

God, an Introduction (Angelology)

Session Outline

1. Introductory note: This session includes extensive resourcing content. The highlighted bullets are summaries of the material. Consider starting the session by having the group discuss questions they have about angels, or common misperceptions about angels that are widely accepted as fact.
2. Basic Information about angels
 - a. The Creation of Angels
 - b. The Nature of Angels
 - c. The Responsibilities of Angels
 - d. The Limitation of Angels
 - e. The Role of Angels in Temptation, Possession, and Sin
3. The Named Angels: Meet's God's Most Famous Messengers
4. Historic Angelic Battles in the Bible and what you can know from them
5. Testing the Spirits: How You Related with Angels
 - a. How you Relate with Angels in this Life
 - b. How you will Relate with Angels in Eternity

Basic Information about Angels

The Creation of Angels

Say: In the first two chapters of Genesis, the creation account is both told in detail and recapped in summary. No mention of angels is included in the detailed account of chapter 1, but chapter 2's summary includes this revealing insight:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.
(Genesis 2:1-2)

The creation of everything in the heavens and the earth had been completed by the end of the sixth day. This would include all the angels. After the seventh day, God introduced the first man and the first woman to the Garden, where he permitted them to eat from every fruit, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That this tree exists points to the reality of evil on the earth and that God had created humans to be innocent of evil.

However, the third chapter of Genesis opens with the introduction of "the serpent," the snakelike embodiment of the personality named Satan. In the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the Bible reveals that Satan is the title meaning "adversary" given to the angel Lucifer, the cherub who was responsible for protecting the glory of God and who was cast out from heaven because of pride and jealousy that built up in him against God. This means that the only evil that could have existed was the evil of the fallen angel Lucifer (or Morning Star), now known as Satan.

In these details alone, it remains unclear where God created angels.

It quickly becomes evident that it is of incredible importance to discern when angels were created. For example, if angels were created *after* the creation of man, this creation occurred after God had labeled his creation "good," and following his self-appointed time of rest. The implication of this possibility is that angels were not in fact created "good," and also that God's work of creation was not complete. This means that no angels could be trusted, as well as that the entire premise of the "day of rest" would be invalid.

A possible insight to this mystery is revealed in a other chronological accounts of the creation:

By the word of the Lord the heavens are made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap, he lays up the deep in storehouses. (Psalm 33:6-7 NKJV)

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Where were you when I created the earth? Tell me, since you know so much! Who decided on its size? Certainly you'll know that! Who came up with the blueprints and measurements? How was its foundation poured, and who set the cornerstone, while the morning stars sang in chorus and all the angels shouted praise? And who took charge of the ocean when it gushed forth like a baby from the womb? That was me! (Job 38:4-8 MSG)

Comparing these accounts with the accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 shows that all four accounts agree that God created by the power of his spoken will. All four accounts agree that God first created the heavens, and that he followed this up by creating the waters of the sea. However, Psalm 33 and Job 38 provocatively include the detail that the “host of them” (the heavens) and “the morning stars” were created after the creation of the heavens and before the creation of the seas.

This would mean that the angels were created between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2.

The validity to this possibility will likely not be known until history concludes. However, this consideration offers implications that agree with what is known and established in accepted biblical doctrine:

- That angels were an essential part of early creation
- That Lucifer and a third of the angels fell prior to the creation of man
- That God's plan was set and established *before* he declared it to be “good.”

