveling beyond outer space into another dimension.

We also see prophecies in Scripture of Christ coming with or on “the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; 26:64)—or “coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27). Consider that He also came to the ancient Israelites in a cloud with power and glory—in the pillar of cloud and fire that led them and that descended on the physical tabernacle.

When Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection “a cloud received Him out of [the disciples’] sight”—and angels said He would return in the same manner (Acts 1:9-11).

In most of these passages the reference is to the earth’s atmosphere, where there are physical clouds. And even physical clouds can be spectacular. You’ve no doubt seen clouds of the sky beautifully illuminated by the sun as a grand display of the majesty of the Creator. In any case, the picture of angels sitting on actual clouds is more cartoonish than scriptural.

Idly strumming on harps

Another popular conception has angels

idly strumming on harps while floating about or sitting on the clouds. Yet we don’t see this in Scripture either. It’s true that some angels do have harps, while others have other instruments. Indeed, God enjoys music, and at least some angels were given great musical abilities, as is true of some people.

Notice what God said to the angel who rebelled and became Satan: “The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created” (Ezekiel 28:13). The apostle John in Revelation 5:8 refers to the 24 angelic elders “each having a harp”—presumably used in performance and praise before God. John later in Revelation 14:2 hears “the sound of harpists playing their harps.”

It seems there are choirs and orchestras of angels in regular praise at the throne of God. John later sees a vision of people joining in



The idea that angels sit on clouds playing harps comes from misunderstanding of Scripture.

the music, “having harps of God” (Revelation 15:2). As the physical tabernacle and temple of God were intended as a model of the heavenly temple (see Hebrews 9:23-24), it seems quite likely that the Levitical choirs and musicians of the physical service were meant to model the ongoing heavenly praise directed toward God.

Don’t be misled by popular—but *wrong*—ideas. Learn what the *Bible* reveals about God’s powerful angels!

in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate” (Genesis 18:1-8, 22; 19:1-3).

Note that both of the angels here looked like men (the third being, also looking like a man, was the Lord who later would be born in the flesh as Jesus Christ). They even ate the meals that Abraham and Lot prepared for them, which shows they were manifested in physical form. Angels don't need to eat, but clearly they can.

Perhaps you, too, have met angels and don't even know it—maybe certain strangers who helped you in some way—especially since they can appear as normal-looking people. Scripture tells us, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2, NIV). This likely refers to what we just read in Genesis. In this case, the angels were soon recognized for what they were, but that's not always the case.

Of course, the encouragement to be hospitable to strangers does not mean to throw caution to the wind in dealing with people we don't know, putting ourselves or our families in potential jeopardy from those who might harm us. But we should be helpful and kind to people, generally speaking.

The key to notice here is that it's not always obvious when angels may be present. They will look like normal men, and as such you may not even be aware of who or what they are.

Men in white at Jesus' resurrection and ascension

In a similar way angels, looking like men, appeared at Jesus Christ's tomb to explain His disappearance:

“But Mary [Magdalene] stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And *she saw two angels* in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’ Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus” (John 20:11-14).

Again, the angels at Christ's tomb appeared as young men, as Mark's Gospel describes: “And entering the tomb, they [the women who came to anoint Jesus' body] saw *a young man* clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here!’” (Mark 16:5-6).

The white raiment seems to have been particularly bright, perhaps a hint at their glory that was otherwise invisible. Luke notes: “And it happened, as they [the same women] were greatly perplexed about this [the stone

Where Did the Idea of Angels as Babies Originate?

Perhaps one of the oddest depictions of angels is as winged infants, these being referred to as cherubs. They are nothing like the biblical *cherubim*—powerful, exotic, four-faced beings (see “Different Kinds of Angels,” beginning on page 29). And in fact, there are no baby-like angels in all of Scripture.

This figure was known in Renaissance art as the putto, Italian vernacular derived from the Latin word for boy, but its origins go much further back to the Greco-Roman world. “The conception of the putto reaches back in art to the classical world, where winged infants were physical manifestations of invisible essences or spirits called *genius*, *genii*, that were believed to influence human lives. Love putti (*erote*) were familiars of Eros [or Cupid] and Venus. In Bacchanals, which were celebrations of Dionysius (Bacchus), putti represented fertility, abundance, the spirit of the fruit of life and were often depicted in wild revelry” (Lin Vertefeuille, “The Putto—Angels in Art,” 2005, ringlingdocents.org/putto.htm). There were other putti associated with fear, dreams, the god Pan, water sprites, music, etc.

Putti disappeared in the Middle Ages, but reappeared in early Renaissance Italy, used then as personifications of human spirit and emotions (*ibid.*). They were especially made

popular by the artist Donatello, who “gave putto a distinct character by infusing the form with Christian meanings and using it



in new contexts such as musician angels” (Wikipedia, “Putto”).

Cupid also came to be represented by the putto figures that had earlier attended to him in Classical art—now representing the presence of love. There was an overlap here with the idea of the cherubim as guardians of God's glory and pure love, with infants representing innocence and purity (Whitney Hopler, “Cherubs and Cupids: Fictional Angels of Love,” ThoughtCo.com, Jan. 21, 2016). “The irony is that the cherubs of popular art and the cherubs of historical religious texts like the Bible couldn't be more different creatures” (*ibid.*).

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, belief in spirits called genius or genii was common, with dozens depicted on this sarcophagus of a Roman nobleman.



having been rolled away], that behold, *two men stood by them in shining garments*" (Luke 24:4). No doubt these dazzlingly white clothes also symbolized their righteousness and holiness (compare Revelation 19:8).

Forty days later, Jesus ascended to heaven, and two angels explained to His disciples that He would come back. Notice the description:

"Now when He [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, *two men stood by them in white apparel*, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11).

Note *how little the two angels said*—just a quick message, and then they were gone. This is the pattern through most of the Scriptures with righteous angels. By contrast, some people who've had encounters with *evil* spirits or demons mention that these will sometimes talk on and on. (To learn more, see "What Is the Origin of Satan and Demons?" beginning on page 24.)

Glimpsing angelic glory in vision

So even though angels can appear as normal men, they are far from "normal," as we understand the word.

Angels are, in reality, powerful and glorious beings. Notice what the apostle John saw in vision: "I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire . . . And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars" (Revelation 10:1-3).

This is very similar to a vision of the prophet Daniel: "I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz [a region producing fine gold]! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude" (Daniel 10:5-6). This is also similar to the appearance of the glorified Jesus Christ, which John likewise saw in vision (Revelation 1:12-16).

Daniel was overwhelmed by what he saw: "And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground" (Daniel 10:7-

9). The experience was so astounding that it appears Daniel passed out!

He was then touched and revived, and an amazing message was given to him, which we'll see more about in the next chapter. This encounter left him dumbstruck until he was enabled to speak.

Daniel writes: "When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And suddenly, *one having the likeness of the sons of men* touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, 'My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me.'

