



Systematic Theology: Angelology

Angelology represents one of the most captivating yet challenging areas of systematic theology. This comprehensive study explores the biblical doctrine of angels - examining their nature, categories, and ministries - while addressing contemporary misconceptions about spiritual warfare and demonic activity.

Course Overview and Objectives

01

Biblical Foundation

Establish solid scriptural groundwork for understanding angelology through careful exegesis of relevant biblical texts, avoiding speculation beyond what Scripture reveals.

03

Practical Application

Equip believers with sound theological knowledge to engage in authentic spiritual warfare while avoiding extremes of both neglect and obsession.

02

Doctrinal Clarity

Distinguish between biblical truth and popular misconceptions about angels, demons, and spiritual warfare that have infiltrated contemporary Christianity.

04

Historical Perspective

Examine how church history has approached angelology, learning from both orthodox teachings and doctrinal errors of the past.



The Challenge of Studying Angels

Karl Barth's Assessment

The renowned Swiss theologian Karl Barth described angelology as "the most remarkable and difficult of all" theological subjects in his monumental work *Church Dogmatics*.

This difficulty stems from the succinctness of biblical descriptions regarding angels' origin, identity, nature, and offices.

Thomas Aquinas' Attempt

In 1215, the Dominican philosopher Thomas Aquinas delivered fifteen lectures in one week, attempting to transmit everything known about angels to eager audiences.

These lectures later formed the foundation of his masterwork *Summa Theologica*, containing extensive speculative exposition about angels.



The Danger of Speculation

- ❏ **Critical Principle:** When Scripture remains silent on details about angels, we must refrain from speculation. God includes everything essential in His Word - we must avoid being presumptuous about supernatural beings beyond our understanding.

Human limitations prevent complete comprehension of celestial beings. No scientist will ever win a Nobel Prize for research on angels, as spirits cannot be weighed or measured through scientific instruments.

Scientific methods apply to earthly matters but not spiritual ones. Therefore, we must exercise extreme caution when making deductions about angels based solely on human experiences.

Contemporary Angel Interest and Dangers

Popular Media Fascination

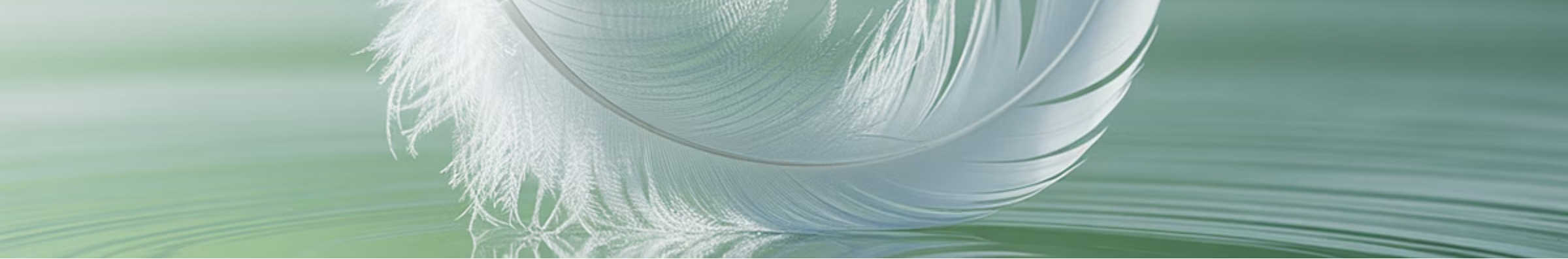
International magazines and bestselling literature extensively cover angels. Time magazine's 1993 cover story noted that belief in angels represents perhaps the most universally accepted idea across diverse cultures throughout centuries.

New Age Exploitation

The deceptive New Age movement exploits this "angel fever" through occultist teachings, disseminating heresies via books, angel images, courses, and seminars.

Commercialized Mysticism

The phrase "angels are returning" represents another fad from the esoteric industry that exploits popular superstition, resurrecting ancient folk beliefs for commercial gain.



