

What the Bible Says About Angels

Part 1: Good Angels

Thirty-four of the sixty-six books of the Bible (17 in each Testament) make mention of angels (Revelation more than any other book). According to Scripture, the only authoritative source of information about angels, there are two types of angels, good (“holy,” Mark 8:38) and bad, or elect (1 Timothy 5:21) and evil (Luke 8:2). Part 1 of this study will focus on the former, while part 2 will focus on the latter.

I. The Characteristics of Angels

A. Created by God

That angels were created by God is seen by such passages as Colossians 1:16 (“in heaven ... invisible ... thrones ... dominions ... principalities ... powers”). Accordingly, they are called “sons of God” (Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7; cf. Luke 3:38, where Adam is likewise called a “son of God”). It is likely that angels were God’s first creation, as they were witnesses to and worshippers of God’s creation of the earth (Job 38:4-7).

B. Finite

All creatures are by nature finite, or limited. Only God, the Creator is infinite, or unlimited. Angels are not divine and, therefore, are not to be worshipped (Colossians 2:18, Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9). Their finitude is seen in their limited perception/they are not omniscient (Matthew 24:36); their limited power/they are not omnipotent (Daniel 10:12-13); and their limited presence/they are not omnipresent, being localized and having to move from place to place (Job 1:7 and 2:2).

C. Superhuman

While angels are created/finite, they are capable of doing things that are beyond human capabilities (Hebrews 2:7 and 2 Peter 2:11). See, for example, Genesis 19:11 and Acts 5:19-23.

D. Incorporeal

According to Hebrews 1:14, angels are spirits (cf. Ephesians 6:12). As such, they are not by nature/naturally corporeal, that is, they do not have terrestrial/earthly bodies, visible to human sight (a case perhaps could be made that they have celestial/heavenly bodies), unless one is given supernatural ability to see them (as in 2 Kings 6:17). They do, however, occasionally and temporarily take on human

bodies. Typically, they appear as young adult males. At times, their appearance is very ordinary, so much so that they are not recognized as angels (Genesis 18). At other times, their appearance is extraordinary (see, for example, Matthew 28:3). It does not appear that angels have wings. Passages that describe them as having wings are passages that have a high degree of symbolism, such as visions (see, for example, Isaiah 6).

II. The Quantity of Angels

Because angels are created, there is a limited number of them, though the number appears to be so great that it is immeasurable/beyond human ability to calculate (Hebrews 12:22). According to Matthew 26:53, there are more than twelve legions of angels. Since a Roman legion is thought to have been 6,000, twelve legions would be 72,000, or perhaps 144,000, if, as some suggest, a Roman legion was backed by an equal number of auxiliary troops (C. Fred Dickason, *Angels, Elect & Evil*, p. 85). According to Revelation 5:11, there are at least “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (cf. Daniel 7:10). According to Dickason (p. 86), this number would be over 200 million. The number of angels is fixed, as angels do not procreate (Matthew 22:30), nor do they pass away (Luke 20:36).

III. Categories of Angels

A. Groups

1. Cherubim (Genesis 3:24, Exodus 25:17-22, 2 Chronicles 3:7, Ezekiel 28:14, 16, and 41:18)

Dickason (p. 61) considers cherubim to be the highest order of angels. They are “proclaimers and protectors of God’s glorious presence, His sovereignty, and His holiness” (p. 63).

2. Seraphim (Isaiah 6)

According to Dickason (p. 65), seraphim means “burning ones.’ This probably speaks of their consuming devotion to God.”

3. Cf. Romans 8:38, Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12, Colossians 1:16 and 2:15

B. Individuals

1. The angel of the Lord

A careful study of this angel throughout the Old Testament clearly yields the conclusion that He is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

2. Michael

According to Dickason (p. 67), Michael seems to be the greatest of the angels (second, of course, to the angel of the Lord) and is characterized as a military leader. His name means “who is like God?” (in stark contrast to Satan’s desire to be like God, Isaiah 14:14). He is called the “archangel” in Jude 9 (*arche* is the Greek word that means “beginning”). He appears to particularly be the protector of Israel (Daniel 10:21 and 12:1).