"Then again, *the one having the likeness of a man* touched me and strengthened me. And he said, 'O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!' So when he spoke to me I was strengthened . . ." (verses 15-19).

Amazingly, what Daniel saw is just a glimpse of the awesome glory of an angelic being. Note that Daniel calling the powerful figure a man (verse 5) concerns general appearance, as he later refers to him as having the *likeness* of a man (verses 16, 18). This was certainly no man in actual fact. And remember that this was a supernatural vision and does not necessarily convey an exactness of actual appearance. The totality of the natural form of angels in the spirit realm may even be beyond human ability to fully grasp while we are yet flesh.

We should also note that angels are evidently on the same size scale as human beings, for Revelation 21:17 refers to a certain number of "cubits [the measure from the elbow to the fingertips], according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel."

We'll next look at more regarding angelic forms and positions, exploring further what Scripture reveals about these amazing beings.

Leading Angels: Michael and Gabriel

We just read of the prophet Daniel's vision of a glorious angel. And his book has much more fascinating details to give us. Here we are introduced to certain angels mentioned by name. And we are further told in the book of Daniel of wars between angels in the spirit realm.

The New Testament also mentions these great angels and the great struggle between good and evil in the spirit realm. We find that angels often travel in large armies in order to consolidate their strength when dealing with, and fighting against, Satan's armies (recall Christ's reference to legions of angels).

Let's now take a look, then, at the particular angels who are named in the Bible and at the spirit warfare Scripture describes.

The archangel Michael

First we have Michael, a name meaning "Who Is Like God." He is referred to in Daniel 10:13 as "one of the chief princes"—that is, one of the leading rulers in the angelic realm. He is further called, in Daniel 12:1, "the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your [that is, Daniel's] people"—the Jewish people and, more broadly, all of Israel. We will look more at the context of these expressions in a moment.

The title of chief prince finds a parallel in the New Testament. We read in Jude 9, "Yet Michael *the archangel*, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" (Because Satan still holds a temporary position of rulership over the world by God's allowance, it would have been inappropriate for Michael to revile him.)

The term *archangel* here means chief angel or chief messenger. Michael is not the only archangel, as he is called *one of the chief princes*. (Referring to him as "Michael the archangel" does not mean there is just one archangel—just as saying "Paul the apostle" would not mean there was just one apostle. Several people mentioned in Scripture were named Michael, so saying "Michael the archangel" distinguishes him.)

As we'll see, it may be that the angel Gabriel was also an archangel or chief prince. And the same appears to be the case for Lucifer before he became Satan. Lucifer was one of the covering cherubim at the throne of God (see "What Is the Origin of Satan and Demons?" beginning on page 24). This

is a leading position for which *archangel* would seem an apt title (though it's possible there could be more archangels than just the covering cherubim).

We are told that part of Michael's job responsibility is *looking after the nations of Israel* and *fighting for the people of God* in times of war. It wasn't only the work and efforts of superior human generals that won the First and Second World War for the Allies. God was involved in the eventual outcome of these great battles! (To see the Israelite identity of the leading Western nations among the World War II Allies, send for or download our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

When there was a major crisis in the nation of Israel, and when there is a crisis today in the nations that are *descended* from the 12 tribes of ancient Israel, Michael is involved. And in crises affecting God's Church, which is spiritual Israel—Christians being Jews inwardly (see Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:28-29; Ephesians 2:11-13, 19)—Michael is likewise involved!

The prophecies of Revelation give us a glimpse into the fighting in the spirit realm: "And *war* broke out in heaven: *Michael and his angels* fought with the dragon [Satan]; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer" (Revelation 12:7-8).

Returning to Daniel 10, we are told that an angel sent with a message to Daniel was held up by demonic resistance. He states: "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia [an evil demon] withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, *Michael, one of the chief princes*, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia [other demon rulers]" (verse 13). Persia was the prominent world power at the time—and we see here that there were spiritual forces behind the earthly thrones of this human empire, as there are spiritual forces at work behind world powers even today.

We see here that Michael was sent to help this angel who could not overcome the *demon prince of Persia*. Daniel 10:20 tells us further that the *demon prince of Greece* would soon come—as Greece was the next world power. But Michael provided the extra force needed to stand firm!

The angel who needed help is evidently the same glorious being mentioned earlier in the chapter in verses 5-6, the description of whom we noted previously—Daniel having seen him in vision girded with gold of Uphaz, with a body like beryl, face like lightning, eyes like torches, and arms and feet like burnished bronze. So astounding was the vision, we saw, that Daniel evidently fainted.

The identity of this glorious angel is not revealed here. He's often assumed to be Gabriel, as Gabriel had been sent with messages to Daniel before. This is possible. If it's Gabriel, perhaps Daniel doesn't realize it's him since he's not appearing in his familiar human form but as an awesome spirit being. Yet it could be a different angel. We are not told.

What Is the Origin of Satan and Demons?

Sometime after the world was formed, the peaceful harmony in the angelic realm dramatically changed. Genesis 1:2 tells us that, after its creation, “the earth was *without form, and void.*” This English translation doesn’t adequately convey the meaning of the original Hebrew. The words *tohu va-bohu*, translated “without form and void,” are better translated “waste and void” (Young’s Literal Translation).

However, in Isaiah 45:18, God expressly says of the earth that He “*did not create it in vain.*” Here the same Hebrew word, *tohu*, is used. If God did not create the earth in this state, how did it come to be that way?

Part of the answer is indicated in Genesis 1:2. The Hebrew word *hayah*, translated “was,” can also be translated “became,” as it is translated in Genesis 2:7 and 19:26. The earth was not *created* waste and void but *became* that way. In Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, Genesis 1:2 appropriately reads, “Now the earth *had become* waste and empty.”

God created the earth in such beauty that the angels rejoiced (Job 38:1-7). But something happened to bring it to a condition of devastation. God then reshaped it, forming it into a beautiful home for the first man and woman, as recorded in the remainder of Genesis 1.

But the Genesis account doesn’t tell us the entire story. God gives additional details in other chapters of the Bible regarding what brought about this condition of waste and confusion.

A rebellion against God

In Isaiah 14 we find more information—reference to an angelic rebellion and its leader.

In verse 4 God addresses the “king of Babylon.” In Isaiah’s time Babylon was emerging as the major power in that region of the world. Its king was a warmonger who enslaved, plundered and devastated the nations around him.

In verse 12 the subject shifts from the physical king to a ruler who is yet higher. Many scholars recognize that the language here is in the form of a lament, a reflection of God’s

mourning due to the events being described:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [Hebrew *Heylel*, the Daystar], son of the morning! . . . For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High!’” (verses 12-14).

Who is this being who dared to challenge God Himself as ruler of the universe?

In Ezekiel 28 God gives us the answer. This chapter is written much like Isaiah 14. God begins by discussing a human ruler, then shifts to the spiritual power behind the earthly throne.

Here God addresses the “prince of Tyre,” Tyre being a major trading center north of Israel on the Mediterranean Sea. Its rulers had grown haughty because of their wealth and power. In verses 6-10 God tells Tyre’s ruler that because of his arrogance, his might would fail and he would be overthrown.

