

SOME THOUGHTS ON ANGELS

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I. Introduction

A. We are in the midst of an angel craze in our society, but the ideas that are circulating about them and the claims being made have little if anything to do with real angels, the angels we learn about in Scripture.

B. As Duane Garrett says in *Angels and the New Spirituality* (p. 10), "The Bible will not tell you everything you ever wanted to know about angels. On many questions we can only infer the answers, and on others we are in the dark altogether. Even so, the Bible does tell us a great deal, and its teachings may correct many of the excesses and errors of the angelphiles [those with extreme interest in or devotion to angels]."

II. Existence of Angels

A. Angels are all over the Bible, so much so that C. Fred Dickason, in his book *Angels: Elect & Evil* (p. 17), says, "The fact that angels exist is as certain as the fact God exists. The Bible reveals the certainty of each."

B. Though some people argue that biblical references to angels are mere metaphoric descriptions of the work of God, there are many references to angels that can only mean they are actual, spiritual persons. For example, 1 Pet. 1:12 says that even angels long to look into the mysteries of the gospel.

III. Origin of Angels

A. The creation of angels is not specifically described in Genesis, but that they were all created by God through Christ is made clear in Neh. 9:6 (NIV adds "starry"); Ps. 148:2-5; Jn. 1:1-3; and Col. 1:15-16.

B. It seems from Mat. 22:30 that angels do not procreate (since they do not marry),¹ which would mean they were all created *directly* by God.

1. Since we are told of no direct creations of beings by God after the original creation effort was completed (Gen. 2:2-3), we can deduce that the angels were all created by the end of the sixth day of creation.

¹ There is a longstanding debate over whether Gen. 6:1-4 means that fallen angels somehow sired offspring through human women, but even if that were the case, it is not angels producing more angels through procreation.

2. Precisely when they were created within the creation week is more speculative. It seems from Job 38:4-7 that at least some of them had already been created by the time God created the Earth.

3. The idea that humans become angels when they die is not found in Scripture. It is based on unbiblical notions of reincarnation.

IV. Nature of Angels

A. Angels are spiritual beings, meaning they are invisible and immaterial beings.

1. They are specifically called "spirits" in Heb. 1:14, as are demons (fallen angels) in several passages (Mat. 8:16, 12:45; Lk. 7:21, 8:2, 11:26; Acts 19:12; Rev. 16:14), and in Col. 1:16 the heavenly forces are referred to as invisible.

2. Yet, angels can be seen by those specially enabled by God (e.g., Num. 22:31; 2 Ki. 6:14-17), and sometimes they become, or at least appear to become, physical and thus are visible to all (e.g., Gen. 18:1-2, 19:1-2; Judg. 13:9-11; Mk. 16:5).

3. When angels are seen, they ordinarily have a human appearance, so that they may well be mistaken for men (e.g., Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 16; Judg. 13:6; Mk. 16:5; Lk. 24:4; Heb. 13:2). Sometimes the glory of the Lord shines from them (Lk. 2:9; 9:26), and sometimes they are described as wearing brilliant white clothing (Mat. 28:3; see also, Ezek. 1:13; Dan. 10:6).

4. When angels appear as human in the Bible, they usually appear as male. The possible exception is Zech. 5:9, but it is not clear that the women in that vision are angels.

a. But, of course, the way angels appear to humans is for our sake and to communicate with us; it does not tell us what they are "really" like.

b. The implication from the fact they do not marry (Mat. 22:30) is that they are sexless: neither male nor female nor androgenous (effeminate males). They are beings for whom sex has no meaning.

5. Angels never appear in Scripture as babies. Some scholars believe the portrayal of angels as fat little babies got started in the medieval church when people would console parents of children who had died by saying the baby had become an angel.

6. As for the popular portrayal of angels having two, bird-like wings:

a. The cherubim, which may be a class of angel or a distinct kind of spirit being, are variously depicted as having two wings (implied in 1 Ki. 6:24; 2 Chron. 3:11-12) and four wings (connecting Ezek. 1:4-11 with 10:1-20). In Ezekiel, the cherubim each have the faces of an ox/cherub, a man, a lion, and an eagle, and their bodies and wings are covered with eyes.

b. The seraphim are mentioned only in Isaiah 6, and it may be that the term is simply a description of how the angels appeared to Isaiah rather than a designation of a particular type of angel or spirit being. They have six wings and are proclaiming the holiness of God.

c. The four living creatures in Rev. 4:6-8 share features of both the cherubim and seraphim. Like the cherubim in Ezekiel, they have the faces of an ox, a man, a lion, and an eagle, but unlike the cherubim, each has only one of these faces. Also like the cherubim, they are covered with eyes. Like the seraphim, they have six wings and are proclaiming the holiness of God.

d. The women in the vision in Zech. 5:9 have two wings like a stork, but they may not be angels. Other angels are spoken of as flying (Dan. 9:21; Rev. 14:6), but nothing is said about their having wings.

e. But again, appearances to us are not a reliable guide of what angels are "really" like. They "really" are spirit.

