

STUDIES
IN
DOCTRINES

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

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OUTLINE

DEFINITION	5
A. Created	5
B. Spirit	6
C. Types	7
PRESENT AT	8
A. Creation	9
B. Birth of Christ	9
C. His temptation	9
D. Garden	10
E. Resurrection	10
F. Ascension	10
MINISTRY TO	11
A. Christ	11
B. Believers	12
C. Nations	12
D. Unbelievers	13
WITNESSES	13
CONCLUSION	14
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	15

DEFINITION

Created

"Scripture everywhere assumes the existence of angels, both good and evil."¹ In the Bible "angels" are used over two hundred times in 35 books. They are mentioned as messengers with divine revelation and as messengers "on a mission of judgment on sin."² According to Cambron the word angel is translated "ambassador, messenger, deputy, and ministers."³ The scriptures provide a good deal of information concerning angels. The Bible indicates that one of the primary functions of angels is the worship of the Lord. This information appears to be inter-twined in such a fashion as to disclose several attributes or descriptions of angels in one or more passages. A study of angels reveals information or facts concerning their creation, the time of creation, their state, numbers, spirit and much more. Some of these topics are covered briefly for background to provide understanding of their presence at certain events and ministry to certain people.

Fact

According to Col 1.16 God created angels in the same manner that He created all things. "All things were created by him, and for him."

Time

Creation of angels took place before the creation of the world. The book of Job contains an account of their presence at the creation where they shouted for joy (Job 38.7).

State

The state of angels as mentioned in Jude 6 indicates that

1Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 133.

2Lewis Sperry Chafer, Chafer Systematic Theology 2 Vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 1:287.

3Mark G. Cambron, Bible Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954) 231.

they had a "first estate." This first estate would have been as created by God. God's creations as originally created were all created "good." When created, angels were created holy for the primary purpose to worship a Holy God.

Numbers

The scriptures indicate that God created angels before the creation of man and that their creation was in numbers which are described as an innumerable company of angels (Heb 12.22). In Revelations 5.11 we read "...and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."

Spirit

Angels have been given substance as God wills and according to His plan. Heb 1.14 describes them as having spirit. "Are they not all ministering spirits,..." As spirit they are non-reproductive, do not experience death, are not human and possess great power.

Non-reproduction

Angels have been created a little higher than man and were created innumerable. There is no need for them to be reproductive since that was not a function given to them at the time of their creation. Further, angels are designated by masculine gender, with a few exceptions (Mark 12.25).

No death

Of God's many creations, angels and man will continue to exist for all eternity. Each being a separate and distinct being from the other. They are eternal beings and will not die (Luke 20.36).

Not Human

Even though angels have revealed themselves in human form does not mean that they are human. Ps 8.4-5 plainly describes angels as having been created different than that of man. They are created spirit and as such remain spirit until changed by the will of God for His purpose.

Great Power

2 Peter 2.11 says that angels have great power and might. Some of the occurrences in which this power and might were demonstrated will be discussed below as ministering spirits.

Types

Of the many types of angels, Heb 1.7-14 and Ps 104.4 describes them as "Ministering spirits." As ministering spirits they possess intelligence, emotion and will.

Intellect

Many scripture references indicate the intelligence of angels. However, a clear indication of the content of that intelligence is not often evident (1 Peter 1.12; Mark 13. 32; Matt 24.36). A review of 2 Samuel 14.17-20 gives insight into the knowledge of angels. Some of the knowledge of angels as expressed in the Bible pertains to "know all things that are in the earth."

Emotion

Angels it would appear are given to emotion in much the same manner as humans. At the announcement of the Christ child's birth they are found to be in multitudes, praising God (Luke 2.13).

Will

To describe the will of angels is probably the simplest task of this paper. Evidence abounds that God created angels with a will. The Bible records that they used their will to decide as to good and evil. They used their will to change from their created "first estate" to that of rebellion against their creator. Jude 6 indicates that some elected to leave their created positions and God has placed them in chains and darkness until "the judgment of the great day." A host of others have elected to serve God as originally created and will be found coming and going from the heavens.

PRESENT AT

"Like miracles, therefore, angelic appearances generally mark God's entrance upon new epochs in the unfolding of his plans."⁴ These plans as part of the decree of God include but are not restricted to the Creation, Christ's birth, His temptation, in the garden, at the resurrection, or at the ascension.

Creation

It is not clear as to when angels were created but their creation must have occurred prior to the creation of the heavens and earth as found in Gen 1.1. We find in Job 38.7 that the angels were present at the creation of earth because they "shouted for joy" as God laid the foundations of the earth and placed the corner stone.

Birth of Christ

The announcement of Christ birth was not made in private or in secret and is discussed at length in Luke chapters one and two. The angel Gabriel shared with Mary that she was to become the mother of the Savior. Another angel provided Joseph with knowledge concerning the birth of the Christ child in a dream saying "...that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 1.20). An angel also appeared to shepherds in a field with the glory of the Lord shining so bright that they were afraid. The angel ministered to the shepherds to calm their fears and announced to them that a Savior would be born "unto them." The angel announced the location of the birth and how the Savior would be identified. The angel was then accompanied by what is described as "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God." The angels present at Christ birth must have been totally awe struck as they watched the God they had worshiped since their creation become a man for the purpose of implementing God's plan of salvation.

⁴Augustus H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1970), 453.