But notice in verse 12 that God begins to address “the *king* of Tyre” rather than the prince. This figure is the *true* power behind the throne. God’s description makes it clear that He is speaking to no physical human being!

“You were *the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God . . .*” (verse 12-13).

No mortal man could accurately be described as being “*the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*” This *created* being (verse 13) had also been “in Eden, the garden of God.” Other than Adam and Eve, no people had been in the Garden of Eden!

The fall of a superangel

God then reveals more about this being: “You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God . . .” (Ezekiel 28:14).

What do these remarkable statements mean? What is a “cherub who covers”? Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the tabernacle established through Moses—the portable

sanctuary the Israelites carried with them in their desert wanderings—was “a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (NIV).

In Exodus 25:18-20 we find that God instructed the Israelites to make a representation—a physical model—of His throne for the tabernacle they would carry with them in the



The being we know as Satan the devil was originally one of two cherubim covering the throne of God in heaven—as represented by the Ark of the Covenant.

wilderness. This was the Ark of the Covenant covered by the “mercy seat.”

Atop each side of the mercy seat, which represented God’s throne, was a golden cherub with wings extended to cover the mercy seat. The two cherubim, fashioned out of gold, represented real angelic beings. The later temple of Solomon similarly had two large sculpted cherubim with wings extending over the ark and its mercy seat (Exodus 25:17-20; 1 Kings 6:23-28).

The being God addressed through Ezekiel is called the “cherub who covers,” indicating that he had once been one of the great angels depicted in the model of God’s throne. God gave these angels the awesome distinction of serving at and covering the very throne of God in heaven! Many other scriptures say that God “dwells between the cherubim” (see 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16).

God also says to this cherub, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:15). Like the description in Isaiah 14, this passage describes a created being, not a man. This being was extraordinary, perfect until his

pride in his own beauty and splendor corrupted his wisdom (Ezekiel 28:17).

“ . . . You were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones” (verse 16, NIV). This once marvelous being sinned and was expelled from God’s throne, cast away in disgrace.

Corrupted self—and others followed

This rebellious angel became *Satan*, meaning “adversary”—the *enemy, opponent, antagonist or foe*. Satan’s arrogance and vanity ultimately led to outright and open rebellion against God. This powerful spirit entity decided to challenge God for control of the universe!

What had been a beautiful, immensely talented spirit being became, through his rebellion, a reprehensible, despicable creature. What God created was a magnificent and perfect being. But this powerful being, by his own choices, *became* the devil and Satan—the adversary, the enemy of God and humanity!

Satan was not alone in this rebellion. Millions of other angels joined him. This is symbolically described in Revelation 12:3-4: “And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon . . . His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”

Verse 9 identifies this dragon as Satan. The Bible uses stars as a symbol for angels (Revelation 1:20). This indicates that a third of the angels followed Satan in this rebellion.

We can see from this that angels were not preprogrammed automatons but were given the ability to think and make decisions on their own. Sadly, a large number chose poorly.

The Bible refers to Satan and the other rebellious angels as evil spirits, unclean spirits and demons. They are fallen angels—no longer serving God and humanity, but reduced to hatred and bitterness toward God and His purpose for humanity.

Thankfully, the rule of Satan and his demons will be lifted when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory! (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*)

The angel tells Daniel that He was immediately dispatched when Daniel began praying and fasting to God: “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words” (verse 12).

So we see that Daniel's prayers were heard, but an answer did not reach him for three weeks because of an intense *spiritual* battle! The next verse, which we read earlier, concerns the archangel Michael needing to have been brought in to set things straight in this unseen world of warfare.

The special messenger from God revived and strengthened Daniel and told him: “Do you know why I have come to you? And now *I must return to fight with the prince of Persia*; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except *Michael your prince*)” (Daniel 10:13-21).

This is an amazing passage to read! Clearly Michael is a very powerful being in his ability to withstand such evil forces! And Daniel is told that Michael will do so again in the end time—in a passage already quoted from in part: “At that time [the end time] *Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people*; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:1-2).

Through the archangel Michael, God brings deliverance to His people.

Gabriel, spokesman for God

A second key angelic figure in Scripture is the aforementioned Gabriel, his name meaning “Strong Man of God.”

Gabriel has a very different role from that of the archangel Michael. He is possibly an archangel too, although the Bible does not directly state this. He may be a cherub—possibly even one of the two covering cherubim. In any case, he is definitely a leading angel.

Gabriel is shown throughout Scripture to have the role of *bringing good news* to mankind, and also of making special pronouncements. We do not find specific reference to him fighting as we see with Michael—unless he was the angel who needed Michael's help against the demon rulers of Persia (though that is not clear). In any case Gabriel primarily appears as a *messenger* (which is what “angel” means) and *spokesman* for God.

Let's notice some of the references to Gabriel. The first occurs in Daniel 8:15-16: “Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was

seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me *one having the appearance of a man*. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, ‘*Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.*’”

Secondly, a chapter later, Gabriel is mentioned again. Daniel writes: “Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, yes, while I was speaking in prayer, *the man Gabriel*, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering” (Daniel 9:20-21).

We later see direct examples of Gabriel in the role of a spokesman for God in his announcing the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

As the priest Zacharias was carrying out his duties in the temple, he was startled and frightened when an angel suddenly appeared before him. “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord . . .

“And the angel answered and said to him, ‘*I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God*, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time . . .’” (Luke 1:11-15, 19-20).

Some six months later this same angel appeared to Mary and announced that she had been chosen to be the mother of the promised Messiah, Jesus:

“Now in the sixth month *the angel Gabriel was sent by God* to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, *the angel said to her*, ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end . . .’ Then Mary said, ‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.’ *And the angel departed from her*” (Luke 1: 26-33, 38).

So we see that Gabriel *announced* the coming birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus to Zacharias and Mary. Possibly Gabriel was the angel who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in Luke 2:9-15. It was certainly done in his style.

Next we'll consider different types of angels with other responsibilities.

Jesus: Not an Angel but *the* Angel

Of the many Old Testament references to angels of God, there are a few where One called “the Angel of the LORD” is also identified as “the LORD” (Genesis 16:10-13; 22:11-12; Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:3-22). But how can an angel of God be God Himself? This is evidently the same figure referred to as “the Angel of His Presence” in Isaiah 63:9, as well as the “Angel” God sent to lead the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land (Exodus 14:19; 23:20).

The word “Angel” here can cause confusion, as it is typically used to refer to created spirit beings who are lesser than God. However, the Old Testament Hebrew word from which the word “angel” is translated, *malak*, simply means “messenger,” as does the New Testament Greek equivalent *angelos* (from which we get the English word *angel*).

We must look at the context to determine whether a human or spirit messenger is meant. In this case, we have *the Messenger of God who is also God*. Clearly, there is only one entity fitting this description. It is an exact parallel to *the Word of God who is also God*—the One who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14).

