

ANGELS

I. Introduction

Angelic beings have been a major (we mean major!) subject of art, architecture, music and literature in Western Civilization, especially during the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Currently, angels are making a comeback.

A. The Current Popularity of Angels

1. According to *Time Magazine* (12\27\93) 69% of Americans believe in angels. 46% believe in personal guardian angels. 32% say they have experienced the presence of angels. 76% of teenagers believe in angels.
2. Angels may be experiencing their greatest popularity since Medieval times. Many books on angels have been and are on bestseller lists. Some of these books are: *The Book of Angels*, and *Angel Letters*, by Sophy Burnham; *Do You Have a Guardian Angel?*, by John Ronner; *Ask Your Angel*, by Alma Daniel, et al. (the most occultic); *Messengers of Light, Guardians of Hope*, by Terry Taylor; and *Where Angels Walk*, by Joan Anderson. Many national television specials have been aired with more scheduled. There are seminars on how to get in touch with your angel, national angel newsletters, and booming commercial sales of angel products.

B. Reasons:

1. After years of naturalistic teaching in the public schools people want some kind of a connection with the transcendent, yet the traditional Biblical God is too much of a threat. *Time Magazine* says: *For those who choke too easily on God and his rules, theologians observe, angels are the handy compromise, all fluff and meringue, kind of non judgmental.* (12/27/93).
2. Adherents of New Age philosophy have borrowed Christian terminology ("Angels") substituting it for "spirit guides". This ploy makes their occultism more palatable to those with a minimal Biblical background on the subject.
3. Popular Christian fiction from author Frank Peretti have heightened Christian interest in the spiritual realm.
4. In desperate times people seek supernatural answers to problems. This interest in angels parallels society's current interest in mysticism. *What is all the aerial commotion? Maybe it's a struggle to retain altitude at a time when culture is short on thrust.* What a quote! It is from *Vogue*, Dec. 1989.

II. The Variety of Beliefs

All the major religions of the world include a belief in angels in their corpus of doctrine. There are therefore, a variety of beliefs:

- A. Angels are departed humans who passed certain tests of virtue in this life. See Clarence in the popular Christmas movie *It's a Wonderful Life*.
- B. Spirit beings of another dimension who are for some reason concerned for planet earth. They are highly evolved beings (sometimes called *master souls*) who can transcend time and great distances. They originated possibly from life on other planets. See Shirley McClaine's new age babble.
- C. The Jungian View: They are not real beings but rather a projection of our subconscious, or higher inner-self.
- D. Entirely mythological and symbolic. This is of course the naturalistic view.
- E. The Christian view based on Biblical revelation. They are created spirit beings who are messengers of God and do His bidding.

III. The Christian View of Angels

A. Sources of Information:

- 1. The Old and New Testaments are our only authoritative source. All other sources and experiences must be filtered through Holy Scripture. To build a doctrine of angelogy we must rely only on Scripture. Where the Scripture is silent we must remain silent.
 - 2. A 6th Century writer, writing under the pseudonym of Dionysius, believed that angelic beings were ordered in a hierarchy under 9 different ranks or choirs. In order of authority these were: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, and Archangels.
 - 3. The great theologian of the 13th Century, St Thomas Aquinas, wrote a major dissertation on the subject of angels. He included all the biblical references, but where the Scriptures did not supply answers, he added his own speculations. Some of these later crept into the corporate beliefs of the church.
- B. In the Bible the word for *angels* is used over 300 times. Both the Hebrew word for angel (*malakh*), and the Greek word (*angelos* from which we get our english word), are the exact equivalents. They both are the ordinary word for *messenger*. The context must determine whether the messenger is human or divine. Other words used for angels are: *Cherubim, seraphim, ministering spirits, watchers, sons of God, chariots of God, holy ones, morning stars, thrones, powers, rulers, authorities, heavenly bodies, and miracles*. Some would also include the *the four*

living creatures and the 24 elders in Rev. 4:6-10.

C. Angels are mentioned in 50% of the books of the Bible and in every period of Biblical history. They are also frequently mentioned in both Jewish and Christian non-canonical literature, i.e., the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. Jesus assumed their existence.