Ask

Why does it matter that Satan is introduced in Genesis 3, even though there is no account of the creation of the angels prior to this reference? *(This is significant because it reveals that the angels had been created by this time, and also that Lucifer and the angels had already rebelled against God and had been cast from heaven.)*

What is the significance in God labeling his creation “good,” if the angelic creation and rebellion had already occurred by this time? *(This is significant because it demonstrates that God created the earth and humans with a purpose. He created people with the intent to restore them, knowing they'd succumb to Satan's evil.)*

Why is it important that the angels were created after the heavens but before the waters? *(It is important that the angels were created after the heavens because it shows that God created them to exist in the highest heaven with him. Their creation prior to the waters shows that God had a place to expel those who rebelled against him.)*

The Nature of Angels

The Bible clearly teaches that angels and humans are distinctly different and share only the fact that they both are created beings. Angels were created *chronologically* before humans, but humans are created *preeminently* before angels:

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! (1 Corinthians 6:3)

Ask Why is it important to understand that humans are created preeminently before angels? *(It is important because this establishes that humans are the culmination of God's creation and that angels were created to serve God and man in the context of the human/divine relationship. Angels were created to serve, not to relate.)*

The Responsibilities of Angels

The main responsibility of angels is to serve as God's messengers, interacting with humans periodically to communicate important truth regarding the God's plans. These plans typically concern the rescue of people, God's judgment, or announcing revelation. Angels warned Abraham of Sodom and Gomorrah's impending destruction. An angel told Mary that she would bear the child who was the Christ. An angel visited Joseph in his dreams and affirmed the news of Mary's divinely inspired pregnancy. An angel met Mary Magdalene at Jesus' tomb to tell her that he had risen from the dead.

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Angels also serve as God's military. The same two angels who rescued Lot from the evil men of Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed the cities shortly thereafter. The Bible reports that a single angel destroyed the Assyrian army numbering 185,000 while they slept, because the Assyrian king dared to overthrow Jerusalem. The angels will be responsible for sorting the humans who will not go to heaven from those who will.

Finally, angels are ministering spirits. This means they tend to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those to whom they are sent.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14 NIV)

Because you have made the LORD...your dwelling place...He will give His angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways. (Psalm 91:9,11 CSB)

Jesus received their ministry after withstanding the temptation of Satan. He was also strengthened by the angels to endure the torture he would receive on the cross. Furthermore, God assigns angels to protect the people who have sought to find the refuge for their needs in him through faith. God's angels do his bidding without reservation in totally obedience and service to him.

- Angels are God's messengers. They communicate messages that God wants people to know.
- Angels are God's military. They fight against God's enemies as he commands.
- Angels are God's ministering spirits. They tend to the needs of those who God loves.

Ask

What does it mean that angels are "ministering spirits?" *(When angels serve as ministering spirits, they are functions of agents of God's goodness toward people who trust him by faith. These angels will at times meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those to whom they are sent.)*

Why is the military service of angels significant? *(The military service of angels is significant because it reveals that God cares enough about his holiness to employ a force of angels to ensure that judgment will be executed according to the standard of it. He will not let evil and ungodliness go unaddressed.)*

Limitations of Angels

Because of the angels' abilities, it is tempting to view angels either as superhuman or as semi-divine. However, angels are altogether non-human. Humans who die do not become angels, and angels were never nor will never be human. The only thing that angels and humans have in common is that they are both types of beings created by God. Accordingly, both are limited in their abilities. In the present reality, according to the Bible, humans have been created with lesser abilities than the angels. However, humans were created in an estimation that God holds in a higher regard. In eternity, humans will have authority over angels and angels will serve humans in perfect obedience to God.

What is man that You are mindful of him,...you have made him a little lower than the angels. (Hebrews 2:6-7 NKJV)

In this temporary reality of the physical life, angels express significant advantages in power, stamina, wisdom, and physical abilities. Perhaps this is because angels – both obedient and rebellious – exist with ease equally between the physical and spiritual realities, whereas the human experience with the spiritual reality is understood primarily by faith until after death occurs. Obedient angels are able to make sudden appearances in the audience of humans and typically reflect the glory of God in a way that is overwhelming and frightening to the humans they encounter.

Heaven and earth will pass away...But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Mark 13:31-32 NASB)

Angels are powerful, but not all-powerful. They are present when unseen, but they are not omnipresent. They are wise, but not omniscient. The obedient angels love humans as God's finest creation, and look forward to eternity where their service to God is fully rendered in deference to the humans in heaven.