Consider an Old Testament prophecy declared in the New Testament to refer to John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. God said: “Behold, I send My messenger [*malak*, here referring to John the Baptist], and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger [*malak*] of the covenant [that is, Jesus Christ, Mediator of the New Covenant], in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming” (Malachi 3:1; compare Matthew 11:9-11; Mark 1:1-2; Hebrews 12:24).

The “Lord” here is God, for He comes to “His temple.” Yet He is also a Messenger—a *malak*, the term elsewhere rendered “angel.” Jesus is thus the Lord God. Yet He is also the Messenger of God the Father.

But He is not like the other spirit messengers

of God. Jesus had no beginning but is “from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). The other spirit messengers were created (Hebrews 1:7). And they were created *by Him!* (Colossians 1:15-17). He is their Creator—their Lord and God along *with* the Father.

Some try to equate the archangel Michael with Jesus. But Michael is called “*one of the chief princes*” (Daniel 10:13), hardly a way to characterize the Creator of all other angels. And Michael “dared not” denounce Satan in a dispute over the body of Moses but said, “The Lord rebuke you” (Jude 9). This just does not fit with the One who *made* the angel who became Satan and who is Himself Lord along with the Father. Also, there is no association made in Revelation 12 between Jesus as the Child to rule all nations (verses 4-5) and Michael mentioned just after (verse 7).

Jesus, at the end of His human life, prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). Then He returned to “the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You?’” (Hebrews 1:3-5).

The angels are referred to as “sons of God” by virtue of having been created (Job 38:7), whereas Jesus became the Son of the Father through being actually begotten of the Father in flesh and Spirit. “But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him’ . . . To the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever . . .’” (verses 6, 8).

Jesus “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22).

Clearly Jesus Christ is far above all the angels—yet He is *the* Angel in terms of being the Father’s Messenger.

Different Kinds of Angels

Many angels sing praises to God the Father and Jesus Christ on a regular basis. In Revelation 5:11-13 we read: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of *many angels* around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’”

“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”

This praise from this massive angelic choir seems to go on continually! Yet it appears that these angels are not all the same.

As we saw with the examples of Michael and Gabriel, angels have different kinds of responsibilities. And interestingly, the Bible shows that there are different *classifications* of angels too—not all are alike!

Let’s look at the categories of angels mentioned in Scripture.

Seraphim—burning ones

In relating the story of his calling, the prophet Isaiah tells us something remarkable: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. *Above it stood seraphim*; each one had *six wings*: with two he covered his *face*, with two he covered his *feet*, and with two he *flew*. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’” (Isaiah 6:1-3).

As with Ezekiel some years later (see Ezekiel 1; 10), Isaiah here sees a vision of God on a throne, attended by spirit beings, at the heavenly temple. These angelic spirits, identified as seraphim, could be a different class or type of angel from the cherubim in Ezekiel. The seraphim are not described extensively, but we may note these features:

- Seraphim have six wings.
- They cover their faces with a set of wings.
- They cover their feet with a set of wings.
- They fly with a set of wings.
- Seraphim form may resemble a person standing upright—but with wings.

- They hover above God's throne.
- They sing praises to God a lot!

Observe that the seraphim here have six wings instead of the four wings of the cherubim in Ezekiel (which we'll see more about shortly). However, it's possible that these beings are not so different after all.

The word *seraphim* has been left untranslated here. It literally means "burning ones." Yet the word *seraph* is translated elsewhere in Scriptures as "fiery serpent" and with another word later in the book of Isaiah as "fiery flying serpent" (14:29; 30:6; compare Numbers 21:6, 8; Deuteronomy 8:15). Notice Numbers 21:6 in the Tanakh, the newer Jewish Publication Society translation of the Holy Scriptures: "The LORD sent *seraph* serpents against the people."

It is commonly thought that the term *fiery* (i.e., burning) serpents connotes the sting of their bites. Yet it may actually refer to the reflective quality of their glassy scales, by which they are *shiny*. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for serpent, *nachash*, literally means "shining one." Indeed, a literal translation of Numbers 21:6 would be: "And sent the Eternal among the people the shining ones, the burning ones, and they bit the people."

Notice also verse 8 in the Tanakh: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a seraph figure and mount it on a standard.'" And Moses made a bronze *nachash* or serpent (verse 9). In fact, the word for bronze is another form of *nachash*, apparently because of its shiny quality. In any case, it appears that *seraph* and *nachash* are interchangeable terms (see also E.W. Bulinger, *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 19).

What then of the seraphim Isaiah sees? According to *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "it may imply either a serpentine form (albeit with wings, human hands, and voices) or beings that have a 'glowing' quality about them" (1985, Old Testament Section, "To Burn," p. 27). Of course, every angel, it should be noted, is a shining being of light (compare Revelation 10:1; 18:1), also described as a "flame of fire" (Hebrews 11:7).

All of this is rather interesting when we consider that Satan is referred to in Scripture as a serpent and even a "fiery red dragon" (Revelation 12:4, 9). This seems too much like "fiery flying serpent" (i.e., *seraph*) to be mere coincidence. And yet Satan is distinctly referred to in Ezekiel 28:14-16 as a cherub. Perhaps, then, a cherub and a seraph are the same thing.

Granted, there do appear to be a few minor differences between the creatures Isaiah and Ezekiel saw—and later the apostle John (compare Revelation 4:6-8). In that case, perhaps cherubim are a class of seraphim, yet different from the class Isaiah saw. However, it could be that Ezekiel's cherubim were actually the same creatures Isaiah saw, but viewed in a different activity so that Ezekiel did not see the extra pair of wings Isaiah and John saw.

Or perhaps these creatures are capable of shifting appearance or form even in the spirit realm—sometimes having six wings and sometimes four, sometimes having four faces and sometimes one. Though we may not be able to ascertain a reason for this, we should not suppose it out of the question—since righteous angels are even able to appear to us as human beings, which is not their natural form. We must remember that these are *spirit* beings, existing in a *spirit dimension* not bound by the physical laws of our physical realm.

Cherubim—with four faces

Many of us have heard of the cherubim. But sadly, what has been depicted in artwork over the millennia is almost always inaccurate. The little baby cherubs with two wings are not at all like the true cherubs of God. (In the Hebrew language, *cherub*, the *ch* pronounced as a *k*, is singular and *cherubim* is plural—the same with *seraph* and *seraphim*.)

As we've seen, Lucifer once was an anointed cherub at God's throne (Ezekiel 28:13-14). But he was cast out, and God then referred to him as Satan, meaning "enemy" or "adversary."

God rode on a cherub to save David! The power of the angelic realm is revealed in this passage from 2 Samuel:

"In my distress *I called upon the LORD*, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. *He rode upon a cherub, and flew*; and He was seen upon the wings of the wind" (2 Samuel 22:7-11). This passage from 2 Samuel is repeated in Psalm 18:7-10. Here is just verse 10: "And *He rode upon a cherub*: yea and did fly upon the wings of the wind."