False Teachings About Angels

"When you use God's Word in Jesus' name, they [angels] are obligated to follow your orders." - Kenneth Copeland

Such teachings represent dangerous distortions of biblical truth. Gloria Copeland even suggests that perhaps 40,000 angels are assigned to each believer, ready to make them wealthy based on spoken words.

Scripture warns against such deceptive spirits: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

Bruce Milne's Balanced Assessment



Contemporary Christians practically ignore God's angels, constrained by modern anti-supernaturalism, awareness of dangers in this area, and fear of introducing mediators between God and humans besides Christ.

This restraint isn't entirely unbiblical - both Old and New Testaments reluctantly give prominence to celestial servants, as it would be undue prominence.

However, growing interest in negative spiritual agents and popular science fiction fantasies should lead Christians to occasionally meditate on the thousands of angels - blessed, radiant citizens of heavenly hosts who serve our interests.

Who Are the Angels?



Hebrew: Mal'ak

The Hebrew word mal'ak carries the primary meaning of "messenger." This term established the foundational understanding of angels as divine messengers throughout the Old Testament.



Greek: Angelos

In classical Greek, angelos meant "messenger." Septuagint translators used this word to render the Hebrew mal'ak, maintaining the consistent meaning across languages.



Latin: Angelus

From the Latin form angelus comes the Portuguese term "anjo" (15th century), preceded by the archaic form "angeo." This linguistic evolution traces our modern understanding.



Biblical Usage of "Angel"

Rare Human References

The New Testament occasionally uses *angelos* for human messengers (Luke 7:24; 9:52; James 2:25). Context determines whether the reference indicates human or celestial messengers.

Primary Divine Usage

Most biblical occurrences refer to God's messengers who inhabit heaven and serve in His presence. Angels constitute a supernatural order whose activities include worshiping God and serving as His messengers for saved people (Hebrews 1:13-14).

The word "angel" appears 292 times across 35 biblical books, demonstrating the significant role these beings play in God's redemptive plan.



The Existence of Angels

Scripture reveals angelic presence from Genesis onward. However, some denied their existence even in New Testament times: "The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit" (Acts 23:8a).

Similarly today, many doubt or deny angelic existence, particularly fallen angels under Satan's dominion. Yet Psalm 103:20-21 clearly shows angels exist to serve God in multiple ways:

- Ministering in God's name on behalf of saints
- Performing what pleases God (celestial hosts under His command)

Angels Are Created Beings

- ❏ Angels were created by God and are therefore not eternal. Colossians 1:16 clearly affirms that Jesus Christ is their Creator, while Nehemiah 9:6 confirms God's creative work.

Lewis Sperry Chafer notes that celestial beings appear 108 times in the Old Testament and 165 times in the New Testament. Jesus clearly acknowledged the existence of both good and evil angels, emphasizing Satan's reality.

Early Christians believed in angelic existence - a belief accompanying the Church throughout its history. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and other renowned theologians demonstrated, sustained, and defended this belief.





The Time of Angel Creation

Scripture doesn't explicitly state when angels were created, nor are they mentioned in the Creation account (Genesis 1-2). However, their creation is clearly indicated:

"Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts! [...] Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created" (Psalm 148:2,5).

Colossians 1:16 supports this: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."

Evidence for Pre-Earth Creation

Job's Testimony

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7)

Implications

The morning stars (personified stars) and sons of God (angels) are described as expressing immense joy at earth's greatness while observing God construct it. They were present, but Job wasn't.

Angels don't exist from eternity, as shown by verses speaking of their creation (Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 148:2,5; Colossians 1:16).