3. Gabriel

Gabriel means “mighty one of God.” According to Dickason (p. 67), he is the leading messenger amongst the angels. As such, we find him delivering news of John the Baptist’s conception to Zacharias (Luke 1:11-19) and of Jesus’ conception to Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

IV. The Conduct of Angels

A. In relation to God

1. Worship Him (Job 38:7, Psalm 148:2, Isaiah 6:3)
2. Carry out His commands (Psalm 103:20-21), including delivering messages (the word “angel” means “messenger”; e.g., message delivered to Joseph to marry Mary in Matthew 1; announcement of birth of Christ in Luke 2; message delivered to Philip in Acts 8:26; message delivered to Paul in Acts 27:23-24). Since God is no longer giving revelation, this function of angels has ceased.

B. In relation to Christ

1. Announced His birth (Luke 2), resurrection (Matthew 28 and parallels), and second coming (Acts 1:9-11)
2. Ministered unto Him while He was on earth (Matthew 2:13-20 and 4:11, Luke 22:43)
3. Will accompany Him at His second coming (Matthew 16:27 and parallels)

C. In relation to man

1. In relation to believers

- a. Service (Hebrews 1:14; cf. 1 Kings 19:4-8, Daniel 3, Luke 16:22)

Whereas in previous dispensations, the work of angels was often direct, visible, and miraculous, today it is indirect, unseen, and providential (Hebrews 13:2). While it may be that every individual Christian has a particular guardian angel (Daniel 6, Matthew 18:10, Acts 12:15), it is perhaps more correct to say that Christians collectively have guardian angels.

- b. Observation (1 Corinthians 4:9, 1 Timothy 5:21, 1 Peter 1:12)
- 2. In relation to unbelievers (primarily), angels are executors of God's judgment (Genesis 19, 2 Samuel 24:16, 2 Kings 19:35, Acts 12:23; cf. the Tribulation judgments in Revelation)
- D. In relation to bad angels, spiritual warfare (Daniel 10:13 and 20, Revelation 12:7)

What the Bible Says About Angels

Part 2: Bad Angels

Like good angels, so bad angels (demons) are mentioned frequently in Scripture (over 100 times in all). Demons are mentioned by every author of the New Testament except the author of Hebrews. Bad angels are led by the archenemy of God and His people, the devil. Thus, our study of bad angels begins with him.

I. The Devil

A. His creation

As pointed out in the first part of this study, all angels were created by God on the first day of the creation week. This would include the devil (Ezekiel 28:13, 15), who is an angel (2 Corinthians 11:14), likely the highest among the class of angels known as the cherubim (Ezekiel 28:14, 16). Everything God created was created good (Genesis 1:31), including the devil (Ezekiel 28:12, 15), who when created was known as Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12), meaning “Day Star.” Being created, he is limited (Job 1:7, 2:2, 1 Peter 5:8) and under the sovereign control of the Creator (Job 1:12, 2:6).

B. His corruption

At some point between the end of Genesis 1 (which ends with a declaration that all that God had created was good) and the start of Genesis 3 (which begins with the devil tempting Adam & Eve), the devil fell into sin (Isaiah 14:12, Ezekiel 28:15, 16), the particular sin being pride (Ezekiel 28:17, 1 Timothy 3:6), expressed in a desire to be like God (Isaiah 14:13-14; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4).

C. His conduct

1. Opposes God, God’s program, and God’s people

The devil is also known as “Satan,” which means “adversary, opponent.” Living up (or shall we say, down) to his name, he opposes God (2 Thessalonians 2:4), including seeking to slander God’s character (Genesis 3:1, 4-5); sought to disqualify Jesus from living up to His name, “Savior” (Matthew 4//Mark 1//Luke 4); seeks to blind (2 Corinthians 4:4) and bind (Ephesians 2:2), ensnare and enslave (2 Timothy 2:26) unbelievers, including seeking to snatch away the gospel seed sown in the soil of their hearts (Luke 8:12); and opposes believers (1 Peter 5:8), including accusing them before God (Job 1:9-11, 2:4-5, Revelation 12:10; the name “devil” [Greek *diabolos*] means “slanderer”). Praise God, that none of his accusations stick (Romans 8:33; cf. 1 John 2:1)!