And then Psalm 80 talks about God dwelling between the cherubim: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who *dwell between the cherubim*, shine forth!" (verse 1). A number of other verses say the same, as we saw earlier.

Now let's look at an awesome description of these cherubs at God's very throne. Here is what Ezekiel saw God riding upon. He describes a frightening, awesome vision!

"The word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of

amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also *from within it came the likeness of four living creatures.*

“And this was their appearance: *they had the likeness of a man.* Each one had *four faces*, and each one had *four wings*. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

“As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a *man*; each of the four had the face of a *lion* on the right side, each of the four had the face of an *ox* on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an *eagle* . . . As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning . . .

“When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, *like the voice of the Almighty*, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings . . . And above the firmament *over their heads was the likeness of a throne*, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it . . .

“Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking” (Ezekiel 1:3-10, 13, 24-28).

The prophet Ezekiel later records further vision about the cherubim and their wheels and their supernatural movement through the spirit world:

“The *cherubim* appeared to have the form of a *man's hand under their wings*. And when I looked, there were four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by each other cherub; the wheels appeared to have the color of a beryl stone . . .

“And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, *were full of eyes all around* . . . Each one had four faces: the first face was the face of a *cherub*, the second face the face of a *man*, the third the face of a *lion*, and the fourth the face of an *eagle*. And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar . . .

“And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them . . . This is the living creature I saw *under*

the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim” (Ezekiel 10:8-9, 12, 14-15, 19-20).

Note that the four faces in chapters 1 and 10 are the same except that instead of the ox face in chapter 1, chapter 10 has a cherub face. This must mean that the primary face of the cherub is an ox face.

So, once more, what are cherubs or cherubim like?

- Cherubim are described as having four wings.
- Two cherubim cover God's throne with their wings.
- Four dwell *under* the Lord's mobile throne, holding it up.
- They each seem to have a general humanlike form but a head with *four faces!*

Cherubs are described as transporting God's throne on supernatural “wheels” full of “eyes” (though these “wheels” may be two more whirling wings, with the appearance of “eyes” being an effect of that, giving a total of six wings—just as the seraphim were said to fly with just two of their wings).

Again, cherubim may be quite different from seraphim, or they might be essentially the same, or cherubim may be one of multiple types of seraphim. The Bible doesn't give us a complete explanation.

Interestingly, we find composite creatures in ancient art and mythology bearing similarities with the cherubim Ezekiel saw and with the four living creatures we'll consider next (see “Do We Have Reminders of Cherubim From the Ancient World?” beginning on page 34).

The “four living creatures” in Revelation and other animal parallels

Ezekiel described what he saw as “four living creatures” (Ezekiel 1:5). The book of Revelation also reveals “four living creatures” at God's throne in heaven. Here is what we can glean from what was revealed to the apostle John:

- The four living creatures are in the midst of God's throne and round about it.
- They have six wings (like the seraphim).
- Each has the likeness of a creature represented by one of the four different cherubim faces.
- They are full of eyes.
- The four living creatures never rest.
- They praise God continually.

John explains what he saw in Revelation 4: “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, *a throne set in heaven*, and One sat on the throne . . . Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back*” (verses 2, 6). They appear to have eyes in the back of their heads! Or, if the eyes are associated with the wings, perhaps this

is similar to peacock plumage—where what appear to be eyes can be seen from either side. (The wings of some butterflies and moth wings are also decorated with what appear to be eyes.)

“The first living creature was like a *lion*, the second living creature like a *calf*, the third living creature had a face like a *man*, and the fourth living creature was like a flying *eagle*. The four living creatures, each having *six wings*, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” (verses 7-9).

Do We Have Reminders of Cherubim From the Ancient World?

The derivation of the Hebrew word *cherub* (*keroub* or *krub*), referring to a kind of angel, is uncertain. Some have proposed that it simply means “figure.” Others have said it



In ancient Assyria, Babylon and Persia, protective beings called lammasu or shedu were depicted by giant statues typically flanking entrances to royal or sacred areas. This statue is from the palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II in present-day Khorsabad, Iraq.

comes from a root meaning “mix,” in reference to combined features. Still others look to similar ancient terms. The Akkadian word *karibu*, which some say refers to intercessory beings and statues of such, seems related to the Assyrian word *karabu*, meaning “great” or

“mighty,” and a similar Babylonian term meaning “propitious.”

These terms, it’s maintained, were applied to mythological protective beings associated with the stars called *lamassu* or *shedu*, which had composite form, with human head, ox or lion body, and eagle’s wings—thus, sphinxes or winged bulls. It’s especially striking how similar these mythological creatures are to the biblical descriptions of cherubim, which also have parts that appear like human beings, lions, oxen and eagles.

Some contend that the Hebrew *krub* or a related Near Eastern term is the origin of the similar sounding Greek *gryps*, whence derives the term *gryphon* or *griffin*—an eagle-headed lion. It’s been pointed out that “the human-bodied Hittite griffin . . . unlike other griffins, appear[s] almost always not as a fierce bird of prey, but seated in calm dignity, like an irresistible guardian of holy things” (Wikipedia, “Cherub”).

The *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* notes parallels between the biblical cherubim and “the gigantic composite creatures well known in Assyrian and Babylonian iconographic and glyptic art. These hybrid creatures protected the entrance into temples or palaces. The colossal Assyrian composite creatures unearthed during archaeological excavations provide a fitting example. They have been excavated at the site of ancient Nimrud, where

These beings, too, may not be so different from the cherubim and seraphim—considering that they are beyond our normal physical dimensions and might appear in shifted ways and can possibly change form.

Something else to note here is which faces and forms came first—those of the angelic beings or those of physical animals on earth? As we’ve seen earlier, the angels were created first. So rather than an angel having a lion face, we might consider that a lion has an angel face. An eagle has an angel face. An ox has an angel face.

And perhaps more of the animals in the physical realm are patterned

they guarded the doorways to the palace of Ashurbanipal II (883-859 BC). One of these is a winged bull with a human head; another has the body of a lion” (note on Ezekiel 1:5).

The same study Bible noted on the cherubim atop the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus 25: “These sculpted creatures are most likely winged sphinxes known from a number of other sites throughout the ancient Near East . . . Such composite creatures have been found in temples and shrines and are often arranged as if guarding the entrance. Their purpose seems to have been protective—to prevent, perhaps only symbolically, unauthorized individuals from entering space where they were not allowed.

“In the Exodus tabernacle, the creatures seem to function as protectors of Yahweh’s presence. They are the last barrier between any possible human entrant and the divine presence. It is not out in front of them but ‘between’ them, says Yahweh, that ‘I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites’ (v. 22). It is therefore also significant that winged composite creatures are found flanking the thrones of kings in the ancient world” (note on verse 18).

As to actual appearance, it’s further pointed out that “Ezekiel consistently repeats the expression ‘looked like’ (e.g., vv. 4,5,10,22,26,27), indicating his unwillingness to commit himself to the substantial identity of the seen with the compared. It looked ‘like’ fire, living creatures, a human being, but these buffer terms indicate that this is only a ‘vision.’ This is the sort of language regularly used in reports of dreams

and visions” (note on Ezekiel 1:5).