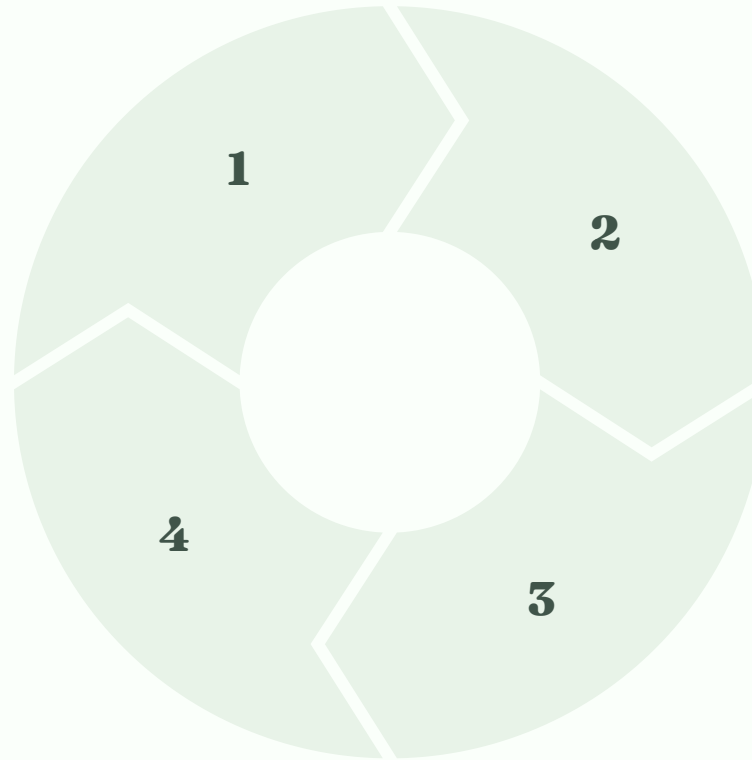
The Nature of Angels

Created Beings

Angels are real, distinct spiritual beings -
immaterial and incorporeal physically -
created by God (Psalm 148:2-5; Colossians
1:16-17; 1 Peter 3:22).

Immutable Number

Angels are unchangeable, unable to
increase or decrease their number, as Jesus
declared regarding resurrection: they
neither marry nor are given in marriage like
angels in heaven.



Innumerable Host

Scripture mentions many times an
innumerable army of God consisting of
