

# Angelology: Angels

by Greg Herrick

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*This sermon explores the biblical doctrine of angels, including their origin, existence, and nature, and discusses their role in salvation, judgment, and God's providential control.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 1:14

**Topics:** "Angelology", "Demonology"

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## Description

Greg Herrick delves into the study of angelology, exploring the biblical doctrine of angels, their nature, classifications, and roles in God's divine plan. Angels are spirit beings created by God with personality, power, and knowledge, serving as messengers and agents of God's will. The Old Testament refers to angels as the 'heavenly host,' 'sons of God,' and 'holy ones,' highlighting their innumerable number, close relationship to God, and pure moral character. The sermon also covers the classifications of angels, the service they provide in salvation and judgment, as well as the existence and activities of Satan and demons as fallen angels.

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## Transcript

The term "angelology" comes from two Greek terms, namely, *aggelos* (pronounced *angelos*) meaning "messenger" or "angel" and *logos* meaning "word," "matter," or "thing." In Christian systematic theology it is used to refer to the study of the biblical doctrine of angels. It includes such topics as the origin, existence, and nature of angels, classifications of angels, the service and works of angels as well the existence, activity, and judgment of Satan and demons (as fallen or wicked angels). Some theologians, however, treat Satan and demons under a separate heading, namely, demonology.

### The Nature of Angels

An angel is a spirit being created by God and commissioned by Him for some special purpose in accordance with the outworking of His plan (e.g., Col 1:16; Heb 1:14). They have enormous, though limited (as a creature) power and knowledge. They are referred to as "messengers" in both the Old and New Testaments and as such they carry out the work of God. Though some scholars have denied their personhood, it is clear from Scripture that they do indeed have personality; they think (1 Peter 1:12), feel (Luke 2:13), and choose (Jude 6), and holy angels render intelligent and excellent praise to God. They are of a higher order than man, as Psalm 8:4-5 explains, but they are inferior to Christ (2 Sam 14:20; Luke 20:36; Heb 1). Apparently they are unable to procreate (Matt 22:30).

In the Old Testament angels are also referred to as the "heavenly host," "sons of God," and "holy ones" (1 Samuel 17:45; Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalm 89:5, 7). The first expression, "heavenly host" relates to their innumerable number and power to defend God's people (cf. Heb 12:22). The second expression, "sons of God" highlights their close relationship to God, their godlike qualities, and the capacity in which they function before him. The third expression, "holy ones," underscores their pure moral character.

### Classifications of Angels

There is not a great deal revealed in Scripture about the classification of angels. One could wish for more information, for what is given does suggest "ranks" or "classifications" among them, but it is difficult to say much beyond this. We should comment at the outset, however, that the claim that some angels were confined to the abyss when they sinned and others were not, on the basis of texts like 2 Peter 2:4, is unlikely. All fallen angels are being held in pits of darkness until their appointed day of judgment, but they are able from there to carry out evil strategies against God, his people, and his creation.

Michael is referred to as an archangel in Jude 9--a designation not received by any other angel in scripture (though of course there may be many other archangels). This seems to indicate that he has authority over many angels and does so under the authority of God. He is also referred to as "the great prince," where the term "prince" also seems to connote levels of authority among the angels (Dan 9:21; 12:1). There are also angels which rule over certain countries such as we see in Daniel's reference to the "prince of the kingdom of Persia" (10:13).

While there is some debate over guardian angels, it seems that Jesus in Matthew 18:10 may be implying this.

There are also the Seraphim mentioned in Isaiah 6:2-4. Unfortunately, this is the only place where they are mentioned in Scripture, so not much can be said about them. The term seraphim means "burning ones" and may allude to their brightness, yet it is interesting that they hid their feet and faces from the brightness of the Holy One of Israel. Thus it appears that they are deeply concerned about the holiness of God and worshipping him in humility. In Isaiah's case they came to him, and on behalf of God, communicated to him the knowledge that his sins were forgiven. Having been cleansed by the burning holiness of God, the prophet was now prepared to speak to a disobedient Israel on God's behalf.

Cherubim are also mentioned numerous times in the OT and once in the NT (Heb 9:5). They seem to be connected with protecting God's holiness and access to him in relationship. Thus they are stationed at the Garden of Eden making it impossible for man to return to the garden and eat from the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Similarly, they are connected with the mercy seat and the law in Exodus 25:18-22; it was there at the mercy seat that God met with sinful man, i.e., the Israelites. They are the living beings Ezekiel saw in his vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28; 10:15) and they seemed to have four wings and faces like lions, bulls, eagles and human beings. They had human hands, feet like calves hooves, etc. See Ezekiel 1:4-14 for further details. They too, like those Isaiah saw, shone brightly, like burnished bronze. They are also associated with fire, lightning, and holy worship of the true and merciful God (cf. Revelation 4:4-8).