How do we account for such remarkable similarities between these mythological crea-



Griffins, mythical creatures with the head and talons of an eagle and body and legs of a lion, were considered guardians and symbols of the divine in the ancient world. This pair of partially reconstructed griffins adorns the top of a column in Persepolis, capital of the ancient Persian Empire, in present-day Iran.

tures from throughout the ancient Near East and the biblical cherubim? A simple answer is that these various popular depictions probably came from dim recollections of the cherubim God had placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24)—angelic creatures that may have been visible to human beings until the Garden of Eden was later destroyed in the Flood of Noah’s day.

after the angels. We saw that the Lord came riding on a cherub, but in Revelation 19 we see Christ returning on a white horse. Is this just a figurative picture? Or are these angels that look like horses? Or perhaps cherubim that are able to take on the form of horses? This is quite fascinating to contemplate.

The “twenty-four elders”

Making up a final category of angelic spirit beings are those referred to as the “twenty-four elders” at the throne of God. Revelation 4 through 5 outlines what we know of them:

“Around the throne [of God] were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw *twenty-four elders* sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads . . . Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, *the twenty-four elders fall down before Him* who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created’ . . .

“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, *and in the midst of the elders*, stood a Lamb [Jesus Christ] as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are *the seven Spirits of God* sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

“Now when He had taken the scroll, *the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders* fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us [or ‘them,’ as other versions correctly have] to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us [that is, them] kings and priests to our God; and we [they] shall reign on the earth’” (Revelation 4:4, 9-11; 5:6-10).

So we see:

- The 24 elders are dressed in white clothing.
- Each elder has a golden crown on his head.
- They sing praises to God and sing hymns on *our* behalf!
- These beings, bearing crowns, evidently have a role in administration in the angelic realm—yet their rule is obviously in submission to the rule of God.

So we see that the Bible reveals different classifications of angels. They are quite different from the common depictions of Hollywood movies, television shows and classic art. One thing is for sure—they are truly astounding and amazing beings!

Serving God and Mankind

God has given His angels important responsibilities. There are special individual duties, there are different duties for different types of angels, and there are obligations for all angels.

Common to all angels is the duty to heed and obey God. Angels were created as agents of God to carry out His will. And the righteous angels are in total obedience. This is why we pray to God, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The angels of heaven carry out God’s will perfectly—and we in prayer are asking that all people on earth would follow that example. Psalm 103:20 states, “Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.”

While God is able to see everything through His Spirit, it seems that He also wants a direct, eyes-on view and report of events on earth through angels. We saw this in the case of the angels who were sent to Sodom in Genesis 19. We see it in the seven spirits of God as “the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the earth” (Zechariah 4:10; see Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; compare Proverbs 15:3).

God has used some angels as intermediaries in communicating various instructions and laws. Acts 7:53 says the Israelites “received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Galatians 3:19 says that Israel’s full legal and ceremonial system “was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator [Moses].” Hebrews 2:2 likewise referred to this “word spoken through angels [having] proved steadfast,” wherein “every transgression and disobedience received a just reward.” Likewise God sometimes used angels to communicate messages to prophets and apostles, as in Zechariah and Revelation (see also 1 Chronicles 21:18).

Serving God’s people and the needs of mankind

Angels are often spectators or observers of what God is doing through mankind. From this they learn more of God’s plan of salvation (see “Angels Are Not People Who Died—Man Has a Far Greater Purpose and Future” beginning on page 38). While angels are *spirit* beings, they often minister or serve in very *physical* ways. Specifically, they minister to those called to be God’s people today.

We read about this role in Hebrews 1: “For to which of the angels did He [God the Father] ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten

You'? And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'? But when He again brings the firstborn [Jesus Christ as a forerunner] into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him . . . ? Are they [the angels] not all *ministering spirits* sent forth to *minister for those who will inherit salvation?*'" (verses 5-6, 14).

In a famous example of physical service, an angel provided the prophet Elijah with food and water and encouraged him to eat:

"Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly *an angel touched him*, and said to him, '*Arise and eat.*' Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, '*Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.*' So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb [Mount Sinai], the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:5-8).

The angel provided for Elijah's *physical* needs, not the *spiritual*. Notice that the angel didn't preach to him or tell him to repent. That was not his role here. It's later in the chapter that Elijah hears the word of God.

Angels don't typically take care of the spiritual matters for God. Jesus

Angels Are Not People Who Died— Man Has a Far Greater Purpose and Future

A common misconception is that when people die (and especially infants), they go to heaven and become angels. Yet angels have existed far longer than people have, being present at the creation of the earth (Job 38:7). Moreover, when people die they don't ascend as conscious disembodied souls to heaven to join the ranks of God's spirit messengers. Rather, people who die are unconscious, having no awareness (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). The Bible compares death to sleep from which people will later awaken in a future resurrection (Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16). (To learn more about this, download or request our free study guide *What Happens After Death?*)

And God created human beings with a higher purpose than that of the angels. People are made in the image and likeness of God, as children are in the image and likeness of their

parents (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-3). People were thus made to become God's divine family (see our free study guide *Why Were You Born?* to learn much more about this amazing destiny).

Regarding Jesus Christ it is stated: "For to which of the angels did He [God] ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You?'" (Hebrews 1:5). And while Jesus was certainly the begotten Son of God in a unique sense, He nevertheless led the way for other human beings to become spiritually begotten sons of God as well—thus "bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10), Himself being "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

Hebrews 2 states that God "has not put the world to come . . . in subjection to angels" (verse 5), but rather that man is to have this responsibility, with Jesus as a forerunner in this (verses 6-9). It's further pointed out in these verses that man, with Jesus leading the way,

Christ and God's ordained ministers and other members of God's Church usually do that. Angels don't take up that responsibility unless specifically assigned.

Of course, sometimes they do have that assignment, such as in communicating God's laws, as we saw above, and preaching the gospel to the world at large (Revelation 14:6). But usually the responsibility is to help with physical needs.

Angels protect us: "The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7).

Remember the physical protection that angels afforded Daniel? They closed the mouths of lions (Daniel 6:22). An angel broke Peter out of jail in Acts 12:7-8, and then made sure that Peter got himself dressed and put his shoes on properly! Once again, we see angels making sure to meet the *physical* needs of God's servants and giving them needed assistance.

Notice also Psalm 91:10-11: "For He shall *give His angels charge over you*, to keep you in all your ways. In *their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*"

Angels will also defend us against our enemies: "Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against

was made "a little lower [or for a little while lower] than the angels" to then be crowned with glory and honor. The book of Revelation tells us that the saints, Christ's followers of this age, will reign with Christ in the coming Kingdom of God as kings and priests (2:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6). In 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, the apostle Paul remarkably writes: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?"