D. The Origin of Angels

1. Angels are created beings though we are uncertain as to the exact time of creation. However, from Job 38:4ff it appears that they were witnesses to the creation of the earth. See also Col. 1:16; and Psalm 148:1-6.
2. According to Mark 12:25 they do not procreate. This passage may be saying no more than angels cannot increase their number by procreation. Concluding therefore, that angels are sexless, or without gender, may be saying more than this passage is saying. They are certainly not genderless. All angels in the Bible appear in the male gender with the possible exception of Zechariah 5:9. We can also conclude since they do not die that their number is eternally fixed. Hebrews 12:22 says they are beyond counting. (Note: Some theologians believe the sin of the much disputed passage, Gen 6, was committed by fallen angels (demons) who cohabited with the daughters of men to produce a hybrid race. Since the redeemer was to be a human, God saw it as a plot to corrupt the race resulting in the judgement of the flood to purify the race. For a very plausible interpretation of this passage see the *The Sons of God*, by David Livingston, in *Archaeology and Biblical Research*, Winter, 1990.).
3. The Bible says men are created a little lower than the angels. Psalm 8:5. In other passages they are referred to as *sons of god*, e.g, see Job 1:6.

E. The Nature and Personality of Angels

1. They are spirit beings. Heb. 1:14. This means that ordinarily they cannot be seen. In certain situations they appear, usually in a man-like appearance, and are often mistaken for men. Sometimes they emit a brilliance as in Luke 2:9 and Matt. 28:3. When angels appear corporeally they are called *angelophanies*. The Lord had to give Balaam special perception to see angels in Num. 22:31. See also II Kings 6:17.

Of course there are many questions related to their spiritual nature. If they are spiritual, where do they reside? How can they have mind without brain? How can they be *present*? Why do they have wings? Isn't flying a physical activity? Etc. This is an area we must confine to mystery. There are answers; we just don't know them!

2. They have all the attributes of personality

- a. They have great intellect, but they are not all-knowing. See I Pet. 1:12; and Matt. 24:36.
 - b. They have sensibility or feelings. They sang for joy at the creation in Job 38, and they rejoice when sinners repent. See Luke 15:10.
 - c. They have will. Jude 6; I Pet 1:12; II Pet. 3:22.
 - d. They have great power. II Pet. 2:11. They are often called *the mighty ones*, or *God's powerful angels*.
 - e. They are moral beings in that they are characterized as holy. Matt. 25:31.
3. They apparently have names, however, only three are mentioned in the Bible, all in the masculine form. They are Gabriel, Michael, and Lucifer, the fallen one. Numerous other angels are named in the Apocrypha and in the Pseudepigrapha.
 4. Only the Cherubim and Seraphim are described as having wings and flying (Ex. 25:20; Isa. 6:2; Dan. 9:21, (See Rev. 14:6 as a possible exception). In the following two other passages we see angelic-like beings with wings: i.e., the enigmatic creatures in Ezek. 1:6, and Rev. 4:8. It does not follow from these passages that *all* angels have wings.

F. Their Organization and Ministry

1. Although the Bible is not specific about the organization of Angels, God is a God of order and there does seem to be some truth to the Medieval speculations about the order and hierarchy of angels. There seems to be some orders of angels created for specific tasks, i.e. Cherubim and Seraphim. It would make perfect sense that among the angels there are those of varying power, intelligence, abilities, etc.
2. Some angels are said to be perpetually involved in worship around the throne. See numerous other references involving angels in a worshiping mode. It appears to be one of their primary occupations.
3. One writer says *Angels are God's hand in the world*. They do His bidding and are involved in a variety of activities. They carry out judgement (II Kings 19:35), answer prayer (Acts 12), observe worship services (I Cor. 11:10), They never act independently, only within God's will.
4. They are involved in conveying revelation and making announcements to man. This is in keeping with the word *angel*. Gal. 3:19.
5. They minister to believers; they guard the elect. See Psalm 34:7; 91:11. Especially Heb. 1:14. It should be apparent that these guardian angels also protect and minister to the elect prior to their coming to salvation (Acts

10:17).

6. Angels will be involved in the second coming. Matt. 25:31; I Thess. 4:16,17.

G. Questions:

1. Does every Christian have a personal guardian angel? It is possible, though it is not explicitly taught in Scripture. At the time of Christ it was the belief of the Jews. They even went as far as to say that one's angel resembled that person. This is the reason Peter was mistaken for his angel. See the story in Acts 12.
2. Why do they sometimes intervene in times of danger and not at other times? Though not always the satisfying answer, it is not always God's will.
3. Can angels influence our thoughts? It would appear that they can plant thoughts or communicate in dreams. Matt. 1:20.

IV. For Further Study:

Adler, Mortimer J. *The Angels and Us*. New York: Macmillan, 1982.
 Dickason, C. Fred. *Angels: Elect and Evil*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1975.
 Gaebelain, A.C. *What the Bible Says About Angels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, n.d.
 Graham, Billy. *Angels: God's Secret Agents*. Revised ed. Waco, TX: Word, 1986.
 Webber, Marilyn Carlson, and Webber, William D. *A Rustle of Angels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.