### Service of Angels

It is impossible to describe all the services which angels provide at God's command, but here are some of the following connected with salvation, judgment, and God's providential control of human history. In terms of salvation, angels played a role in the coming, death, and resurrection of Christ. They delivered the

message to Mary that she was to have the Christ-child (Luke 1:26-38) and they proclaimed him as Savior before the shepherds (Luke 2:13). They ministered to Christ during the period of his wilderness temptations just as they strengthened him in his Gethsemane trials (Luke 22:43). They were also ready at his command to fight for him (Matt 26:53). Further, they rolled away the stone from his tomb and they also proclaimed his resurrection (Matt 28:2, 6).

The writer of Hebrews summarizes the role of angels in the lives of believers in Hebrews 1:14: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to help those who will inherit salvation?" As such, they are vitally interested and involved in our own spiritual growth and the mission we have of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. They will, when God desires, encourage us and even rescue us from physical dangers so that we can continue God's work of preaching the gospel (Acts 12:7; 27:23-24). They are deeply interested in the salvation of the lost and rejoice when one sinner repents and turns to God (Luke 15:10). Indeed, Philip was commissioned by an angel to go and meet the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road so that this man could be saved (Acts 8:26). Angels are also involved in caring for believers when they die (Luke 16:22).

Angels are also used by the Lord in the judgment of unbelievers. This can be seen in Genesis 19:12-13 when the angels tell Lot to get out of Sodom; at the Lord's command and because of the evil of that city, they were preparing to destroy it. Sometimes they inflict punishment (Acts 12:23) and in Revelation 8-9, 16 they are intimately connected with the trumpet and bowl judgments.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the age they will be the ones who gather the unrighteous for judgment (Matt 13:41-42).

In the sense that angels were involved in the coming of Christ, the salvation, growth, preservation of Christians, and the judgment of unbelievers they are involved in the providential outworking of God's plan (encompassing all things) in the world. This can be seen in the control of nations as well (Daniel 10:13, 20-21).

### Satan as a Fallen Angel

The term "Satan" means "adversary" in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament writers simply brought the name over into Greek without any change. Satan is a fallen, wicked angel, perhaps a cherub, though this is by no means certain (cf. Ezek 28:14).

There has been much speculation about Satan (and his demons) which calls into question his existence and personhood. First, it must be said that the devil or demons are attested to by every NT writer and appear in several OT books as well. Second, Jesus Christ himself dealt directly with Satan and his demons on numerous occasions (e.g., Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 5:1-20). Third, certain particularly egregious evils throughout history--such as the Holocaust--lend support to the reality of the biblical portrait of Satan, demons, and their destructive capabilities and activities.

Satan is also clearly portrayed in Scripture as a person. But some argue that the biblical idea of Satan and demons must be demythologized. That is, Satan and demons belong to the worldview of Christians (and others) in the first century, but now with the advent of the scientific worldview, we know better. What physical ailments the ancients attributed to Satan we now know are diseases caused by microscopic bacteria and viruses. The problem with this view is that Christians (and others) in the first century did not attribute all physical infirmities to the devil, only some. Thus they were not quite as naïve as this view implies. Further, it is simply arrogant, not to mention naïve, to assert that because they lived then and we live now, their metaphysical views are necessarily infantile, childish, and implausible and ours are necessarily informed. Perhaps we do not know as we ought to know. Besides, science is incapable of

rendering judgment on this issue for in the nature of the case, the reality of the things talked about do not lay within its scope, methods, or 'knowledge paradigms' of inquiry.

There are others who say that the devil is really a way of speaking about evil forces, in culture. This is, however, far afield from what the Bible teaches regarding Satan and his emissaries. Concerning Satan, the Bible teaches that he is a person (i.e., has personality, but he is not human). He is very cunning (Gen 3:1; 2 Cor 11:3), gets angry when he is foiled (Rev 12:17), and exerts his will in capturing people who are unwilling to listen to the truth (2 Tim 2:26). These are all functions a person carries out and he, of course, will be held accountable to God for all that he has done, is doing, and will do (John 12:31; Rev 20:10). Thus he is morally responsible. So he is not just a force in culture, evil or otherwise; he is a person who though not to be equated with culture, nonetheless plays an evil role in cultural and world events (1 John 5:19). Demons also have personality and are not the souls of dead people who sinned apart from the saving grace of Christ.

In scripture Satan ("adversary") goes by many names and titles which are elucidate his activity of opposing God's purposes, plans, and people. His names include: (1) the devil ("slanderer" Matt 4:1; 13:39; Rev 12:9); (2) Beelzebul ("Lord of heaven"; Matt 12:24; while it was used by the Pharisees to refer to Satan, the origin and associations of the name are uncertain. It might have been used originally to refer to the Canaanite fertility deity who was the chief adversary of the Israelite religion. In this case Baal means "lord" and zebul refers to "heaven"<sup>30</sup>), and (3) Belial ("one who opposes God"; 2 Cor 6:15).<sup>31</sup>