Yes, human beings who become God's spiritual children and remain faithful will ultimately be exalted *above* the angels. In the meantime, we are told of the angels, "Are they not all ministering [serving] spirits sent forth to minister [serve] for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). We can perhaps think of it like the adult attendants of a royal child who is heir to the throne of a kingdom. These are above the child in many respects as the child is growing up, but one day that child will become the ruler of these attendants. So it is with God's human children eventually being glorified and then ruling over the angels.

Even now, God has a special relationship with His human children that the angels do not directly share in—as God has given these people His Holy Spirit, His very essence, so that they have become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). And it is by the Holy Spirit that the deep things of God are revealed (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

Indeed, God has revealed aspects of His divine plan and purpose through His human children that angels had not yet been privy to. As Peter writes of Old Testament prophets under inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel [or good news] to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. *Even angels long to look into these things*" (1 Peter 1:12, NIV). Thus, angels gain some understanding from what God reveals through His people.

Clearly, God intended human beings to ultimately be much more than angels!

me . . . Let them be like chaff before the wind, and *let the angel of the LORD chase them*" (Psalm 35:1, 5).

Heralds, meting out judgment, gathering the elect

God also uses angels as heralds to proclaim good news and warn of judgment.

Gabriel was used to announce the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself, as we saw in an earlier chapter. Angels rolled back the stone from Christ's tomb and announced that He was not there—that He had risen from the dead.

In Revelation 14:6, cited above, the apostle John wrote: "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." The angel then tells everyone to "fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come" (verse 7).

Another angel then announces the fall of Babylon (verse 8), while a third angel warns against receiving the mark of the Beast so as not to "be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (verses 9-11).

Also in the book of Revelation we see angels sounding the seven trumpets that herald the calamities of the Day of the Lord and the glorious return of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 8:13 we see an angel in the form of an eagle pronouncing woes to the earth's inhabitants over the final three trumpet blasts.

And the angels are used to mete out judgment at God's command. After David's sin in numbering Israel, an angel was used to bring a plague—and to show where a new altar of sacrifice was to be built (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21).

In defending Jerusalem from invaders, an angel of the Lord slew 185,000 people in the camp of the Assyrian army—causing King Sennacherib to head back home in defeat (2 Kings 19:32-37).

In Ezekiel 9 we see men from God who are angels, because of the sins of the people, sent in to slay the people of Jerusalem starting at the temple.

When God struck Egypt with plagues at the time of the Exodus, "He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them" (Psalm 78:49).

When Herod accepted the praise of people lauding him as a god, "immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:23).

In Revelation 15 through 16, we see angels pouring out bowls on the earth containing the seven last plagues at the time of Christ's return.

We've already seen in Revelation 12:7-9 that Michael and his angels will

fight against Satan and his demons and cast them down to the earth. Soon afterward, at Christ's coming to the earth, He will have an angel lay hold of Satan to then shut him away for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3).

Jesus spoke of a harvest of His followers at the end of the age in which "the reapers are the angels" (Matthew 13:39). And they will get rid of what's in opposition to God:

"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire" (verses 41-42).

Yet they will bring His true followers to Him: "And He



Angels provided physical protection to the prophet Daniel, closing the mouths of lions that otherwise would've killed him.

will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:31).

And in the far future of the new heaven and new earth, we will find angels at the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12).

God's righteous angels will always be there, for they are immortal, as we will then be too (Luke 20:36). And forever they will devotedly serve God and His glorified children. Again, may we all follow the example of their perfect obedience!

Personal Stories of Angelic Encounters

Many people have reported experiences of some type of help that seemed to involve angels. Some are quite overt. Others are more subtle. Of course, not all such stories we might come across are genuine or are recalled accurately. Nevertheless, there are so many such stories that surely some have really happened as reported.

We have compiled several stories here from people we personally know whom we find no reason to doubt. Indeed, we would expect angelic help for God's people at various times. These encounters have been greatly encouraging to those who have had them. And they are recounted here to encourage and inspire you and others as well.

Car prevented from going off a bridge

It was a hot, sunny day in North Carolina. My wife and I were driving home after spending a day visiting with members of our church. We had been married for a little more than a year, and we were young in life's experiences and new to God's ministry.

As we drove along the interstate highway that day, we began to pass over a large bridge spanning a major river. We all know what it can be like after several miles of such travel—you're driving, thinking about other matters, passing cars, and other cars are passing you. Every driver assumes that everyone else is being alert and careful with their vehicles.

Except this time a man driving a large truck wasn't.

Halfway across this bridge, a sudden jolt lifted our car and began pushing it toward the railing. The truck had hit the rear of my car. In an instant, I realized we could be going over the rail and plunging into the river far below—a fall that would have meant certain death. But before I could even react, my car came back into the driving lane and steadied itself. The truck screamed past us only inches from my door.

I managed to get off the bridge and pull over on the shoulder of the road to inspect my car. The driver of the truck had also stopped and rushed up to me. "I thought I had pushed you over the bridge when I hit your rear bumper!" he said. My wife and I were shaken but relieved. It was a very close call. The driver had been tired and momentarily dozed off at the wheel of his speeding truck when he veered into my lane and caught the left rear of my car, sending it toward the side of the bridge.

He thought we had gone over. I thought we were going over. But we didn't. My wife says she felt the car move back to the left. I know that I didn't turn the wheel to make it happen. We both feel that on that day, at that moment, we had the hand of an angel move our car back into

The truck had hit the rear of my car. In an instant, I realized we could be going over the rail and plunging into the river far below—a fall that would have meant certain death.

the driving lane—keeping it from going off the bridge.

I didn't see an angel, but to this day we strongly feel there was a bit of extra help—an angel who rescued us from disaster.

—D.M.

Help with a tire change in 100-degree heat

I was with my roommate traveling cross-country as she transitioned to a new job in Texas. We were just leaving Albuquerque, New Mexico, when we experienced tire trouble. There was nothing for miles around once we left that last exit, so we crossed the median and went back to the service station to get help.

It was in the middle of July and blazing hot with the sun beating down, and the only shade in the area was under the awning at the gas pumps. I went inside to ask permission to park under the pumps while we attempted to change the tire but was flatly told, "No, you cannot block the gas pumps." So we decided to park at the edge of the parking lot and started to unload the trunk to get to the spare tire. Neither of us had changed a tire in a long time, especially in 100-degree heat.

Out of nowhere, a man came up to us dressed in what appeared to be painter's clothes. He asked if we needed help and proceeded to retrieve the spare tire and started to remove the damaged tire. Once he saw the spare, he said the rim on the spare was not the right one for the car.

When we mentioned that the men inside the air-conditioned station didn't seem helpful, he just said, "Yes, they are like that," and then said he might have something that would work. He drove off, and returned in a few minutes with a different tire. He changed the tire and reloaded the trunk. We tried to pay him but he wouldn't take any money and said that it was okay—"Glad to help." He added that he "didn't need the tire he gave us."

We thanked him, and he got back in his truck and drove off. He was so kind and so unassuming, we felt like God had provided the help we needed when there were no other options. We think that he was an angel come to rescue us!

