

Angels and demons, principalities and powers

There are a lot of books and films about angels and demons, which are pure fantasy. Comparatively little has been written about them based on purely biblical content, especially about angels, mainly because we are not told very much in the bible. Over the centuries, myths and stories about angels and demons have been made up, which can lead to confusion and false ideas about them.

Angels

Despite what many people think, angels are not spirits of dead people. We do not become angels when we die.

At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. **Matthew 22:30**

Angels (meaning: messenger) are supernatural beings of great power, created by God to serve him.

The angel said to him, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. **Luke 1:19**

Whilst there is no evidence that we have individual guardian angels, God sends his angels before us, to watch our backs and generally to guard over us.

My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. **Exodus 23:23**

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. **Psalms 34:7**

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; **Psalms 91:11**

Angels comfort and attend to us when we are weak.

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. **Matthew 4:11**

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

Angels bring messages of encouragement and warnings from God.

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.' **Judges 6:11-12**

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ... The two men said to Lot, 'Do you have anyone else here - sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it. ... With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.' When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. ... Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah - from the Lord out of the heavens. **Genesis 19: 1, 12-13, 15-16, 24**

Angels rescue us and lead us to safety.

They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. **Acts 5:18-19**

When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: 'Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you." So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me **Acts 27:20-25**

Angels announce great events.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
Luke 2:9-14

Angels bring God's judgement and are capable of wielding great power.

And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the Lord saw it and relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was destroying the people, 'Enough! Withdraw your hand.' The angel of the Lord was then standing at the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell face down. **1 Chronicles 21:15-16**

And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his god, some of his sons, his own flesh and blood, cut him down with the sword. **2 Chronicles 32:21**

This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous. **Matthew 13:49**

Nowhere in the bible does it say that angels have wings or sing in heavenly choirs, they are only seen by people when God wants to be. Frequently they are mistaken for ordinary people.

When Gideon realised that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, 'Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!' **Judges 6:22**

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. **Hebrews 13:2**

We are warned to avoid making gods out of angels. Sometimes people who have seen angels (or who think that they have) make big deal out of it, trying to make themselves look more important and distracting people from the real business of doing God's will and extending his kingdom.

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. **Colossians 2:18**

The archangel, Michael (meaning: who is like God?), is the only angel who appears to have a higher rank as the chief of the angels (**Daniel 10:13 & 21, 12:1, Jude 1:9, Revelation 12:7**). No other archangels are mentioned by name, though there is one mention of "the archangel" (**1 Thessalonians 4:1**). Some non-Christian sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists, believe that Michael is non-incarnational Jesus¹.

Some biblical scholars believe that Satan, who was known as Lucifer (meaning: bearer of light or Morning Star), was an archangel before his pride and rebellion against God.

Apart from Michael (and Lucifer), Gabriel (meaning: God is my strength) is the only other named angel in the bible, in the Old Testament (**Daniel 8:16, 9:21**) and in New Testament (**Luke 1:19 & 26**). Both times, Gabriel is sent as a messenger from God.

Heavenly creatures called cherubim (possibly meaning: blessing or mighty) and seraphim (meaning: consuming fire) do not have the status of angels. It is only in later sources that some people consider them to be a division of the divine messengers. Cherubim figure mostly in the books of Exodus as ornamentation on the top of the Ark of the Covenant (aka the Mercy Seat), 1 Kings and Ezekiel, where they are identified as the "living creatures" (**Ezekiel 10:15**). Cherubim are mentioned only once in the New Testament (**Hebrews 9:5**). Seraphim are mentioned twice in the entire bible in one passage (**Isaiah 6:2 & 6**)

Demons

Demons (aka impure, unclean, evil spirits) were angels who, led by Satan, rebelled against God. The bible does not say much about the rebellion of Satan but certain passages in the Old Testament allude to it (eg **Isaiah 14:12-15** and **Ezekiel 28:12-19**). The book of Revelation indicates that the rebellion of Satan was accompanied by one-third of the angels in heaven.

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who 'will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre.' And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. **Revelation 12:1-6**

The fate of these rebellious angels is sealed.

The angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling - these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. **Jude 1:6**

¹ Jewish folklore had a strong tradition that there were seven archangels and during medieval times, an "angelic" hierarchy was written by an author only known as "Pseudo-Dionysius" consisting of nine ranks. Archangels are ranked second from bottom, which seems rather strange for the "chief of angels". None of this is supported by the bible.

In the meantime, their aim is to corrupt and spoil God's creation and to destroy the lives of as many people as possible.

When we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours might have been in vain. **1 Thessalonians 3:4-5**

We are told to be wise about Satan and his ways and to avoid the traps which the demons make to lead us astray.

Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven - if there was anything to forgive - I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. **1 Peter 5:8-9**

Demons are supernatural, like angels, but tend to remain hidden. However, they can manifest in any number of ways, sometimes pretending to be opposite to what they really are?

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. **2 Corinthians 11:14**

The good news is that demons are limited and cannot tempt us beyond what we are capable of resisting through the grace of God.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. **1 Corinthians 10:13**

There are many warnings throughout the bible regarding any kind of occult involvement. This includes such things as spiritism, séances, palmistry, ouija and horoscopes as well as more obvious practices such as satanism, necromancy and magic of any kind. Involvement in these is an open invitation for demonic activity.

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. **Deuteronomy 18:10-11**

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. **1 Timothy 4:1**

Demonisation

There is some debate as to whether Christians can be "demon-possessed". Whether they can or not, they can be troubled, sometimes persistently by demonic activity in the same way as anyone else, especially if they have been involved in or exposed to any kind of occult activity. Demons will try to exploit any kind of trauma or wound to our spirits and souls, which has not been dealt with. Where there are open wounds, flies will gather and maggots will appear!

Exorcism is a powerless religious rite, which does not appear in the bible. As Christians, living under the protection of the Lord Jesus and his angels, we are equipped to deal with any kind of demonisation in his

name. We have no need to be afraid because Jesus has overcome the power of the enemy and we have the power to drive out demons in his name. We generally call this deliverance.

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and illness. **Matthew 10:1**

There are some principles to keep to when faced with some form of demonisation.

- Don't go looking for demons. Some people make a career out of seeing demons in everything and make outlandish, unhelpful assumptions and claims about them. Demonisation is much less common than some people would have us believe.
- Be sure that the issue is actually demonic in nature. Demonic manifestations can be very similar to mental illness or evidence of abuse and laying hands on someone and/or praying for demons to leave may make the condition worse. If we ask the Lord to give us discernment we will be better equipped to determine what is of the enemy and what is not.
- Work in pairs, if possible, without crowding the person being delivered. Avoid theatricals and putting on a show. If it is appropriate to touch the person being delivered, place your hands lightly on their shoulders and avoid pushing them over.
- Don't ask the demon to name itself². This is pointless, as it is a lying spirit. Whenever Jesus cast out a demon, he did not ask it to name itself.
- Pray for protection from the Holy Spirit for everyone concerned and simply tell the demon to leave in the name of Jesus.
- Be prepared for some physical reaction from the demon or the person being delivered but do not be put off. Continue to pray without raising your voice and with confidence in the authority of Jesus.
- When the prayer for deliverance is ended, ensure that the person is in a fit state to leave. Pray for their protection and filling by the Holy Spirit.

Principalities and powers

There is a constant battle in the spiritual realm between the forces of good and those of the enemy. Some locations and even regions seem to be inhabited by demonic powers. An angel was delayed in bringing a message to Daniel by the prince of Persia until assisted by the archangel Michael.

Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. **Daniel 10:12-13**

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. **Revelation 12:7-9**

² When Jesus delivered the man from the legion of demons (Mark 5:9) he asked *the man* what his name was but it was the demons that responded. Jesus delivered a boy from a deaf and dumb spirit (Mark 9:17 & 25) but the boy's father had already told him what the problem was.

We need to realise that Satan and the demonic powers are behind much of the evil in the world. We have no need to fear them, though we need to be equipped by God to do battle against these in his name when we come across them because he has overcome them by his death and resurrection.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. **Colossians 2:15**

Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **Ephesians 6:11-12**

This water ... saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand - with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. **1 Peter 3:21-22**