- Angels demonstrate incredible feats of strength and insight into God's plans that far surpasses human limitations. However, angels are not all-powerful and all-knowing. God has limited their abilities.
- In heaven, angels and humans will have a more equitable relationship because humans will have bodies that have been perfected and all God's creatures will live fully in the eternal spiritual reality.

Ask

Why are angels more powerful than humans? *(Angels have more power than humans in the current physical reality because they live in complete unity with God. They exist with equal comfort between the physical realm and the spiritual realm in ways that humans will not experience until after they go to the eternal heaven.)*

How will the relationship between angels and humans change in heaven? *(In the physical reality, humans have been created lower than angels. In heaven, humans will have authority and responsibility over angels.)*

The Role of Fallen Angels in Temptation, Possession, and Sin

In the gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus, the Bible introduces people who are troubled beyond the limits of human understanding. These people are described as being possessed by demons. The manner in which these people behaved frightened others in their community and caused the people themselves to either seek Jesus for help or to isolate themselves from human interaction. While these people terrified others, Jesus never demonstrated fear in healing people from their spiritual oppression.

One such man who was wrought with demons is known in the Bible as "the Gadarene demoniac." As a man who was controlled by the evil spirits of demons, he was known in the Gadarene region as the man who lived in the cemetery in the outskirts of the community. He had been bound in chains, but had broken free. He was known for tearing at his own flesh, for speaking in a non-human voice, and for running naked through the land invoking fear in all those who lived in the area. Yet, Jesus approached the man without fear or apprehension. Jesus spoke directly to the multitude of demons that enslaved the man. The demons acknowledged that Jesus is God, and begged him not to condemn them to the fiery pit. They were powerless against Jesus and submitted without resistance when he cast them into a nearby herd of pigs. Once Jesus liberated the man from the demons, he quietly sat at the foot of Jesus in total control and peace of mind.

The demons had gone out of him, and he was sitting there at the feet of Jesus. He had clothes on and was in his right mind. (Luke 8:35 CEV)

Jesus freed many others from demonic possession while he ministered on the earth. The Bible reports that he drove away several oppressive spirits from Mary Magdalene. He healed demon-possessed men who had been rendered blind or mute by their oppressors. The Bible says that all those who were possessed by demons were cured when Jesus spoke to them. No evidence exists of any demon who could withstand the commands of Jesus to flee from the humans they possessed.

And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God." (Mark 3:11 NKJV)

Ironically, Jesus himself was accused of performing his miracles by the power of a demon that possessed him. Jesus refuted this false allegation, and in so doing revealed important truth. He declared that it was impossible for a demon to dwell in a place that belonged to God. Specifically, no demon would be able to overpower and control any person who belongs to God by faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, for the Christian, the Bible promises that when God has saved the person from hell and promised them heaven, one piece of proof of this guarantee is the presence of the Holy Spirit leading the person through life.

The Bible declares that such a person has been “filled by the Spirit of God.” This indwelling or “filling” is pictured as an overflowing manifestation of the presence of God in the person’s life. This means that the person cannot and will not be possessed by Satan or a demon.

It is in Christ that you...found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13-14 MSG)

Even so, a Christian is still subject to the temptation and deception of fallen angels. God permits and even ordains these occasional temptations as tests that are intended to prove a person’s faithfulness to God. The Bible promises that a person will never be tempted beyond what they can withstand, and that they God will always provide for a way for the person to escape any temptation that is encountered.

While Satan engages in temptation to deceive the person, defy God, and destroy lives, God orchestrates testing in people’s lives to bring spiritual victories, prove faith, and affirm God’s promises.

It is important for every person to understand and appreciate the reality of fallen angels intermingling in the spiritual realm. These evil beings have the capability to bring spiritual, emotional, and mental misery to people who are alienated from God because of ignorance or disbelief. However, Jesus’ power is available through the Holy Spirit to overcome any dark spiritual presence in the world today.