—D.B.

Face bandaged by person no one recalled seeing

The story occurred in the early 1960s, before my wife was born, and when her older brothers were just toddlers. The family was driving in the car, and it was evening. They had an accident with another vehicle, and my wife's mother's head went through a broken windshield and back

At the emergency room, doctors examined her and declared that whoever bandaged her must have been an expert.

again. She was cut up quite badly. The boys in the back seat were crying, and their dad was telling them not to be afraid and quoted Scripture: "Stand back and watch the salvation of the Lord!"

They got out of the car, and other drivers stopped to give assistance. Soon, a man carrying an old-fashioned doctor's bag walked up and told everyone, "Step aside; I can take care of this." He proceeded to quickly bandage the mother's face, putting her at ease, and stopping the bleeding.

Dad was distracted for a bit speaking to the police, but he says that it was not long before he got back to his wife. The man who helped her was gone. He asked people there where he went, and none of them had any recollection of ever having seen any man there at all. Not long afterward, though, at the hospital emergency room, doctors examined her and declared that whoever bandaged her must have been an expert, because a highly trained doctor could not possibly have done a better job.

She healed so well—from what could easily have been a fatal accident—that she has only one very small scar on her face. It's only noticeable to someone who knows to look for it. The family has long been convinced that God sent an angel to give them assistance when they needed it the most, but that the angel—like many times in Scripture—instantly vanished once the job was done.

—F.D.

A companion when stranded at an airport

When I was 19 I was stranded for 24 hours in an airport with no money and no credit cards. When I realized I was going to be stuck until my friend arrived the next day, I sat down and prayed that God would take care of me because I was alone and just a little bit afraid. Not long after, a young man came and sat down next to me. He said I looked nervous and he thought I could use some company. (To this day I can't remember if he told me his name. If he did I don't remember it, even though we spent almost a full day together.)

He bought me dinner and sat with me overnight. The next morning he even bought me breakfast. I told him I could pay him back when my friend

arrived. He walked with me to the gate where my friend was arriving. We chatted until I saw my friend walk through the door.

I waved, and turned to tell the guy that this was my friend, and he was gone. He had literally been right next to me up until that point. I looked around but couldn't see him anywhere. I am quite convinced he was an angel just making sure I was safe for that night I would have spent alone in an airport.

—L.V.A.

Car righted itself, bike kept from hitting

In the 1980s in East Texas it was one of those rare events for that area to get a bit of snow and ice. My husband and I were driving home when we hit a slick spot and lost control of the car. We headed right into the path of an oncoming car. I closed my eyes, anticipating the impact—but it never happened. When I opened my eyes, my husband said he didn't know how the car righted itself, but we were back in our lane, traveling along as though nothing had happened.

When I was in Jerusalem during the summer of 1973 on a college project, another student and I were walking along a street in the old city, down a hill. All of a sudden we heard someone shouting and looked up to see a man on a bicycle headed straight for us. Perhaps he was yelling to say his brakes weren't working. Anyway, he was almost on us when suddenly his bike seemed to hit an invisible wall and he fell over. He continued to exclaim (Arabic? Hebrew?), and we kept asking if he was okay. Since we couldn't properly communicate, he went on his way. I marveled afterwards

We headed right into the path of an oncoming car. I closed my eyes, anticipating the impact—but it never happened.

that he and the bike never touched us at all. We felt no impact whatsoever. It dawned on me later, not at the time, that perhaps an angel stopped him.

There are probably many more times that I don't realize when there was divine intervention through angels, but these come to mind for now.

—J.M.

Trapped in a car and somehow transported outside

We were driving from our local horse stables in southwest Ohio and approached a major highway intersection. At that moment a car made a left turn in front of us, causing us to crash our vehicle. I was sitting on the front passenger's side. The door on the driver's side would open, but my door was jammed and would only open a few inches. I was trapped. It was impossible for me to get out of that side of the car.

I was sitting there in deep shock, helpless, unable to exit the vehicle. But the next thing I remember, I was somehow transported and found myself standing on the road next to the car. I saw a dark shadow at the front of the car. It looked like the front part of a man from the side view.

Sometime later the driver's husband said to me, "I don't know how you got out of that car." I thought about it some more and realized I must have been moved *through* the car door with some supernatural help.

Now I'm better able to see how three men can be thrown into a fiery

I thought about it some more and realized I must have been moved through the car door with some supernatural help.

furnace, as happened with the prophet Daniel's friends in Babylon, and come out with no evidence of being burnt. So this has given me a new perspective on a lot of things, including angelic protection.

—L.R.

Help for two stranded women and six children

A friend and I were on the way home after taking six children swimming when the station wagon we were in had a blowout. It was during a very busy rush hour, and my friend managed to maneuver the vehicle into a hard-to-reach spot alongside the freeway. What would we do? One of the children started praying.

The next thing we knew a man showed up and offered to change the tire. Curiously, he apologized for taking so long to get to us. He started putting on the spare but saw that it was flat. He left and returned a short while later and put the spare on, but said the inner core of the tire was cut and we shouldn't travel far on it. We offered him money but he refused it.

As we drove away we looked back and the man was gone. We stopped as soon as we found a place to replace the tire, and sure enough, it was damaged on the inside exactly as he said. To this day we're sure this kind man was an angel sent to help us out of our difficult situation.

—V.W.

Maybe you have heard of similar stories. Maybe you or someone you know has even experienced such things. The fact is, God is real, and His angels are real. And they really are sent to intervene for people in times of need. Sometimes God acts for us directly through the power of His Spirit. And at other times, He has His spiritual agents, righteous angels, act for Him. No doubt they have intervened for us many times that we are not even aware of. How amazing it will be to one day at last know of all of the supernatural help we have all received in this life!

Conclusion

God created angels as ministering spirits, but some rebelled and chose to follow Satan. However, two-thirds remained loyal to God. The angels of God truly bring protection, announcements of great events and warnings before enforcing God's wrath. They are powerful beings who do God's bidding.

The truth about angels has been twisted and distorted into a confusing assortment of fables and myths. People have wanted their senses titillated, and they like to hear smooth things that lack true spiritual substance (Isaiah 30:10). So often there is a constant barrage of falsehood, against which even true Christians must guard their thoughts, actions and beliefs. God alone is worthy of worship! (Isaiah 37:16).

We need to ask God for His help and protection, including that which He provides through His angels. So much can go wrong in just an instant of time—events that can change our lives forever. The intervention of angels has probably saved us from death or tragic injury on more than one occasion!

Over the years we have experienced or heard of others experiencing miraculous things—direct physical intervention that prevented a tragic accident or a strong force that stopped us from doing something foolish!

The Scriptures abound with many accounts of the intervention of angels. They are involved in helping God carry out His plan, and they watch over each of us called according to God's purpose.

Each day we should ask our Father in heaven to afford us the help and protection that His angels can provide. Angels are a very important element of God's creation—something not seen, and yet more permanent and real than we are today!

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