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THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS

The fact that angels exist is as certain as the fact that God exists. The Bible reveals the certainty of each. Though angelology is not a cardinal doctrine, its acceptance opens the mind to a better understanding of the Bible, God's plan of the ages, the Christian life and ministry, as well as world conditions and course of affairs.

I. THE WITNESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. THE BOOKS OF LAW

The word *angel* appears thirty-two times in the writings of Moses. Hagar was comforted by the Angel of Jehovah (Genesis 16, 21). Abraham conversed and ate with angels, and two angels delivered Lot and his family from Sodom before the fire fell (Genesis 18–19). Jacob dreamed of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:12), a dream recognized by the Lord Jesus (John 1:51). Jacob also wrestled with an angel and was crippled, yet he held on until he received God's blessing and a new name, Israel (Genesis 32:24–28; Hosea 12:2–4).

In Exodus, Moses was called by the Angel of Jehovah to deliver Israel from Egypt (3:2, 10), and an angel led Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness journeys (14:19; 23:20). Leviticus seems to refer to demons promoting the sacrificing of

animals to idols (17:7). Numbers records that God dealt with both Israel and the false prophet Balaam through angels (20:16; 22:22).

Never in Mosaic writings are angels considered mere illusions or figures of speech. They are an integral part of the story of God's dealing with men. Men recognized the reality of the beings they contacted, and in most cases recognized them as messengers from God. Moses, however, regards the Angel of Jehovah as more than an ordinary angel wherever he appears in the narrative; he regards him as deity. (See chapter 6 on the Angel of Jehovah.)

B. THE BOOKS OF HISTORY

The word *angel* appears about thirty-seven times in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Most occurrences are in Judges where the Angel of Jehovah, who is more than an angel, conversed with Gideon and Manoah. In 2 Samuel (14:20; 19:27), King David is compared in comfort, wisdom, and power to an angel of God. An angel smote David's people in judgment when David in pride took a census of his army (2 Samuel 24). From the account here and from the parallel in 1 Chronicles 21, we note that it was Satan who tempted David to sin, and it seems it was the Angel of the Lord who executed the judgment and then directed David to build an altar on the future site of the temple.

C. THE PROPHETS

In the major prophets, Isaiah makes two references to the Angel of Jehovah as defending Israel and defeating her enemies (37:36; 63:9). Again, this is not an ordinary angel. He also refers to seraphim (6:2), but does not use the term *angel* of them. Jeremiah and Ezekiel do not use the word *angel*, but Ezekiel does mention the cherubim (10:1-3, 6-8, etc.). Angels intervened in the record of Daniel to deliver the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace and Daniel from the mouths of lions (Daniel 3, 6). Gabriel, who later appears in Luke 1, appears first to Daniel with a revelation of the future of Israel (Daniel 9:20-27). Michael the archangel (Jude 9) is identified as "one of the chief princes" (Daniel 10:13), and he stands as Israel's principal defender

against men and other angelic beings (Daniel 10:13; 12:1).

In the minor prophets, Hosea identifies the “man” that wrestled with Jacob (Genesis 32) as an angel (Hosea 12:2–4). Zechariah contributes substantially to the Old Testament doctrine of angels, with twenty occurrences of the word. He pictures angels as God’s reconnaissance agents (chap. 1), as interpreters of His visions for Zechariah (chaps. 1–6), and as agents of God’s activity and judgment (chaps. 2, 4). The Angel of Jehovah is identified as the personal representative of Jehovah, even Jehovah Himself, who intercedes for God’s people (chap. 3).

D. THE BOOKS OF POETRY

Job and Psalms contribute to our knowledge of good and evil angels. Though Psalm 78:49 may be a reference to human messengers instead of evil spirit beings, there is no doubt that Satan is represented as one of the spirits called “the sons of God” in Job 1:6 and 2:1. His evil design against God and Job, the man of God, is obvious. The Psalms picture angels as protecting and delivering God’s people from harm (34:7; 35:5–6; 91:11). They are God’s energetic and fervent servants (104:4) and His devoted worshipers (103:20; 148:2).

The only reference in Ecclesiastes warns man not to equivocate in the presence of an angel concerning his vow, for the angel is a representative of God (5:6).

SUMMARY

The Old Testament presents angels as genuine personal beings who serve as messengers and ministers of God. Their character, position, power, and activity are revealed in some detail. These creatures of God are either good or evil, depending on whether they serve God or Satan. They are so essentially bound in the narrative that to rip them from the record would do violence to the cause and continuity of many significant historical events and would destroy the concept of a moral battle that involves and yet transcends the human race.

II. THE WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

Though we will yet consider the witness of Christ, we will

here look briefly at the reality and role of angels as seen by the writers of the New Testament.

A. THE GOSPELS

All four gospel writers report the existence and activity of angels. Matthew and Luke tell of the significant ministry of angels connected with the birth of Christ, its prediction, and its announcement (Matthew 1:20–23; 2:13; Luke 1:26–38; 2:8–15). The first three gospels (the synoptics) are full of references to angels and demons. All four record the appearance of angels at the empty tomb of the resurrected Savior.

B. THE BOOK OF ACTS

This New Testament history by Luke has many references to the ministry of angels. At the ascension of Christ, two angels announced His second coming (1:10–11). When the apostles were cast into prison, an angel opened the doors and freed them (5:19). An angel directed Philip to a new place of ministry (8:26). Appearing to Cornelius, an angel directed him to send for Peter to learn of salvation in Christ (10:1–7). Later, Peter was again delivered from prison by God’s angel (12:5–11). Paul, in a turbulent storm at sea, received encouragement and announcement of deliverance from God through an angel (27:23–25).

