

## Angels: God's messengers and helpers to us

Message for Sunday, September 11, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6-9 and others

**Children's Message:** Matthew 1:18-25  
Show a traditional picture of an angel. Ask if they know what it is, and if not, explain.

Three months from now we'll be putting up Christmas decorations. Angels are an important part of our decorations. What do angels have to do with Christmas? (They will probably recall that angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields to tell them that Jesus had been born and to tell them where to find him.)

There were several times, close to Christmas, when angels appeared to someone:

- An angel came to Mary and told her she was going to have a baby who was God's Son.
- Later an angel came to tell Joseph the same thing. The angel told Joseph what they would name the baby. Names are very important. When each of you was born your parents spent a long time deciding what to call you, because they loved you so much. (Find out ahead what "Bruce" means, and the names of the children I expect will be present.)

The angel who came to Joseph used two names for Jesus, because Jesus was to be such a special baby. The name Jesus means "he will save," and we know that Jesus is our Savior, saving us from our sins.

The other name the angel called Jesus was "Emmanuel." Emmanuel means, "God is with us." God loved us so much that he became a human being so he could be here with us in person. Jesus was God in human form. Jesus came to let us know what God was like and to show us how to live in God's way.

**Message:** "Angels: God's messengers and helpers to us"

This is a "sermon by request." Someone said, "Angels are mentioned so often in the Bible. I'd like to know more about them."

That person is correct. The Bible talks about angels more than 300 times, right from the third chapter in Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation.

Angels are also very common in pop culture. There have been TV series based on angels: *Touched by an Angel* was popular a few years ago. One of the most famous movie star angels is Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart. Many Christmas ornaments feature angels.

Angels are typically depicted in art with wings. (The example I showed the children had wings.) But early Christian art wasn't like that. It was only in the middle ages that artists started putting wings on their angels, so that viewers could tell which were the humans and which were the angels.<sup>1</sup>

So much for what our culture teaches us about angels. Let's look in the book to see what it says.

### 1) Angels are messengers from God

The Old Testament word for angel in Hebrew is *malak*, which also means "messenger." You tell from the context which meaning is intended. If a person sends a *malak*, that's a messenger. If God sends a *malak*, that's an angel.

The same is true in the New Testament. The Greek word for angel is *angelos*. Our English word "angel" is more or less those letters copied into English. As with Hebrew, *angelos* can also mean "messenger."

So an angel is primarily a messenger sent by God. Sometimes they have other functions, but that's their primary role.

An angel came to Mary with the message that she would bear God's son, Jesus. An angel brought the message to Joseph, telling him what was happening. An angel was sent to deliver the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds outside town.

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, there are heavenly creatures—a type of angel, perhaps—with wings. These are the cherubim and seraphim. But cute they are not! In Genesis 3:24, the cherubim are armed

guards at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. For more descriptions, see Ezekiel 10:14 for cherubim and Isaiah 6:2 for seraphim.

The book of Revelation, in the very first verse, begins with an angel bringing a message to John:

**Revelation 1:1, New Living Translation:**

An angel was sent to God's servant John so that John could share the revelation with God's other servants.

In the final chapter of Revelation, the same angel says to John:

**Revelation 22:6, Today's English Version:**

Then the angel said to me, "These words are true and can be trusted. And the Lord God, who gives his Spirit to the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must happen very soon."

If God has a message for you, he might send an angel to tell you. There are other ways, though: the Holy Spirit in us can prompt us inwardly; some people have heard voices or seen visions; God can work through other people and circumstances; and of course, the Bible. Our role is to be open to receive whatever God may have for us.

## 2) What are angels?

### a) Angels are created beings

They were created by God, just like the various creatures here on earth.

**Nehemiah 9:6, New International Version:**

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

Angels are not people who have died and gone to heaven. I heard of a family where a little baby boy had died. During the visitation before the funeral, one person said to the parents, "God needed another angel; that's why he took your boy." That's not just a poor attempt to comfort the parents; it's also bad theology.

### b) Angels are God's servants — that is, *not* to be worshipped

Again in that final chapter of Revelation, right after the last verse quoted, comes this:

**Revelation 22:8-9, New Living Translation:**

And when I saw and heard these things, I fell down to worship the angel who showed them to me. But again he said, "No, don't worship me. I am a servant of

God, just like you and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this scroll. Worship God!"

## 3) Do we have guardian angels?

This idea is not spelled out in the Bible. The whole idea is based on these two verses:

**Psalms 91:11-12, Today's English Version:**

God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you wherever you go.

They will hold you up with their hands to keep you from hurting your feet on the stones.

**Matthew 18:10, Today's English Version:**

[Jesus said,] "See that you don't despise any of these little ones. Their angels in heaven, I tell you, are always in the presence of my Father in heaven."

Certainly many people have told of their experiences where they were saved from disaster by a stranger who disappeared immediately afterwards. But why this happens to some, while others perish, is a mystery. In any case, the danger here is that people may end up focussing on angels, instead of on God, the one who sends the angels.

## 4) The danger of fallen angels

Not all angels are good. As with humans, they have the ability to choose right and wrong, and some have gone over to the other side. Satan is seen as the leader of the forces of evil.

**Revelation 12:9, Today's English Version:**

The huge dragon was thrown out—that ancient serpent, named the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all his angels with him.

**Ephesians 6:11-12, Today's English Version:**

Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.

I often talk about being open to the Holy Spirit: learn to obey those inner nudges, that feeling of being convicted when we do wrong. It is also important, though, to reject any impulses which come from evil spirits. Always choose the good.

The point of these two verses is that, while we struggle with temptation and evil, the outcome has already been decided. When Jesus died on the cross, that was the turning point of history. What appeared to be the triumph of evil was actually the opposite. As a result, Jesus is now in charge.

**Revelation 11:15, New International Version:**  
The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.

### **Next Steps:**

So there's some interesting information. You can impress your friends when you casually mention the Hebrew word for angels! But the Bible was not given to us for information; it was given to us for transformation: to help us grow more like Jesus. Here are some ways to put into practice the truths of these Scriptures:

- Put God first in your life. Above angels, above money, above hobbies, above family, even above yourself. Problems abound whenever we worship something else than God.
- Be open to God speaking to you. That may come through an angel, an internal voice, an inner nudge, a vision or dream, another person, even something you read. Use discernment to consider whether it's really from God. Then act on it!