Satan is also known by my many titles which reveal his efforts of opposing the work of God and causing harm to the saints. He is known as the god of this age--an age characterized by sin and opposition to God. He opposes the gospel by blinding people's minds to its truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is similarly referred to as the prince of this world (John 12:31). And so there is a sense in which the entire world system lies in his lap (1 John 5:19). He is the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2; Col 1:13) and as such rules over the demons who do his bidding and over unbelieving people, the sons of disobedience. His name, the evil one, suggests his own nature and the nature of his work among people promoting evil and opposing righteousness and truth. He is known also as (1) a vicious thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10); (2) the tempter (1 Thess 3:5); (3) a murderer (John 8:44); (4) the father of lies (John 8:44), and (5) the Great Dragon who deceives the entire world (Rev 12:9). What great news it is that Jesus' ministry struck at the heart of his power and he is now a defeated foe, awaiting sentencing. His final end will be in the lake of fire where he will be tormented day and night forever (Rev 20:10).

### Demons as Fallen Angels

Satan is a fallen angel and is referred to as "the prince of demons" (Mark 3:22). Therefore, demons are fallen angels as well and under his command. At times they are referred to as "unclean spirits" and "evil spirits", both ascriptions referring to their moral and spiritual wickedness (Matt 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26). They are also referred to as "principalities and powers" in Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 15:24, and Colossians 2:8-15. They are able to inhabit people and speak through them (Mark 1:34) as well as to inhabit animals (Mark 5:12). They seek to cause disease, though not every disease is caused by them (Matt 12:22-24). They desire to deceive Christians (2 Cor 11:14) to the point of getting worship from them (1 Cor 10:20) and therefore must be firmly resisted (Eph 6:12-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8). We are not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Cor 2:11). The bottom line is that demons, like their father the prince of demons, want to thwart the work of God by causing the people of God to sin or do anything that would render them less effective for Him. They also love to lead the entire world away from the truth in Christ and

to destroy them if God permitted (cf. John 10:10). Their ultimate plan is to overthrow the kingdom of light with the kingdom of darkness and to dethrone God.

### The Judgment of Angels

By what we have said so far it may seem that we are advocating a kind of "dual of equals" between the forces of good and the forces of evil. This is not so. The Devil and his angels are completely under the control of God in every respect. Their ultimate end in the lake of fire proves this (Rev 20:10). In short, their judgment was secured through the cross and resurrection of Christ for through that great event he has driven out the prince of this world (John 12:31). The war may not be over, but the 'cross-victory' at Normandy has rendered ultimate victory certain.

### Dealing with Demons and Spiritual Warfare

Virtually all Christians would say that we have at least some measure of authority over Satan. After all, we can resist him and are not required to submit to his authority (James 4:7). Also, there are times that we must engage in "hand to hand" combat against Satan and his forces (Eph 6:12-18). Other Christians go further and claim that we can, as our Master did, cast out demons when we are confronted with them. This too seems quite scriptural and indeed necessary at times. We are seated with Christ in the heavenlies and share in his reign at the present time. This seems to be Paul's point in Romans 16:20 when he says that the God of peace will soon crush Satan "under your feet"--an allusion to Psalm 110:1 and messiah's reign.<sup>32</sup> The eschaton has broken into the present and we now possess authority in Christ to overcome the works of the devil.

NOTE: A word about demon "possession." The term "possession" in reference to demons or Satan does not appear in the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures and is an unfortunate mistranslation. There are two ways in which the Bible speaks about the influence of demons on people. People are said to be "demonized" or "to have a demon." This is not the same thing as possession in the modern day use of that term where it often means that the demon has complete control over the person, using him/her at will. This is rarely the case, even in the gospels. Most often the language of "having a demon" and "demonized" seems to speak of demonic influence to greater or lesser degrees.

There is considerable debate in the evangelical community around the world as to whether demons can inhabit Christians who possess the Holy Spirit. We cannot answer in detail that question here, as important as it is, but no one on either side of the debate can afford to ignore the profound influence Satan and his demons can have on Christians, sometimes to the point that indwelling looks possible. In any case, we must stand firm in our position in Christ. When he attacks, we must resist him using the word of God and prayer. Above all we must pursue a holy life so that we do not give him a foothold. Also, we must be careful of blaming all sin and disease on him and forgetting our own participation in evil. The "demon under every rock" syndrome is potentially just as faith wrecking as denying Satan's existence.

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28 See Sydney H. T. Page, Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 255-61.

29 BAGD, s.v. diavbolo". The name is sometimes used interchangeably with Satan (Matt 4; 1, 10; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12)

30 See G. H. Twelftree, "Demon, Devil, Satan," in Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 164.

31 The precise origin of this name is very difficult to pin down. It is probably not used in connection with any OT "personage," but is found in later Jewish writings and at Qumran. It seems to indicate one who opposes God and his purposes. See Ralph P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 40 (Dallas: Word, 1986), electronic version, in loc.

32 The future tense "will...crush" refers to the eschaton when Satan will be completely defeated, but notice that just as then, so also now, we participate in his overthrow. In Romans this implies the defeat of his power in temptation because of indwelling sin and death.

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