B. Being mere creatures, angels are not in the same category or class with God.

1. It is right for us to respect their character and position, to be impressed by their power, to appreciate their ministries, and to admire their attitude toward God, but we may not worship them.

a. The angels worship God alone (Isa. 6:1-4; Rev. 4:6-11), including God the Son (Rev. 5:8-14), which implies that they consider only members of the Trinity to be worthy of worship.

b. Scripture specifically forbids worship of anyone other than God (Ex. 20:1-6).

c. Angels themselves forbid John from worshipping them in Rev. 19:10 and 22:9, saying they are only fellow servants with John and other Christians.

2. Nor may we treat them as mediators between God and men. In other words, we cannot seek to relate to God through them. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

a. This means we cannot pray to them or direct our appeals for help to them, which is how some people use "angel pins" and other depictions of angels. They use them as a charm or contact point in their effort to gain the protection or aid of angels. Nothing in Scripture supports offering prayers to anyone other than God. If we appeal to angels for blessings, we are implicitly declaring that Christ's mediatorship is insufficient.

b. This also means we cannot seek to "win their favor" by doing what we perceive they want us to do. Our responsibility is to God. This is precisely what the Colossian heretics were rebuked for doing -- claiming that angelic beings and powers had to be placated to gain "fullness" with God.

3. Since Jesus is God the Son, it makes sense that angels are everywhere presented as being subordinate to him.

a. In all their dealings with him, angels are joyful heralds or obedient servants, but in contrast to their dealings with biblical prophets, they never gave him instructions.

b. In Revelation 5, the angels in heaven acknowledge that Christ alone is worthy of praise; only he has authority over human destiny and only he merits all honor and thanksgiving.

c. His superiority to angels is obvious in Col. 2:8-23 and is assumed as the basis of the argument in Hebrews 1 and 2.

C. Humans are, at least for now, "lower" than the angels (Heb. 2:7) in that angels have superior powers (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:11; Acts 12:7-11), superior knowledge (see, Mat. 24:36 -- gained from their presence before God), and the glory of being in the immediate presence of God.

D. Angels are not subject to death (Lk. 20:36). They are spirits, so they cannot die physically, and God apparently grants them immortality of being. Rebellious angels will, however, endure the punishment of the "second death" (Mat. 25:41; Rev. 20:14, 21:8).

V. Names and Classifications of Angels

A. Scripture does not tell us how many angels God created, but it was apparently a very great number. Heb. 12:22 speaks of "innumerable angels," and in Rev. 5:11 John sees "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" of angels.

B. Only two angels are named in the Bible: Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7-8) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16, 9:21; Lk. 1:19, 26-27).

C. The fact Michael is called an "archangel" in Jude 9 (the only angel so identified) and Paul refers to "the archangel" in 1 Thess. 4:16 suggests there is some kind of rank or order among the angels, but we are told nothing about it. Dan 10:13 says Michael is "one of the chief princes," which probably means he is one of a number of archangels. The reference in 1 Tim. 5:21 to "elect angels" seems to confirm the notion of varied status or rank.

D. As mentioned, the cherubim and seraphim may be a type of angel or a distinct kind of spirit being, and the four living creatures in Revelation may be yet another category. If they are in fact angels, we know nothing definite about their rank or position in the angelic order.

E. In the O.T., the term "the angel of the Lord" sometimes refers to an ordinary angel, but sometimes it refers to a specific figure who appears to be God himself.

1. The classic text is Ex. 3:1-6 where "the angel of the Lord" appeared to Moses in the burning bush and said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." It says Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at "God." Some other passages that merge the angel of the Lord with God are Gen. 16:7-13, 18:1-22, 22:11-18, 31:11-13; Judges 6:22, 13:15-23; and Zech. 3:1-2.

2. One way to understand these appearances of "the angel of the Lord" is to see them as temporary, preincarnate manifestations of the Word, the second person of the Godhead. This gains some support from the fact no angels in the N.T. took on the identity of God. After the Son became incarnate as Jesus Christ, any appearance he made would not be described as an appearance of an angel but an appearance of the risen Christ.

VI. Activities of Angels

A. Angels in Scripture frequently manifest themselves to deliver some message, particularly regarding a significant event (e.g., Gabriel's appearance to Zechariah and Elizabeth and his appearance to Mary -- Lk. 1:8-23, 26-38).

B. Angels in Scripture often protect God's people, help them, and deliver them from trouble (e.g., an angel shut the lions' mouths [Dan. 6:22] and whisked Peter out of jail [Acts 12:6-12]). Heb. 1:14 says, "Are not angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" This does not mean, however, that each Christian has a "guardian angel."