2. Tempts others to sin (he is called “the tempter” in Matthew 4:3 and 1 Thessalonians 3:5)

a. Other angels

At some point after his fall into sin, the devil tempted the other angels to join with him in his rebellion against God. Those who did (2 Peter 2:4), perhaps as many as a third of the angels (Revelation 12:4), became, like him, eternally confirmed in corruption and are now his henchmen (Matthew 25:41, Revelation 12:7).

b. Man

In Genesis 3, the devil tempted Adam & Eve to do what he did, sin by seeking to be like God (Genesis 3:5). Sadly, Adam & Eve succumbed.

c. Jesus

In Matthew 4//Mark 1//Luke 4, the devil tempted Jesus to sin. Praise God, unlike the first Adam, the second/last Adam did not succumb!

3. Deceives

The devil seeks to not only counteract, but counterfeit, God’s work (Dickason, p. 149). The devil is the master deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:14; cf. Genesis 3:13, 2 Corinthians 11:3, and Revelation 20:3), in keeping with his character (John 8:44). As such, he is the ultimate source of false doctrine (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 1 Timothy 4:1, 1 John 4:1-3).

D. His condemnation

The devil’s defeat was prophesied in Genesis 3:15. It was procured at the Cross (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14; cf. 1 John 3:8). The sentence will be carried out in the end times (Revelation 20:10; cf. Matthew 25:41).

II. Demons

According to Matthew 25:41, the devil has his “angels” (cf. Revelation 12:7), called elsewhere in Scripture “demons” (Matthew 12:27-28 et. al.), as well as “principalities,” “powers,” “the rulers of the darkness of this world,” and “spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places” (cf. Colossians 2:15). At some point, the devil led an angelic rebellion, resulting in those who rebelled with him being confirmed in condemnation. Some demons have been permanently confined (2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6), while others retain some measure of freedom. All will eventually and everlastingly be incarcerated in the eternal penitentiary called Hell (Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10). It may be assumed that the deeds of demons (at least those who are not already incarcerated) are the same as those of the devil, since the former are the latter’s emissaries. According to Daniel 10:13 and 20, it appears that demons may have their own geographic domains (as do good angels, Daniel 10:21 and 12:1).

III. Defeating the Devil and His Demons

A. Respect (Jude 9)

While the devil and his demons are creatures and, therefore, finite/limited, and while they are defeated foes due to the Cross, they are angels and, therefore, superhuman (see, for example, Mark 5:1-4 and Acts 19:16). If even the archangel, Michael showed respectful restraint when dealing with the devil, so much more should we.

B. Be ready (1 Peter 5:8)

The devil is our enemy (“adversary”; the name, “Satan” means “adversary, opponent”) and he’s on the prowl (“walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”). He has many “devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11), “wiles” (Ephesians 6:11), and “snares” (1 Timothy 3:7 and 2 Timothy 2:26). He is the master deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:14). Because he is so subtle, he will attack when and in a way least expected. You cannot let your guard down!

C. Resist (Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9; cf. Ephesians 6:11-18, as well as how Jesus defeated the devil in Matthew 4//Mark 1//Luke 4).

“Resist” in James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:9 (cf. “withstand” in Ephesians 6:13) is a military term that literally means “stand against.” It is a defensive term. We are not to go on the offensive directly against the devil (Jude 9). “Never in Scripture is the believer exhorted to seek out or attack the Devil or his demons. On the contrary, the Devil seeks to attack the believer” (Alex Konya, *Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective*, p. 103). The devil will attack eventually (1 Peter 5:8). When he does, we must resist his attack. If we do, he will flee (James 4:7b; cf. Matthew 4:11//Luke 4:13).

D. Request (Matthew 6:13)

In answer to our prayer for protection from the devil, Jesus protects us (1 John 5:18), praying for the same (Luke 22:31-32 and John 17:15).

IV. Demon Possession

A. A definition

“Demon possession is a condition in which one or more evil spirits or demons inhabit the body of a human being and can take complete control of their victim at will” (Merrill Unger, cited in Dickason, p. 182).