- Demon possession was a real and supernatural phenomenon. It caused people to behave in unnatural, dangerous ways that frightened others and caused the people to become alienated from everyone else.
- Jesus demonstrated the consistent ability to free people from demon possession. No demon could withstand the command of Jesus to flee from a person and cease oppressing them. Every spirit submitted to the orders of Jesus.
- Jesus promised that any person today whose faith is in God will be protected from demon possession and spiritual oppression by the filling and fulfilling presence of the Holy Spirit in the person’s life.

Ask What is important for a Christian to understand about demon possession? *(It is important to understand that it is impossible for a Christian to be possessed or controlled by a demon.)*

If it is impossible for a demon to possess a Christian, what will God permit in demon interaction with Christians, and why? *(God permits Christians to be tested by demons so that his children may resist the temptations of Satan and prove their faith in God as an example to others, that they may be encouraged and grow in their own faith.)*

The Named Angels: Meet God’s Most Famous Messengers

Of the three named angels, the notorious “Lucifer” mentioned in Isaiah 14:12 is commonly understood to be the fallen angel today known as Satan. However, the validity of his original name is disputed, since the word “Lucifer” is a Latin word used in a 4th -century translation of the original Hebrew texts. Elsewhere in the same Latin translation, “Lucifer” is also used to describe Jesus as the morning star (2 Peter 1:19). While it is unclear at best if the fallen angel’s name was actually Lucifer, it is clear that today he is rightly named Satan, as the adversary of both God and humans.

The name of the angel Gabriel, however, is undisputed. He is the clarion of God, sent to offer announcements and proclamations to people throughout history. Gabriel is mentioned by name in both the Old and New Testaments. Gabriel visited Daniel and interpreted an important prophetic dream for him. Centuries later, Gabriel announced to Mary that she would miraculously become pregnant with the promised Christ.

Likewise, the angel Michael is named in both the Old and New Testaments. However, while Gabriel was God’s messenger, Michael is God’s soldier. He served Daniel by fighting those who opposed the Persian king Darius. In the New Testament, Michael is revealed to have contended with Satan for the body of Moses, and is also named in the

book of Revelation for warring against Satan. While all angels are likely named, these identified angels show that the real attention belongs focused on the work of God.

- Only two angels are named explicitly in the Bible, and the name of the fallen angel known as Satan has traditionally been identified as Lucifer.
- More important that angels names are the deeds they perform in serving God. Gabriel announced God's messages, and Michael fights in behalf of God's causes.

Ask What is important to remember about the possible name of Satan? *(The validity of Satan's original name as "Lucifer" is disputed. However, his title "Satan" as the adversary of God and humans is not disputed. His original name is not important, but his role in deceiving people is essential to remember.)*

What is the significance of the angels in the Bible being named? *(Though the names of the angels are infrequent, they are consistently presented with specific responsibilities. This shows that angels have specific tasks to perform according to God's design.)*

Historic Angelic Battles in the Bible and What you Can Know From Them

God has used angels as instruments of judgment against humans, often to devastating results. Two angels entered Sodom and Gomorrah and brought destruction upon their population because of rampant rebellion against God's laws. Much later, Israel's king Hezekiah was distressed Assyria's armies advanced toward Israel, intending to overthrow Hezekiah and establish its own pagan rule. That night, God sent a single angel who slew 185,000 Assyrians. This caused the Assyrian king to retreat to Nineveh, where he was killed by his own sons.

That same night the LORD sent an angel to the camp of the Assyrians, and he killed one hundred eighty-five thousand of them. (Isaiah 37:35 CEV)

Angels not only war against evil humans, but also against evil angels. The Bible speaks about a past heavenly war where a third of all angels joined Satan in his rebellion. God cast all the revolting angels from heaven and confined them to the universal domain. Another similar battle will occur in the future, with the same victorious results of God's obedient angels. God consistently brings victory to his faithful angels.