1. Bible nowhere states that each Christian has an individual guardian angel assigned to him or her. The two passages used to support the concept are at best inconclusive.

a. When Jesus tells his disciples in Mat. 18:10 that they must not adopt the world's contempt toward even a single Christian, the reason he gives is that "*Their* angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." This does not require one to conclude that each Christian has a specific angel assigned to him or her. An analogy would be telling the Fox network not to mistreat any members of the cast of the show 24 "because their fans have direct access to the sponsors." This would not mean that one particular fan was assigned to one particular member of the cast.

b. When Peter knocked at Mary's house in Acts 12 and those gathered there told Rhoda that it must be "*his* angel," they may have been referring to an angel they thought was guarding or caring for Peter at that particular time. Or, the comment may simply reflect that some of those present believed, as did many Jews of that day, that individuals *did have* guardian angels and that those angels looked liked their charges.

2. The notion of a private guardian angel has certain dangers. The private guardian angel can take on the function of God in the minds of people, and the idea can easily lead to the practice of praying to that angel.

3. The bottom line, in my opinion, is that we do not have sufficient reason for believing in a private guardian angel, and we should be aware of the dangers inherent in such an idea.

C. Angels in Scripture serve as God's agents of judgment. Ps. 78:49 says they were involved in bringing the plagues on Egypt, and in Isaiah 37 the angel of the Lord struck down the Assyrian army while it was preparing to assault Jerusalem. Angels serve as agents of punishment throughout Revelation, and Jesus indicated they would be involved in the final judgment (e.g., Mat. 13:41-42).

D. Angels in Scripture are observers of human affairs. In 1 Cor. 4:9 Paul says the apostles had been made a spectacle to the angels, and in 1 Cor. 11:10 he supports his argument about sex-appropriate attire by appealing to the fact angels observe Christian assemblies. In 1 Tim. 5:21 Paul charges Timothy "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels" to fulfill the work of a minister. 1 Pet. 1:12 says the angels eagerly desire to understand the mystery of the gospel of Christ (so they do not fully understand the work of God).

E. Angels in Scripture are involved in visions and in explaining and interpreting visions (e.g., Zech. 6:1-8; Dan. 10:5-12:4; Ezek. 9:2-6, 40-43; Rev. 4:7, 7:1-2, 10:1-2, 21:15-17).

F. Angels in Scripture are sometimes described as being in the courts of the Lord (e.g., Rev. 5:1-2), where they spend much time praising God and worshipping him (e.g., Ps. 103:20; Revelation 4-5).

VII. New Age Beliefs

A. The New Age movement has gotten into angels in a big way. There are many popular books on the subject that portray angels in a completely unbiblical way. These include: *Ask Your Angels* by Alma Daniel, Timothy Wyllie, and Andrew Ramer; *A Book of Angels* by Sophy Burnham; *Guardians of Hope* by Terry Lynn Taylor; *Angels of Mercy* by Rosemary Ellen Guiley; and *The Angels Within Us* by John Randall Price.

B. These books draw from all kinds of sources, such as the Bible, the Pseudepigrapha, Gnostic writings, the Kabbalah, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and seem to give them all the same credibility. They make little or no attempt to reconcile contradictions in how these various sources understood angels. They simply draw what they want to paint whatever picture they want.

C. A big thread running through these books is that angels are everywhere and talk to all kinds of people with all kinds of religious backgrounds. Their point is that it does not matter

whether you're Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Mormon, Hindu, or whatever; you can still get into angelphilia and feel good about it.

D. The false ideas they promote about angels include:

1. That angels are channeling messages through certain people.
2. That angels can choose to be born as humans.
3. That discovering angel names is a key to spiritual experience.
4. That the human body contains eight "chakras," defined as "centers in the energy body that help to integrate it with our physical vehicle and with our mind and our emotions," and awareness of these chakras is fundamental to meditation and thus to connecting with angels.
5. That we can rediscover joy by reconnecting with our "inner angel child," which we do by "let[ting] go of [the] ridiculous notion of being an adult."
6. That growing awareness of and contact with angels is leading us into a utopic new age of harmony, love, and fulfillment.
7. That humans can progress through a series of incarnations to angelhood, a crowning spiritual attainment.
8. That humans can initiate contact with angels through various methods and rituals and can then obtain personal guidance for life.
9. That angels work with civilizations in other galaxies and with animals on earth.
10. That angels will invigorate you when you are down with a "heart-to-heart transfusion of golden liquid light."
11. That certain meditative exercises can help you grow invisible angel wings.
12. That angels are indifferent to morality and teach that categories of right and wrong are illusory and only entrap us in feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, and a judgmental spirit.

E. New Age angelphilia is nothing short of an alternative religion based on a new source of revelation -- angel encounters. It is, in fact, a return to paganism, animism, gnosticism, mysticism, magic, and witchcraft. It seems that the total openness to spiritual powers that they advocate has caused them to embrace demons in the guise of angels of light.