

Do Angels Really Exist?©

Psalm 91; Hebrews 1:1-14

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Rev. Sharlyn Gates

Most of us have grown up with some ideas of who angels are and what they do. Here are a few things that some kids have said:

Matthew, 9: *It's not easy to become an angel! First, you die. Then you go to heaven; then there's still the flight training to go through. And then you got to agree to wear those angel clothes.*

Daniel, 9: *Angels talk all the way while they're flying you up to heaven. The basic message is where you went wrong before you got dead.*

Vicki, 8: *Some of the angels are in charge of helping heal sick animals and pets. And if they don't make the animals get better, they help the kid get over it.*

Gregory, 5: *I only know the names of two angels. Hark and Harold.*

In Billy Graham's book, titled "Angels" he tells an amazing story of Reverend John G. Paton, a pioneer missionary in the New Hebrides Islands, a story that Rev. Paton believed involved protective angels. He says (and I quote) "Hostile natives surrounded his mission headquarters one night, intent on burning the Patons out and killing them. John Paton and his wife prayed all during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see that, unaccountably, the attackers had left. They thanked God for delivering them.

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

The missionary answered, "There were no men there, just my wife and I." The chief argued that they had seen many men standing guard ... hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands. They seemed to circle the mission station so that the natives were afraid to attack. Only then did Mr. Paton realize that God had sent His angels to protect them. The chief agreed that there was no other explanation.'

Billy Graham asks, "Could it be that God had sent a legion of angels to protect His servants, whose lives were being endangered?"

So ... what do we believe about angels? Nine year old Katelynn says, *“My angel is my grandma who died last year. She got a big head start on helping me while she was still down here on earth.”*

Like Katelynn, many of us grew up with the notion that after we die, we become angels, watching over our loved ones who are still living.

But, although angels are mentioned around 300 times in the Bible, there is nothing that tells us we will be angels after our death. The Psalmist declares, in Psalm 8:

*“What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the angels;
you crowned him with glory and honor
and put everything under his feet.”*

The Bible tells us that in the beginning there was only the triune God who is the creator of everything in heaven and earth. If angels really exist, they are created beings, just as humans are created, but separate, different, spiritual beings ... created for a purpose.

The angel we are probably most familiar with in the Bible is Gabriel, which in Hebrew, means “God’s hero,” or “the mighty one,” or “God is great.” Scripture often refers to Gabriel as “the Lord’s messenger.”

It was Gabriel who first came to Zechariah to tell him that he and Elizabeth would have a son in their old age ... who would be John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus (Luke 1); and then Gabriel went to Mary, God’s chosen one, to tell her of God’s plan for her to be the mother of the long awaited Messiah; we know that an angel of the Lord (who is not named) appeared to Joseph to tell him that the child Mary, his betrothed, was carrying the Son of God;

We also remember the angel who came to the shepherds to tell them of Jesus’ birth and then the whole multitude of angels in the sky singing “Glory to God in the Highest!” (Luke 2); there was the angel who warned Joseph to flee with Mary and the child into Egypt because of Herod’s wrath.

Of course, we are most familiar with these accounts of angels because we celebrate and recount the story of Christ’s birth every year, reading the Scriptures and singing hymns about those angels ... Hark and Harold.

The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary says that the word angel means simply "messenger, envoy." These messengers are to: convey the mandates of God to humans; to announce special events; and to protect the faithful, either individually or collectively. St. Augustine said the word "angel" is the name of the office and the office is one of assisting the Lord.

There are numerous accounts of angels in the Old Testament that you may not be as familiar with. It was an angel who ordered Abraham to refrain, at the last moment, from sacrificing his only son, Isaac. (Gen. 22:11) An angel reassured Jacob against the attempts of Laban to cheat him of his wages (Gen. 31:11).

It was an angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2); an angel protected Jacob; escorted the Israelites through the wilderness; and put a cloud between them and the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 23 and 14).

In the Scriptures we read of angels appearing as men as they did to Abraham, who entertained them as guests not knowing who they were. (Gen. 18) These men told of the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah who were very old, and also of the judgment that was to come upon Sodom.

In both of our texts today, angels are charged with protecting and ministering to God's faithful people. The Psalmist says "the Lord will command his angels to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." (Psalm 91:11,12)

And in the New International Translation, the author of our Hebrews passage asks in verse 14, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

John Calvin, the founder of our Presbyterian roots writes in his Institutes: "The angels are the dispensers and administrators of the Divine beneficence toward us; they regard our safety, undertake our defense, direct our ways, and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us."

The Bible talks about the Archangel, Michael in Jude 1: 9. The prefix "arch" suggests a chief, principal or great angel. Thus Michael protects and defends God's people; he is the messenger of law and judgment. He will be the one who announces Christ's return. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

In Isaiah 6, we read of the prophet's vision of worshipping at the throne of God with the 6-winged Seraphim above the throne, calling "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!" The ministry of the seraphim seems to be to praise the name and character of God in heaven.

"Cherubim," in the Bible, are often symbolic of heavenly things. "At God's direction they were incorporated into the design of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle. They had wings, feet and hands. Ezekiel 10 pictures the cherubim in detail as having not only wings and hands, but being full of eyes, encompassed by "wheels within wheels." A strange sight indeed! The Cherubim guarded the most holy place in the Old Testament temple. They were also made guards of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had to leave because of disobedience.

According to Scripture, angels do exist for the purpose of ministering and watching over us ... God's children. In The Larger Catechism from our Presbyterian Book of Confessions, it states that "God created angels – spirits, - immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power, to execute his commandments and to praise his name, yet subject to change." In Biblical accounts they appeared in different forms, depending on the situation.

But the Reformers also made it clear we are not to worship angels. The Westminster Confession says "Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to him alone, not to angels, saints, or any other creature ..."

Colossians also warns against worshipping angels.

It has always been easy for humans to place our adoration and praise on things other than God. We must remember that if we have angels protecting us ... it is only by God's order and they are there only as God created them. God gets all the credit ... all the praise!

Our text today, in the New Revised Standard Translation ends with the question: *"Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"*

God has promised to watch over and care for us. The Scriptures portray God's angels as being one of the ways that God has chosen to do this.

I'd like to end this message today with how Rev. Billy Graham ends his book on angels. With deep faith he says, "The Scripture says there is a time to be born and a time to die. And when my time to die comes an angel will be there to comfort me. He will give me peace and joy even at that most critical hour, and usher me into the presence of God, and I will dwell with the Lord forever.

Thank God for the ministry of His blessed angels!"

Amen.

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