angels (Psalm 68:17; Matthew 26:53;
Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11).

Created Simultaneously

All angels were created at once, as they
cannot reproduce normally (Matthew
22:30), and no new direct creation
occurred after original creative efforts
concluded (Genesis 2:2-3).



Westminster Larger Catechism on Angels

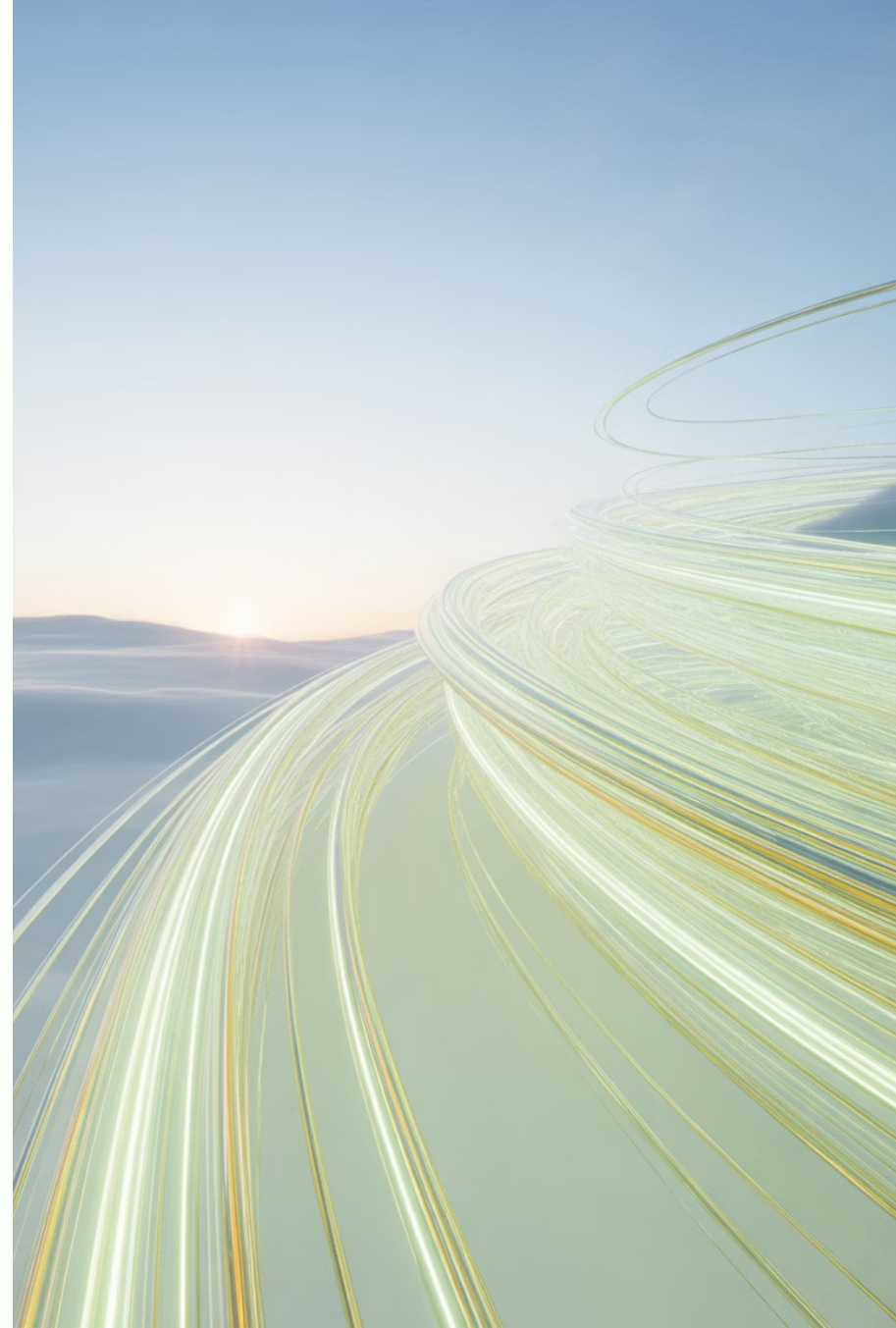
"God created all angels as immortal spirits, holy, excellent in knowledge, mighty in power, to execute his commandments and praise his name, yet subject to change."