Bless God, all you armies of angels, alert to respond to whatever he wills. (Psalm 103:21 MSG)

God is incredibly patient with all humans and he loves people as his finest creation. However, for those who stubbornly oppose God and willfully seek to endanger his children, God will use his warrior angels to bring swift and extreme judgment against his enemies. God does not make war against his creation without necessity. His strong reaction to evil is a necessary response against those who seek to overthrow him as Lord. God uses angels to protect his creation, to defeat his enemy, and to advance his progress toward eternity.

- God does not take the matter of warring against people lightly. However, when necessary, he will use angels to fight in these conflicts, bringing heavy losses to humans.
- Angels have also warred against their rebellious fellow angels. There are two faithful angels for every rebellious demon.

Ask Why is it important to understand the power of angels? *(It is important to understand that angels are powerful beings created by God to do what he commands. This includes making war against all his enemies, whether they be angelic or human.)*

What is significant about the angelic actions against humans recorded in the Bible? *(It is significant to understand that angels only act against God's enemies at God's command. They do not act against humans who follow God by faith, and they do not oppose humans the way Satan opposes humans.)*

Know What You Believe About Angels (Angelology)

Testing the Spirits: How You Relate with Angels

How you Relate with Angelic Beings in This Life

In the numerous biblical accounts of whenever a person was visited by an angel, common experiences describing the encounters revealed the natural reaction to such otherworldly visitations. The angels are consistently described as shining with a brightness of God's holiness. Time and again, this manifestation of the purity of God caused an immediate response from the humans who were present in it:

- Abraham bowed before the angels who would later destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Lot bowed his face to the ground in their presence.
- The pagan false prophet Balaam fell to his face when he saw the Lord's angel.
- The true prophet Isaiah was completely undone from a vision of God and the heavenly host of angels.
- The prophet Daniel fell to his face in the presence of God's angel.
- In the New Testament, John the Baptist's father Zechariah was seized with fear when he was met by Gabriel.
- Even though Gabriel's message to Mary was a wonderful blessing, she was troubled by his visit.
- The shepherds were greatly frightened by the angels who announced the birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph.
- Finally, the apostle John fell on his face in the presence of an angel while given his vision of the future as recorded in Revelation.

Whenever it was important for an angel to demonstrate that it was sent by God, it showed God's holy nature in its appearance. Accordingly, the natural response of the human was to fall forward or bow to God as represented by the angel.

The angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." (Luke 2:10)

When an angel appeared before a person, it was always for a purpose. Typically, it was to communicate an important message to the person. Accordingly, it was important for the person to understand the message and be able to respond to it. Unfortunately, the first example of human/angelic interaction was the exchange between Adam and Eve and Satan. To the first people, the fallen angel appeared as a serpent and deceived them to doubt God's goodness, to distrust his plan, and to disobey his instructions. Adam and Eve did not test the claims of Satan against what they already knew about God. Instead, they compared the accusations of Satan against their own emotions, desires, and assumptions. The tragic result of their errors was the breakdown of their perfect relationship with God.

The LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says..." (Zechariah 1:13-14 NIV)

However, in subsequent examples of communication between angels and humans, the situations demonstrate that everything that is communicated by an angel of God to a person will always agree with what God has already promised or revealed. Angelic messages of judgment, of victory, or of blessing agreed with earlier God-given promises. In this, God used angels to prove his faithfulness or to demonstrate his commitment to complete what he started with a promise given much earlier in history.

The principles established in these biblical examples serve humans with a method to "test the spirits" while living in the physical life. Until eternity in heaven arrives, any encounter with angels must be subject to examination and evaluation. The Bible says that Satan presents himself as an angel of light; it is impossible to decide of the goodness or intent of an angel based upon what the human sees in their encounter. However, anything revealed by an angel of God will agree with truth that has already been established by God through the Bible. If an angelic being

attempts to convince a person that God is not good, that God cannot be trusted, or attempts to lead the person to disobey God, that person can be certain that the being is a fallen angel. While authentic visits by angels are rare and provocative, every person can have confidence that the experience can be assessed to determine whether the angel is of the Lord or of the adversary, Satan.

Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14 CSB)

Myth Buster

Angels are popularly depicted as babies, humans, or as for demons, red devils with pitchforks. However, in the numerous encounters with humans, angels appear to take on the form of a person. In the visions of heaven, angels appear to have wings, but are otherwise nonhuman in appearance. Some angels appear to have a face that resembles an animal's, but with unexplainable features such as eyes covering every part of their body. While some people interpret these passages as literal depictions of angels, others interpret the passages to communicate that the descriptions symbolically convey the nature or abilities of the angels.

- As messengers of God, angels have at rare times interacted with humans to communicate a message to the person from God. Commonly, the person responded to angelic appearance by falling forward in an act of worship to God.
- When an angel brings a message from God, that message can be tested against the Bible for its validity. God has declared that he will not speak a message through an angel that contradicts what he has already revealed in the Bible.
- A person should not evaluate an angelic message based upon their own emotions, desires, or preconceived notions, as the cautionary example of Adam and Eve demonstrates. Satan will attempt to deceive people by getting them to doubt God, distrust him, and disobey him.

Ask

What is the significance that Balaam and Lot responded to their angelic visitors the same as did Daniel and Abraham? *(The fact that all four of these men responded to God's angels by bowing demonstrates that in the presence of God's holiness, all humans will worship the Lord.)*

What does Adam and Eve's encounter with Satan demonstrate to people about Satan's tactics in interacting with humans? *(Satan demonstrated that he will appear in a way that if possible, he will appear in a way that is agreeable to humans. Then, he will connive to deceive humans to disobey God and doubt his love for them.)*

What does it mean to "test the spirits?" *("Testing the spirits" means to evaluate the message communicated by an angelic being by the established word of God in the Bible for the message's validity and trustworthiness.)*

How does a person "test the spirits" to determine if the spirit is a messenger of God or an agent of Satan? *(Any person can evaluate the message of a spirit being by comparing its message to what God has already revealed in the Bible. If the spirit's message agrees with biblical truth, it can be trusted. If the message is not in agreement with biblical truth, it cannot be trusted.)*

How You will relate to Angels in Eternity

The Bible offers encouraging glimpses of the future relationship between angels and humans. In eternity, the angels will rejoice, singing songs of praise to Jesus because God's restoration of people will be complete. God's justice will have been perfectly executed. All the rebellious spirits—human and angelic—will be eternally separated from God forever. Every person who belongs in heaven will be in heaven. There will be no more temptation, no more failure, no more rebellion, no more disobedience, and no more warfare. There will only be joyful, peace-filled coexistence between God's perfect angels and God's humans that have been restored to the perfect state of being of their original design.

Because humans and angels will perfectly co-exist, humans will join the angels in the song of rejoicing that praises God forever. This indicates that humans will be in a continual state of joy in heaven. The Bible gives provocative hints that while angels are advantaged beyond humans now, they look forward to the inauguration of eternity when that relationship will change. In eternity, humans will have the authority to judge the angels. In heaven, the angels will look to humans to learn and understand the deep things of God that they themselves do not understand. This means that the lessons learned by faith in this life will not only be remembered forever, but they will be a blessing that humans share with angels to teach them new understanding.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you... Angels desire to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:12 CSB)

- In heaven, humans and angels will rejoice together in unity over the fulfillment of God's work being accomplished now. The advantages held by angels over humans will change in eternity.
- The angels look forward to eternity because they do not understand all that they currently do in obedience. In heaven, they will learn important spiritual truth from the humans.

Ask

Why is it important to understand the nature of the future relationship between humans and angels?
(Understanding the future relationship between angels and humans shows that angels willingly do their current tasks with joy, even though they currently have advantages over humans.)

What are ways the relationship between humans and angels will change in eternity? *(In heaven, the angels will seek and receive understanding from humans regarding the important matters of relating to God that humans learned during the physical life. Also, humans will be given authority in heaven to judge the angels.)*