



Cherreguine Bible Doctrine Ministries

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THE CREATION OF ANGELS

The angelic conflict started long before the creation of the universe –long before the existent of man. In the eternity past, God created the angelic beings¹.

From the Greek term *Αγγελος*, we got the English word "angel". It may denote either a human or a heavenly "messenger." Yet in the NT, except in Luke 7:24; 9:52; and perhaps Rev. 1:20, it is used only for heavenly beings.

The term chosen by Scripture to denote angels gives us the clue to the function by which they are primarily to be known and understood. They are God's messengers or ambassadors. They belong to His heavenly court and service. Their mission in heaven is to praise God (Rev. 4:5). They devote themselves to doing God's perfect will (Psalm 103:20) and in this activity they behold His face (Matthew 18:10).

They accompany God in His work of creation (Job 38:7), though they themselves are also creatures (Psalm 148:2, 5). They also assist in God's providential ordering of human historical affairs (Daniel 12:1). Above all they are active in the divine work of reconciliation (from Genesis 19:1-2 onward). In fulfillment of their mission they declare God's will or decree (Luke 1:26-27) and do His work (Matthew 28:2). There seems to be some ordering in their ranks; some are referred to as archangels, as over against those who are referred to as simply angels (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9).

The function of angels may be seen clearly from their part in the saving mission of Jesus Christ. They are naturally present when this both begins with the nativity (Matthew 1; Luke 1-3) and ends with the resurrection (Matthew 28:2) and ascension (Acts 1:10). They also assist the church in its early ministry (Acts 5:19; 10:3).

They will play an important part in the events of the end time (Rev. 7:1-). Finally they will come with Christ when He returns in glory (Matthew 24:31) and separate the righteous and the wicked.

They do not do the real work of reconciliation, which is Christ's prerogative. But they accompany and declare this work, praising the God of grace and glory and summoning men and women to participate in their worship (Luke 1:46). Interestingly, there seem to be only two angelic recorded appearances between Christ's birth and resurrection: at the beginning of His way to the cross in the temptation and then before the crucifixion itself in Gethsemane.

This is perhaps because Jesus had to tread His way of atoning self-giving alone, and in His humiliation He is made a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:9), though exalted far

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above them by nature (Hebrews 1). Yet angels did not withdraw from the scene, for they rejoice at sinners repenting (Luke 15:10) and will hear the Son of man confess those who confess Him (Luke 12:8).

The Bible offers only a few hints about the nature of angels. Belonging to the heavenly sphere, they cannot be properly conceived of in earthly terms. They are mostly described in relation to God, as God's angels (Psalm 104:4). The two angelic names, Michael and Gabriel, emphasize this relationship with the "el" suffix attached to Hebrew name of God. It is as God's angels, perhaps, that they are called "elect" in 1 Timothy 5:21. Hebrews 1:14 described them as "ministering spirits" in a conflation of the two parts of Psalm 104:4.

They figure as the "heavenly ones" (Psalm 29:1) or the "holy ones" (Job 5:1) who are set apart for God's service; both these terms occur in Psalm 89:6-7, though "sons of God" is here another rendering of "heavenly ones" (Psalm 29:1). The "gods" of Psalm 82:1, in whose midst God holds judgment, are often thought to be angels too.

THE NATURE OF ANGELS

Like Christians, angels are also called "children of God" but we need not infer from this usage, because angels are lesser deities. Indeed, the Bible clearly warns us not to worship them (Colossians 2:18; Revelations 19:10).

Among the heavenly beings mentioned is made of the seraphim (Isaiah 6:2) and, more frequently, the cherubim. Cherubim guarded Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:24). They form God's chariot at His descent (Psalm 18:10). Figures of cherubim adorned the Ark (Exodus 25:17) and Solomon's temple (I Kings 6:23), so that Yahweh is enthroned above the cherubim (I Samuel 4:4; Psalm 80:1). Ezekiel offers an elaborate visionary description (Ezek. 1:10; 9:3; 10:15-22) in which their form is human (1:5) but symbolical traits stress their glory and spiritual excellence

Of the angels named, Michael is called "the great prince" (Daniel 12:1) and the other angels seem to be led by Him (Revelation 12:7), though God Himself, of course, is the Lord of hosts and Prince of the host (Daniel 8:11). The man who appeared to Joshua in Joshua chapter 5 usually taken to be an angel, says that he has come as commander of the army of the Lord, Gabriel, the other angel named in canonical Scripture, is the angel of the annunciation (Luke 1:26).

Distinctions seem to be indicated in Revelation 4-5 with the references to the beasts and the elders, but the exact significance of these terms is disputed. The apocryphal archangels (Raphael, Uriel, Jemeil Tob) are all fictitious.

From the various statements about the nature of angels, and Paul's use of the terms "principalities," "powers," "thrones," "dominions," and "forces," early and medieval theology evolved a complex speculative account of the angelic world.

The error in so much angelology was to deal with angels apart from the biblical witness. Even regarding their function there was a tendency to rationalize or to focus interest on the idea of the guardian angel (Matt. 18:10). Though they come in human form, the angels are essentially non-corporeal. Even they were present at the time of creation, they are still creatures (Psalm 148:2, 5). They form an ordered unity, yet their plurality entails the existence of individuals within the totality, with a possible gradation in function.

As compared with humans they have the advantage of being in God's immediate presence and serving as His direct messengers. They also guard the proprieties, if that is the meaning of I Corinthians 11:10, and seem to play some role in or over the nations (Daniel 10). But when men and women respond to God's saving work in Christ they are raised above them, enjoy their ministry (Hebrews 1:14), and will finally judge them (I Corinthians 6:3), for even angels are not faultless in God's eyes (Job 4:18; 15:15).

In Judges 13:2-3 this seems to be identical with God. Many have thought, then, that in the OT at least the reference is to the pre-incarnate Logos. Liberals have explained it as a softening of Theophany to angephany but without showing why this does not always apply.

Another questionable interpretation is that God speaks so fully through the angel that He himself is virtually speaking. Certainly the "angel of the Lord" of Luke 2:9 is not Christ, but this does not in itself rule out such an equation in the OT.

Has there been a fall (expelled from heaven) of angels? The Bible speaks of the dragon and his angels (Revelation 12:7) and also of powers of evil (Ephesians 6:12), so that while we cannot be too dogmatic on the subject, we have to assume that there is a real kingdom of evil in grotesque caricature of the angelic kingdom.