This definition captures the essence of angelic nature: they are spiritual beings of great power and knowledge, created for service and worship, yet capable of moral choice - a capacity that led to the fall of some angels.

Angels Are Incorporeal

Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." They are not limited by physical and material conditions, capable of appearing and disappearing unseen while moving with extreme speed (Daniel 9:21).

Ephesians 6:12 clarifies their incorporeal nature: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."



Angelic Manifestations

Invisible by Nature

Angels don't have material bodies - "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39) - and are invisible (Colossians 1:16). Their "body" is immaterial, spiritual.

Because angels aren't souls but only spirits, they cannot possess the same rich essence as humans, whose soul is the union point where spirit and nature meet.

Temporary Physical Form

When appearing to humans, angels assume visible human form. This doesn't prove materiality - disembodied human spirits in intermediate states have appeared in human form, like Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration.

Angels can assume human form capable of touching objects and consuming solid food, as seen with the three angels who appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18:1-8).

Conciliar Decisions on Angel Bodies

Council of Nicaea (784)

1

Decided angels possessed bodies composed of ether or light, based on Matthew 28:3, Luke 2:9, and texts referring to their luminous appearance and accompanying glory.

2

Lateran Council (1215)

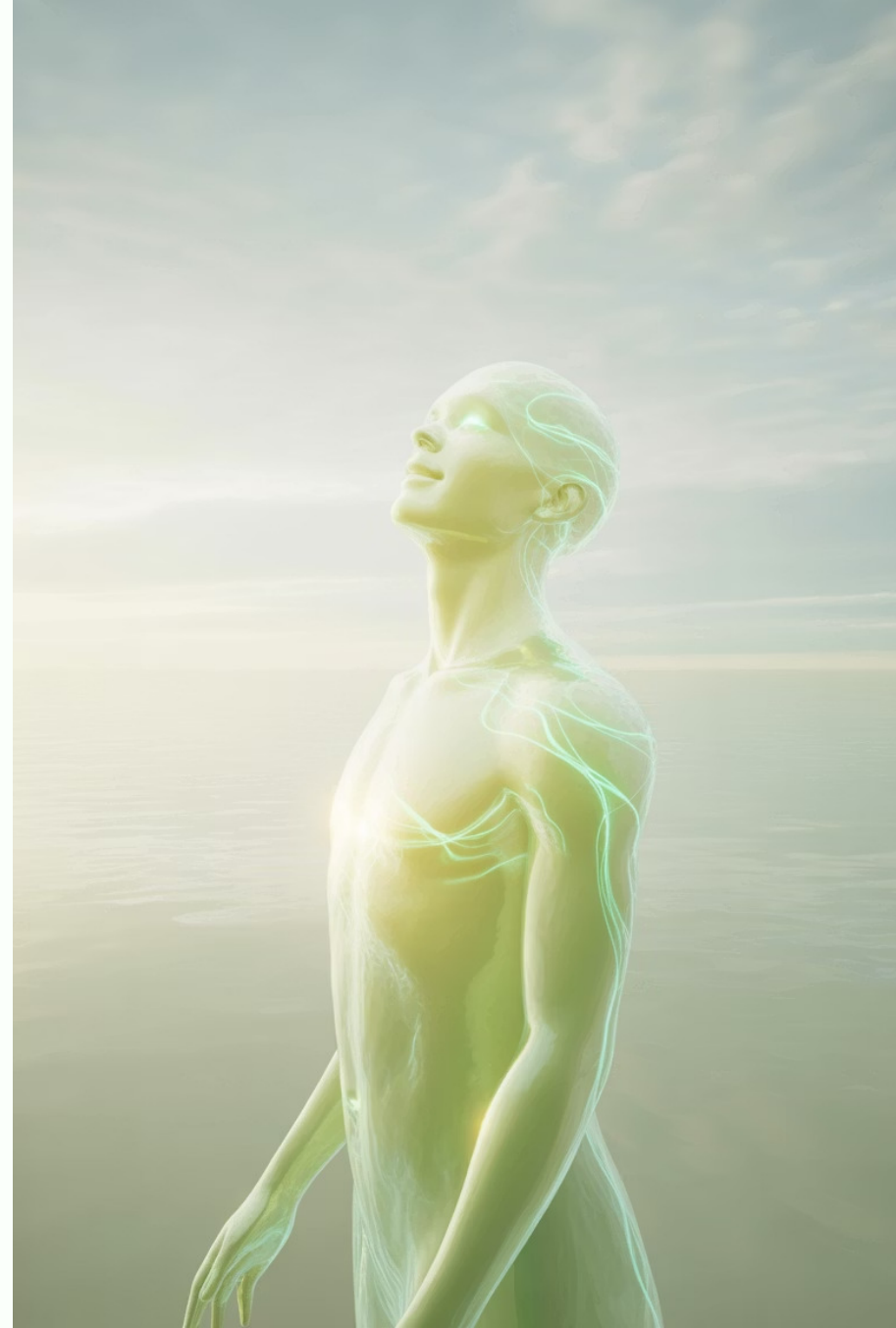
Decided angels were incorporeal - a biblical decision accepted by the Church. Scripture remains silent about the substance of these angelic spirits.

Despite being spiritual beings, angels can assume human form capable of physical interaction and consuming food, as demonstrated in biblical narratives involving Abraham and Lot.

Angels Are Immortal

As pure spirits (immaterial and incorporeal), angels are not subject to death. Jesus clarified that angels don't die when teaching the Sadducees about resurrection:

"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels, and are children of God, being children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36).



Angels Are Numerous

Scripture consistently refers to angels as multitudes. Only "Jehovah Sabaoth" - the Lord of Hosts - knows their vast number. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that angels, as immaterial substances, constitute an immense multitude surpassing all material multitude.

292

Biblical Appearances

The word "angel" appears 292 times across 35 books of the Bible

108

Old Testament

References to celestial beings in the Hebrew Scriptures

165

New Testament

References to angels in the Christian Scriptures

Biblical Testimony to Angelic Multitudes

Old Testament Witnesses

- "The Lord came from Sinai... from myriads of holy ones" (Deuteronomy 33:2)
- "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven" (1 Kings 22:19)
- "Can his forces be numbered?" (Job 25:3)
- "The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands" (Psalm 68:17)

New Testament Witnesses

- "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53)
- "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared" (Luke 2:13)
- "You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels" (Hebrews 12:22)
- "Ten thousand times ten thousand" (Revelation 5:11)

Angels Possess Personality and Intelligence



Self-Awareness

Gabriel's declaration "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19) shows clear consciousness of existence and personality.