C. THE EPISTLES

The epistles abound with teaching about angels. In them, angels are classified as either elect (1 Timothy 5:21) or fallen (2 Peter 2:4). They are contrasted as living realities with the living Christ (Hebrews 1:4–5). Paul declares that the Cross of Christ defeated evil angels, and he warns against the worship of angels as promoted by false religionists (Colossians 2:15, 18). Peter speaks of Christ having declared victory over angels and then having ascended above them in authority (1 Peter 3:18–22), as also does Paul (Ephesians 1:20–21). Paul, James, and Peter regard Satan as the believer’s angelic opponent who can be overcome only through Christ (Ephesians 6:10–12; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8–9).

D. THE BOOK OF REVELATION

There are sixty-five clear usages of the word *angel* in reference to spirit beings in John’s Apocalypse. Eight additional usages may also refer to such or to human messengers as representing the seven churches of Asia Minor. In this book, which contains more references to angels than any other Bible book, they are portrayed as worshipping the Lamb of God (5:11–12), preserving the servants of God (7:1–3), and administering the wrath of God (chaps. 8–9; 15–16). Angels are basic to the structure and significance of this great capstone of God’s revelation.

SUMMARY

If there are no such beings as angels, then we must doubt some direct revelations and key attestations of truth presented as coming through angels in the New Testament. We must then also doubt the miraculous deliverance and interventions by angels in Acts and consider that the epistles are pure imagination or accommodation to ignorance when they speak of Christ’s superiority and victory over angels. We must ignore any reference to supernatural enemies and spiritual warfare in the Christian life. We must also regard the book of Revelation as either a fictional masterpiece of deception or a figurative mass of incoherent revelation. Furthermore, the more highly developed doctrine of Satan, his angels, their system, and influence found in the New Testament revelation is complete speculation without any real correspondence in experience. And this is probably what Satan would desire to have us believe. But the New Testament gives abundant evidence of the existence of angels.

III. THE WITNESS OF THE SON OF GOD

Speaking with the authority of the Father who sent Him and with His wisdom and integrity as the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ gave in His speech and action more than sufficient testimony to the reality of angels. Some doubters say that Christ was accommodating His words to the popular belief of that time that angels were real and they exerted power in the realms of the natural and supernatural. But to those who regard Christ as a teacher of truth, and especially to those who know Him as the

Truth, who always spoke the truth, such a thought is next to blasphemous (John 8:31–32, 45–46; 14:6). To say that Christ spoke of angels and demons just because the people believed there were such, while He Himself knew that there were none, is to make Him guilty of perpetuating error and falsehood. However, He who is God’s truth would not gain in perpetuating a lie. Neither does the extent and nature of His testimony concerning angels support any idea of accommodation. He believed in and taught the reality of angels.

A. IN HIS TESTINGS

When Christ was tempted by Satan in the wilderness and afterward was helped by angels (Matthew 4:11), who was with Him? He was alone, away from His disciples. This is *His* record. Was He bordering on the insane when He spoke to Satan as a real person, or was He the only fully sane and sinless man, the God-man, battling with the greatest of all evil angels, Satan, who had personally enticed the first man into sin and darkness which was his originally by reason of his own brand of insanity?

B. IN HIS TEACHING

Several instances demonstrate that Christ positively taught the existence of angels as personal creatures of God. When the Sadducees who denied the reality of angels and of the resurrection sought to discredit Christ in regard to the teaching of the resurrection, He not only affirmed the resurrection but compared our state in the resurrection to that of angels who do not procreate (Matthew 22:29–30). In doing so, He placed the doctrines of the resurrection and of angels on the same plane of truth. If we believe in a resurrected Savior who will raise us from the dead, we must also believe in the existence of angels.

When our Lord prophesied concerning His second coming in power and great glory, He predicted that angels would gather the elect (Matthew 24:31). The holy angels will be associated with Him in His glory, and the evil angels along with Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (Matthew 25:31–32, 41).

Could Christ have been accommodating when He rebuked Peter’s use of the sword and said that He could, if desired, have the help of twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53)? Or did

Christ continue a notion of ignorance when, speaking to His disciples privately, He told them that they failed to cast out a demon because of lack of faith and prayer (Matthew 17:18–21)?

C. IN HIS MINISTRY

An outstanding feature of Christ’s ministry was the casting out of demons. The synoptics make much of this, recognizing that such miraculous actions testified to Christ’s authority in the realm of the supernatural (Mark 1:27). If we assume, as the facts forcefully indicate, that demons or evil spirits (sometimes called devils) are wicked, fallen angels, we have strong evidence for their existence in the ministry of Christ. He spoke to them in intelligent conversation, rebuked them, and cast them out of men’s bodies which they had entered (Matthew 8:28–33; Mark 1:32–34; Luke 4:33–36, 41).

SUMMARY

Evidence abounds from Christ’s personal narratives, ministry, and teachings that angels do exist. He spoke of holy and evil angels; He did battle with Satan; and He put the reality of angels on a par with that of the resurrection. For the genuine believer in Christ, when He speaks on an issue, it is settled.

The combined witness of the Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, and of the Savior assure us that there is a world of intelligent, powerful, invisible creatures about us and above us that warrants our prayerful and careful study and challenges us to expand our categories of thought and to change our conduct of life in accord with God’s truth. Though much was revealed of angels in the Old Testament, the progressive revelation of God has culminated in the New Testament with a highly developed angelology.