His temptation

Men who have been tempted of the devil should appreciate the temptation of Jesus. Our Lord endured every snare of the devil that He might know our temptations and forgive us of our trespasses of sin. As Christ was tempted the Bible says that the angels could have intervened. Matt 4.6 says "for it is written, HE SHALL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE CONCERNING THEE." After Jesus rebuked the devil and he departed the Bible states that the "angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt 4.11).

In the Garden

As Jesus prayed in the garden that God's will be done the Bible says "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22.43).

Resurrection

What a presence and foreknowledge of a great event occurred at the resurrection of Jesus. Matt 28.2 says,

And, behold, there was a great earth-quake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Ascension

The presence of angels seem to open our eyes to events of major importance while at the same time they seem to have an air of wonderment which is projected by the angels present at the event. The ascension of Jesus is one such occurrence of wonderment of angels at the lack of human understanding concerning the divine. "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel" (Acts 1.10). For the angels to see Jesus ascension into the heavens was perhaps not a special occasion but for mortal men to view such an occasion was something of a miracle. If there be such a thing as angel arrogance it is perhaps exhibited here in Acts 1.11. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

MINISTRY TO

Angels in the scripture for the most part are found ministering, and each of the ministries seem to be from a very broad spectrum. One major task of ministry is the worship of God. Some of the other noted ministries have been to Christ, believers, nations, and unbelievers.

Christ

The ministry of angels to Christ encompassed the prediction of His birth (Luke 1.26.33). As well as, the announcement of His birth (Luke 2.13). Heb 1.6 states "Again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he said, And let all the angels of God worship him".

One of the ministries to Christ was to protect Him as the Baby Jesus (Matt 2.13).

It is also noted that angels were assigned to minister to Christ by strengthening Him after the temptation. (Matt 4.11). They were even prepared to defend Him if he so commanded (Matt. 28.2).

As Christ sought the supreme will of His Father in heaven angels are seen ministering to Him in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22.43). They were even present to remove any barriers to humans that might not allow them to understand that Jesus had risen from the dead. The angels ministered at the resurrection when they rolled away the stone from the tomb, that all might see that it was empty (Matt 28.2). Their continued ministry at this appearance was the announcement of Christ's resurrection from death and the grave (Matt 28.6) At each of these great moments in the life of Christ the angels were sent to minister to Him.

Believers

Jesus went away into heaven, but before He left He told us that He would not leave His saints without a comforter. He provided the Holy Spirit as that Comforter. He also has provided in addition to the Holy Spirit "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb 1.14). This

ministry seems to be one of a general ministry of aiding the saints in that if we "suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom 8.17). Chafer believes "Though we have been given no communication or fellowship with the angels, yet we should recognize the fact of their ministry, which is constant and effective."⁵ This ministry to the Christian is the involvement of angels in answering prayer (Acts 12.7). They are also, observing the Christians' experiences (1 Cor 4.9; 1 Tim 5.21). Their ministry includes encouragement in time of danger (Acts 27.23-24). And they are interested in the evangelistic effort of Christians (Luke 15.10; Acts 8.26). It should further be noted that the ministry of angels to the believer is the caring for them at death. "Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16.22; Jude 9).

Nations

Much of the ministering of angels to nations is found in the Book of Daniel and Revelation. Michael the archangel seems to have a special relationship to Israel as noted in Daniel 12.1. Michael is also mentioned in Daniel 10.21 as revealing "that which is noted in the scripture of truth" concerning nations. According to several chapters of the book of Revelation, (Rev 8, 9, 16), angels will be used extensively during the judgment period of the Tribulation as the nations of the world are punished.

Unbelievers

Angels have been used to announce impending judgments as they did at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19.13). They will also be used to deliver the gospel to the earth and announced that "the hour of his judgment is come" Rev 14.6-7).

According to Acts 12.23 angels will inflict punishment on those who "gave not God the glory." Angels are also noted at the end of the world as reapers who separate the good seed of the Son of man from the tares of the wicked one at end of the age (Matt 13.39).

⁵Lewis Sperry Chafer, Major Bible Themes (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1974), 154

WITNESSES

Luke 12.8 give us a good description of the angels as witnessing agents. The scripture states that "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God."

Angels are described as "watchers" in Daniel 4.17. From the text it would appear that they are present as observers sent by God.

Chafer indicates that "angels are watching to see the unfolding of God's redemptive plan"⁶ (Luke 15.10; 1 Tim 3.16; 1 Peter 1.12).

CONCLUSION

The Bible gives ample evidence of angels and their ministry. The ministry of angels began with their creation and will continue forever, since they have been created eternal beings. Their ministry has been to both God and man as many scripture passages testify. Whether or not we choose to believe in angels is a mute question. It should be remembered that much of the evidence of angels and their ministry points directly to the carrying out of God's redemptive plan and that their appearance has been a signal of important events which are about to take place. Chafer makes this point with:

Taken as a whole, angels are important factors in carrying out the plan of God from eternity past to eternity future and for this reason are given a large place in scriptural revelation.⁷

Strong makes this point quite clear as he states,

The fact that we do not in our day see angels should not make us skeptical as to their existence anymore than the fact that we do not in our day see miracles should make us doubt the reality of the New Testament miracles.⁸

⁶Chafer, Systematic, 1:288.

⁷Chafer, Systematic, 1:287.

⁸Strong, Systematic, 453.

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