Emotional Capacity

Angels are emotional beings (Job 38:7), possess considerable knowledge and wisdom (2 Samuel 14:20), and despite being spirits, are rational, offering intelligent worship (Psalm 148:2).



Cognitive Abilities

Angels contemplate God's face with understanding (Matthew 18:10), are conscious of their limitations (Matthew 24:36), and rejoice when sinners repent (Luke 15:10).

Angelic Character Traits

Intellectual Qualities

Angels possess remarkable intelligence, with knowledge beginning at their origin and continuing to expand. Their opportunities for observation, experiences, and direct divine revelations have greatly added to their original intelligence accumulation.

However, despite extraordinary intelligence, angels don't possess omniscience - an attribute exclusive to God. They cannot know human heart thoughts, as this knowledge belongs exclusively to God (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

Moral Character

Angels demonstrate meekness, don't harbor personal resentments, and don't slander opponents (2 Peter 2:11). They are reverent - their highest activity is worshiping God (Revelation 7:11). They are holy (Revelation 14:10) and loyal; despite heavenly rebellion, elect angels remained faithful to the Lord.



Angelic Power

Angels possess elevated power according to David's words: "Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding" (Psalm 103:20). Scripture calls them "the mighty ones" and "God's mighty ones."

These celestial beings move with astonishing speed, capable of transporting from Heaven to Earth instantaneously. Jesus noted this power: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

Scripture teaches that angels are superhuman beings created superior to humans: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them... You have made them a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:4-5).

Demonstrations of Angelic Power

01

David's Census Judgment

One angel destroyed 70,000 people in Israel within three days as divine punishment for David's disobedient census (2 Samuel 24:15-16).

03

Daniel's Spiritual Warfare

During intense spiritual resistance, Daniel was comforted by an angel who revealed that archangel Michael came to help him (Daniel 10:12-13).

02

Assyrian Army Destruction

In a single night, one angel destroyed 185,000 soldiers from the proud Assyrian king's army (2 Kings 19:35-36).

04

New Testament Manifestations

Angels demonstrated extraordinary power in Christ's resurrection (Matthew 28:2), apostolic prison liberations (Acts 5:19-20), and will imprison Satan (Revelation 20:1-3).



Categories of Angels

Post-biblical popular tradition, rabbinic Jewish traditions, and Patristic commentaries present contrasting ideas about angelic hierarchy. Nine groups are mentioned, resulting from five classes cited by Paul: principalities, powers, authorities, dominions, and thrones (Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:16) plus angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim.

When Scripture refers to principalities, powers, thrones, and dominions, it doesn't allude to angel species but rather to diversification of authority levels exercised by angelic beings.



Named Angels: Gabriel

Name Meaning

Gabriel means "man of God" or "hero of God," also signifying "the mighty one," evidencing what the name suggests. Scripture doesn't mention Gabriel as an archangel.

Biblical Appearances

Gabriel appears four times as God's spokesperson or revealer of divine purpose:

1. Speaking to Daniel about end times (Daniel 8:15-27)
2. Revealing the seventy weeks prophecy concerning Israel (Daniel 9)
3. Announcing John the Baptist's birth to Zechariah (Luke 1:19)
4. Announcing Jesus' birth to Mary (Luke 1:26-27)

The Archangel Michael

The word "archangel" (Greek: *archangelos*) means "chief angel." The prefix "arch" suggests a head, principal, or powerful angel. Scripture mentions only one archangel: Michael (Jude 9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Michael's name in Hebrew means "Who is like God?" Thus, Michael as "archangel" denotes that no created being can be "similar to God." Scripture describes Michael as:

- The archangel (Jude 9)
- Leader of angelic hosts against Satan and his evil angels (Revelation 12:7)
- One of the chief princes (Daniel 10:13)
- "Your prince" (Daniel 10:21)
- The great prince, "defender of your people's children" (Daniel 12:1)

Is Jesus the Archangel Michael?

