



The Ministry of Angels



In light of a renewed emphasis on angels in the religious and secular world and the obvious satanic hijacking of this subject, one might find himself asking questions like: Do angels play a significant role in the life of a Christian? Should one acknowledge their existence? Do they really move amongst believers?

In this day of technology one has little trouble accepting the existence of unseen infrared light beams that guard doorways, metal-detecting sensors that travel through clothing, and cell phone conversations that float through cars and living rooms, but it still seems difficult to comprehend the existence of a spirit being sent by God to minister to His people. Does the fact that most people cannot see them mean they are not there? Should one consider it strange to feel the presence or touch of an angel? Have their past appearances been so rare as to be discounted in such a report in this day? Psalm 34:7 assures us, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

Perhaps it would be reassuring and enlightening to re-examine the frequency and the role of angels in Scripture. In the King James Version of the Bible the word "angel(s)" is mentioned 295 times. These spirit beings are also referred to as cherubim, seraphim, and messengers in additional passages of scripture. It seems significant that fifty-nine of the sixty-six books in the Bible mention angels. There are 104 appearances of angels recorded in the Bible. Sixty-seven of those appearances are recorded in the New Testament, and fifty-seven of them occurred after the Day of Pentecost. All this indicates that God is not uncomfortable with acknowledging their existence. Unfortunately, it seems that many people are more comfortable recognizing the existence of demons (fallen angels) than the existence of God's holy angels. The Bible clearly gives God's holy angels significantly more attention. One may be shocked to realize that the word demon(s) is not found in the King James Version of the Bible, although it appears in other translations. The words "devils" and "evil spirits" are found only fifty-nine times. In other words, God's holy angels are mentioned six times as much as devils are mentioned. How is it that many are quick to believe someone has a demon but slow to believe someone has seen or been touched by an angel? Where does a skepticism concerning angels lead? Merrill Unger maintains, "The denial of the existence of angels, as that of a personal Devil and demons, springs from terrible form denies the existence of God." It might be that a better understanding of angels would allow His people to better cooperate with God as He employs them, much like an understanding of healing opens the door for God to heal those who will believe.

A simple definition of an angel can be found in Lingers Bible Dictionary as follows: "According to his [Jesus'] teaching, they are personal, sinless, immortal beings, existing in great number, and in close relation not only with individual men, but also with the history of God's kingdom." Apparently, as many Bible stories indicate, angels have specific roles to fulfill and jobs to do; there are angels that war, angels that worship, and angels that deliver messages. There are heavenly hosts that work together in praise and in battle. Oh that God would open the eyes of modern-day Christians like he did the eyes of Elisha's servant! How encouraged one might be to see God fighting on his behalf. On the other hand, what a triumph it would be for Satan if he could cause people to close their eyes to such a host of angels.



One well-known Bible account that allows insight into angelic activity is the story of Balaam and his talking donkey. This story is found in Numbers 22, and it refers to the angel nine times. There are important points that one can glean from this account. First, this story makes clear that angels are working whether or not one sees, acknowledges, or believes in them. Second, God can and must open one's eyes in order that an angel may be seen. And, last and most importantly, angels are not just neat apparitions; they have a purpose. Who will be brave enough to pray, "God, open my understanding. God open my eyes"?

Lest one should think that it is extravagant to spend time reading, preaching, or talking about angels, it would be beneficial to take a few lines to recount some biblical examples of how angels brought good news and ministered to some of our favorite Bible characters. It may be that many readers have never realized that angels are mentioned in many famous Bible stories. Many times the stories are or retold inaccurately or incompletely, leaving out the

angelic aspects; it is as if they are invisible. We should notice by the following Bible events how much of the Bible a person must disregard if he does not believe in angels.