B. Demonstrations

According to Konya (p. 31), “the Old Testament presents no clear-cut example of demon possession.” Demon possession appears most frequently in Scripture in the Gospels. There is some that also appears in the book of Acts (5:16, 8:7, 16:16-18, 19:11-16).

C. Debates

1. Is demon possession still happening today?

Alex Konya (in his *Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective*) makes a compelling case that demon possession is not necessarily happening today.

For one, he points out that the casting out of demons was a sign of the Kingdom (Matthew 10:7-8 and 12:28), suggesting: “This violent struggle between Satan’s kingdom and the kingdom of God thus offers a possible explanation for the extraordinary number of demonized persons found during the time of Jesus’ ministry, and consequently, the great emphasis upon demonic expulsions performed by Jesus and His representatives in this period” (p. 45) and “It is truly remarkable that the Bible has no clear records of demonized people in the Old Testament period, and after Calvary the phenomenon again begins to fade until one finds virtually no discussion of demon possession or how to cast out demons in the Epistles. The coming of the King, with Satan’s vicious opposition to Him and His kingdom, may explain these facts” (p. 46). Since the Kingdom is currently in abeyance/on hold, a case may be made that so also is demonic possession.

Second, the ability to cast out demons may be considered a miraculous sign gift (perhaps part of the gift of healing), performed only by Christ; by

those directly commissioned by Christ, the apostles (Matthew 10:1; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:12); and by those indirectly commissioned by Christ/those directly ministered to by an apostle (for example, Philip, Acts 6:5-6 and 8:6-7) in order to authenticate the revelation they were giving (Acts 2:22, 14:3, Hebrews 2:3-4; cf. 1 Kings 17:24). Since the canon of Scripture is closed and the apostles are deceased, a case can be made that the miraculous ability to cast out demons has ceased and, with it, the phenomenon of demonic possession.

2. Can a believer be demon possessed?

In order to answer this question, we must return to something that was said at the start of this study: “According to Scripture, the only authoritative source of information about angels ...” Those who believe in *sola Scriptura* will reject the all-too-common tendency to make experientialism an arbiter of truth equal or superior to Scripture. Such a tendency is seen in Dickason (p. 188) when he writes: “Can a genuine Christian be demon possessed? ... We must consider the biblical *and* clinical evidence” (emphasis mine). He goes on to write: “Later, on the basis of the claims of many missionaries all over the world, he [Merrill Unger] modified his opinion to allow that in certain cases a true believer may become possessed or repossessed, particularly in idolatrous cultures” (p. 188) and “... [E]vidence from mission fields and clinical counseling seem to say that a genuine Christian may under unusual circumstances become possessed or repossessed” (p. 189).

Based on such factors as the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the believer (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 6:19); the binding of the strong man (Matthew 12:29) that took place with the work of Christ; the fact of the Spirit’s control of the believer (Romans 8:14), which is a matter of degree; and the truth that “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4), we can confidently claim that the believer cannot be demon *possessed*. However, it does appear that a believer can be demonically *oppressed* (for example, Job, as well as Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:7; cf. Revelation 2:10).

3. How is demon possession to be dealt with?

Based on what has been said to this point, one may biblically, and therefore legitimately, make the case that demon possession is not occurring today. “... [The epistles] don’t even give any criteria or tests to determine demon possession. The Apostle Paul at Ephesus encountered great occult and demonic traffic and had a significant ministry in casting out demons (Acts 19:11-22), yet the epistle to the Ephesians says nothing about any of it” (Rolland McCune, “Should Christians Bind Satan?,” *The Sentinel*, Spring 1998). Even if demon possession is occurring today, one may not necessarily assume that casting out of demons is how demon

possession is to be dealt with. “The New Testament epistles say nothing about attacking Satan’s empire of darkness or identifying, confronting, or casting out demons” (John Whitcomb, cited in Konya, p. 12). The only way to rid the unregenerate of the devil’s domination (Ephesians 2:2, 2 Timothy 2:26), to whatever degree, is through the declaration of the Truth that can set free (John 8:32).

Resources for Further Study

Angels: Elect & Evil by C. Fred Dickason

Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective by Alex Konya

Paper by the author, entitled, “The Existence and Ministry of Angels in the Present Age”