❏ **Warning:** Some groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, incorrectly identify Jesus Christ with the archangel Michael. This interpretation lacks biblical foundation and diminishes Christ's divine nature.

Biblical evidence clearly distinguishes Jesus from Michael:

1. Michael is called "Archangel" and "Prince" - titles never applied to Jesus, who is called "Lord" and "King"
2. Michael "did not dare bring slanderous accusation" against the devil but said "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9) - showing deference Jesus never displayed
3. Daniel calls Michael "one of the chief princes" (Daniel 10:13), indicating multiple equals, while Jesus is unique



Cherubim: Guardians of God's Holiness

Etymology and Role

Cherubim originates from Hebrew *kerub*, meaning "guard" or "cover." They constitute an elevated category of angels related to God's retributive and redemptive purposes for humanity (Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:22).

In Hebrew, cherubim correlates with an Akkadian verb meaning "bless," "praise," "worship." Cherubim are directly linked to God's holiness and worship.

Biblical Description

Cherubim are described as having faces of lion, man, ox, and eagle, suggesting they represent creature perfection - lion's strength, human intelligence, eagle's swiftness, and ox-like service. This symbolism immediately relates them to the living creatures in John's vision (Revelation 4:6-5:14).



Seraphim: The Burning Ones

The word "seraphim" originates from Hebrew *sarap*, meaning "burning ones" due to fire – the Lord's fire. Seraphim are mentioned only in Isaiah 6:2-7. Little is known about these elevated angelic beings.

They likely constitute the highest order of angels, distinguished by flaming love for God. In the text, they appear above the Lord's throne, crying and proclaiming the Lord of Hosts' holiness attributes.

Besides their reverently covered faces and feet, the seraphim's wings and voices were in perfect readiness to fulfill their mission and sing in antiphonal chorus their triple expression of holiness to the Lord of Hosts.

Living Beings and Angels of Nations

Living Beings

Living beings is a title apparently representing angels manifesting divine life's fullness, their incessant activity and permanent participation in God's worship. Some scholars identify the living beings surrounding God's throne (Ezekiel 1:5-14; Revelation 4:6-8) as cherubim.

Angels of Nations

Based on Daniel 10:13,20, some classify angels as national protectors. Each nation may have its protecting angel who strives for its welfare, as seen in the Persian prince opposing the return of Jews from captivity.

Wayne Grudem notes that with their lion, ox, human, and eagle faces, living beings represent the most powerful beings from diverse parts of God's creation, continuously worshipping: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 4:8).

Elect Angels and Specific Designations

All angels were created equally good and holy. Initially, all angels were in a state of freedom, therefore of probation. Many sinned, and "God did not spare angels when they sinned" (2 Peter 2:4). The rest didn't sin but preserved their original state of creation.

Scripture refers to these good angels as "elect": "I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality" (1 Timothy 5:21).

- **Angels of Judgment**

Genesis 19:13; 2 Samuel 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; Psalm 78:49; Ezekiel 9:1,5,7

- **Watching Angel**

Daniel 4:12,23

- **Destroying Angel**

1 Chronicles 21:15

- **Angel of the Covenant**

Malachi 3:1

The Angel of the Lord

In many early biblical texts, YHWH's protection of Israel is personified as "Angel of Jehovah" (Genesis 16:7-14; 18:2; 21:17-19; 22:11-14; 31:11-13; Exodus 3:2-6). This angel, sometimes appearing as "Angel of God" or "my angel," represents a celestial being sent by God as His personal agent and spokesperson.

The expression "Angel of the Lord" appears over fifty times in the Old Testament. In some passages, it points to a created angelic being. In other citations, it refers to Jehovah's personal presence.

In many biblical citations, "the angel of the Lord" speaks as God Himself, in first person singular, demonstrating divine authority and identity.