Angelic activity with Biblical characters

- An angel appeared to Hagar and Ishmael when they were about to die in the wilderness (Genesis 21).
- An angel spoke to Abraham as he was about to kill Isaac (Genesis 22).
- Angels smote homosexuals with blindness and delivered Lot from Sodom (Genesis 19).
- Jacob saw angels on several occasions (Genesis 31).
- Moses saw a burning bush, but he turned aside when he saw an angel in the bush (Exodus 3).
- A cloud and a pillar led Israel, but it was the angel of the Lord that went before the cloud (Exodus 14).
- Acts 7 records that Moses spoke with an angel on Sinai.
- Exodus and Numbers are filled with incidents where the angel of the Lord went before God's people into battle. Angels smote entire armies. (Exodus 23:23; Exodus 33:2).
- Gideon was commissioned by an angel but he did not realize the being as an angel until the angel caused fire to come out of a rock and consume the dinner Gideon had offered to him (Judges 6).
- Minah, Samson's mom, was told by an angel that she would have a baby. Minah spoke at length with this particular angel. (Judges 13)
- David saw an angel that was about to destroy Jerusalem because David had counted Israel (II Samuel 24), David saw the angel of the Lord on several other occasions (I Samuel 29).
- An angel strengthened a depressed Elijah, twice. The angel also gave him a word of knowledge (1 Kings 19)
- Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego were accompanied by an angel in the furnace (Daniel 3).
- Angel that shut the mouths of the lions to whom Daniel was thrown (Daniel 6:22).
- Zechariah, Daniel, and John were given insight into the future by talking with angels (Revelation 22:8).
- An angel told Zachariah that he would be the father of John the Baptist. In fact, the angel's name was Gabriel, and he smote Zachariah mute because of his unbelief (Luke 1).
- The angel Gabriel appeared to a virgin named Mary (Luke 1).
- Joseph was instructed by an angel in his dreams (Matthew 1,2).
- Jesus' name came from God but it was announced to Joseph and Mary by an angel (Luke 1:31).
- An angel explained the virgin birth of Jesus (Mark 1:20-24; Luke 1:34-45).
- A host of angels proclaimed Jesus' birth (Luke 2).
- Jesus was strengthened in the desert by angels (Matthew 4:11).
- In Gethsemane an angel strengthened Jesus (Luke 22).
- Facing crucifixion while at Calvary, Jesus said he could have called many angels to rescue Him (Matthew 26:53).
- Angels moved the stone from the tomb and angels told the disciples Jesus had risen (Matthew 28).
- Angels told the people on Olivet that Jesus would come again in the clouds (Acts 1).
- On two occasions angels delivered the disciples from prison (Acts 5,12).
- Philip was directed to go to Gaza by an angel (Acts 8).
- Cornelius had an angelic visitation that opened the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10).
- Because of his pride, Herod was smitten with worms by an angel (Acts 12).
- Paul was encouraged and instructed by an angel (Acts 27).
- Matthew 13 proclaims that angels are even now helping to reap the end-time harvest.
- Matthew 16 reveals that angels will reward the godly.
- Matthew 18 says children have angels.
- Luke 15 explains that the angels witness the joy when a sinner repents.
- The angels pay attention to whether a woman has long hair (I Corinthians 11:10).
- The Book of Revelation makes sixty-six references to angels.
- Michael and his angels will overcome the Dragon in heaven (Revelation 12:7).
- God will appear in the clouds with angels and catch His church away (Matthew 16:27).
- An angel will bind Satan and cast him into the pit (Revelation 20).
- Angels will be present at the judgment of the entire human race (Luke 12: 8-9).

We must give much weight to the more than one hundred appearances of angels in biblical incidences here. From these it is obvious that angels impart information, give understanding, heal, encourage, fight evil, reprove believers, lead God's people, and demonstrate God's power. In the Bible, there are more examples of angelic activities and appearances than there are people receiving the Holy Ghost, listening to a sermon, even getting baptized. Are these angelic activities fairy tales? Does the present-day believer have no need for angels? Has Satan convinced the modern-day Christian that one can handle life without the help of God's angels?

If we realize the importance of angels in the Bible, we may wonder what our role is when we need angels. Bible stories indicate that a believer's prayers open a door for God to command His angels to minister to us in our need. We pray to God, not to angels; only God can give commands to His angelic host. Psalm 103:20 says, "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." Notice the list below with many biblical incidents where angels appeared because people prayed.

Angelic activity because people prayed

- With Hagar, God had heard the voice of the lad (Genesis 21).
- It was the Israelites' prayers for deliverance that caused God to send an angel to the burning bush (Exodus 3:7).
- On several occasions God's people prayed and God sent angels to war against their enemies.
- When Israel "cried out to the Lord," God sent an angel to Gideon (Judges 6:7).
- When Samson's mom saw the angel, she talked to her husband and then prayed again that God would send the angel back. The angel returned. (Judges 13)
- Elijah had prayed to die. God responded by sending an angel to strengthen him to live (I Kings 19).
- The three Hebrew boys simply expressed their faith in God and an angel was sent (Daniel).
- Luke 1:13 records: "But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shall call his name John."
- Cornelius prayed. Then the angel came (Acts 10).
- Acts 12:5 reads: "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." God responded by sending the angel.
- Jesus prayed and an angel came to strengthen Him (Luke 22).

The Scripture warns by word and example not to worship angels, but we would be wise to believe that God uses them. Furthermore, cooperating with God and angels is biblical. To pray to God in times of need and expect angels to assist is also scriptural. God is sovereign to assist us in any way He chooses, which may include the ministry of angels. It is therefore scriptural to assume that angels stand poised, waiting for God's command to minister to His people.

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