Pre-Incarnate Christ as Angel of the Lord

Divine Attributes

This Angel is attributed power to forgive or retain sins (Exodus 23:20-23). Two supremely important things are said: first, the Lord's name is in Him; second, He is the Lord's face - the Lord's face can be seen in Him (Exodus 32:34; 33:14).

He has power to save (Isaiah 63:9) and refuse forgiveness (Exodus 23:21). This mysterious angel is none other than God's Son, the Messiah, Israel's Deliverer, and the world's Savior.

Biblical Evidence

In Judges 2:1, the angel of the Lord says: "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you to the land I swore to give your ancestors." Comparing this with other passages describing the same events, these were acts of the Lord, Israel's covenant God.

When this Angel appeared to Joshua, Joshua prostrated and worshiped Him (Joshua 5:14) - an attitude suggesting this Angel was a manifestation of the Lord God Himself.

Angels of the Churches

There's no uniform understanding among biblical commentators regarding the expression "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches" spoken by Jesus to apostle John (Revelation 1:20).

1

Theory 1: Guardian Angels

Some scholars like Origen believe these were angelic beings designated to protect churches, based on Daniel 10:13 and 12:1.

2

Theory 2: Human Messengers

Others explain these were human messengers sent by churches to inquire about John's health and convey letters to congregations.

3

Theory 3: Pastors

Each letter addresses a human reader ("angel" also meaning "messenger") of local congregations. Since pastors are flock teachers, they were responsible for reading the book aloud to churches.

Guardian Angels: Biblical Evidence

Popular Question

Many ask whether each human has a guardian angel - a personal angel assigned at birth for lifelong protection. Scripture declares God sends angels to protect us: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11-12).

These verses were cited by Satan when tempting Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). See also Psalm 34:7; Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14.

Biblical Analysis

Two texts are cited as evidence for guardian angels: Jesus' statement about children - "their angels in heaven always see my Father's face" (Matthew 18:10) - and the disciples' reaction to Peter at the door: "It's his angel" (Acts 12:15).

However, other biblical texts show not just one but many angels accompanying, protecting, and sustaining believers. The reference to children's angels specifies they're in the Father's presence, suggesting worship rather than earthly guardianship.

Angelic Character and Ministry

Obedient

Angels fulfill their assignments without questioning or wavering. Therefore we pray: "Your will be done on earth as in heaven" (Matthew 6:10; Psalm 103:20).



Reverent

Their highest activity is worshiping God (Nehemiah 9:6; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:6). They provide examples of how we should worship.



Gentle

Angels don't harbor personal resentments or slander opponents (2 Peter 2:11; Jude 9). They demonstrate perfect restraint.



Wise

"Like an angel... to discern good and evil" (2 Samuel 14:17). Angelic intelligence exceeds human understanding in this life, though evidently finite.



The Ministry of Angels

01

Glorify God Directly

In Revelation 4:8-11, four living beings probably represent all living creation in ceaseless worship, exalting and praising God's holiness. Angels glorify God for who He is, for His excellence (Job 38:7; Psalm 103:20; 148:2; Isaiah 6:2-3; Luke 2:13-14).

03

Rejoice in Salvation

"There is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). Angels celebrate each person's conversion with divine joy.

02

Execute God's Designs

God governs all creation. Angels are messengers executing His will and commands according to His purposes (Psalm 103:19-22). They fulfill God's determinations, heeding His word's voice (Psalm 103:20-21).

04

Encourage Believers

In life's most difficult moments - pain, suffering, trials, danger - angels provide comfort and encouragement in various ways, as they did for Paul (Acts 27:23-24).

Conclusion: The Significance of Angelology

Angels of God are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). They are continually with us, guarding, encouraging, and helping us. Let us thank God for His love and solicitude, including the ministry of His angels on our behalf.

Through studying this scriptural subject, we better know our Enemy, understand God's arsenal resources available to us, and realize that the Strong God strengthens His people, delivering and guarding them from and in tribulations.

We cannot overcome angelology distortions by fleeing them - the church must know biblical truth about this subject to explore the real value of God's angels and their mission among us. True spiritual warfare requires biblical knowledge, not speculation beyond Scripture's clear teaching.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31, 37-39)