

Angels in Scripture – A Brief Look

Angels appear all over both the Old Testament and New Testament. However, for some reason most Christians understand only a small fraction of what the Scriptures tell us about them. I believe that a comprehensive understanding of them is invaluable in understanding how the human race and the earth fit into the eternal history of the LORD's greater creation.

First, there are two categories of those beings we call angels.¹ The first are called the “elect angels” who in eternity past have chosen to trust in the LORD. The second are called “fallen angels.” In eternity past they chose to follow the example of their leader Satan and reject the LORD.

There are currently three general categories of fallen angels.

The first consists of those who are confined in the Abyss, which is a compartment of Hell. At the time of the Great Tribulation they shall be released and wreak havoc on the earth:

Revelation 9:1-3 “The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.”

The second category consists of those who are confined to the surface of the earth, but without physical bodies. They are often called demons or evil spirits in Scripture. To be able to function physically they must possess the body of a man or animal.

Matthew 12:43-45 “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”

However, even without physical bodies this category seem to be able to deceive men by twisting their thoughts through dreams, visions, or emotions.

¹ The word translated “angel” in Hebrew is מַלְאָךְ {mal·äk'}. The word translated “angel” in Greek is ἄγγελος {ä'n-ge-los}. Both Hebrew and Greek words generally mean “messenger” or “ambassador.”

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

The third category of fallen angels consists of those who currently exist throughout the universe, among the stars.² They, along with Satan, will be cast out of the stars down to the earth at the time of the middle of the Great Tribulation. When the verses below speak of the stars being flung or cast to the earth, it is speaking of the fallen angels who currently hold those stars in rebellion against the LORD.

Revelation 12:3-4 “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns (*Satan*) and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.

Isaiah 34:4 “All the stars of the heavens ³ will be dissolved ⁴ and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.⁵

Luke 10:18 “He (*Jesus*) replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.⁶

Luke 21:26 “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

There are a lot of angels. The elect angels are numbered three places in scripture.

Revelation 5:11-13 “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living *things* and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’”

Daniel 7:9-10 “As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His

² Some operate on earth. Their leaders appear in Daniel 10 as the “Prince of Persia” and the “Prince of Greece.”

³ Stars are commonly used to denote angels, here - fallen angels.

⁴ The Hebrew word here is מַכָּה {mä·kak'}. A more common translation of is “decay” or “rot.”

⁵ Revelation 6:13 “and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.

⁶ This was a vision of what will happen at the middle of the Tribulation (Revelation 12:9).

throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.”

Psalms 68:17 “The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands.”

The first two verse has been interpreted to mean (1,000 x 1,000) a million times (10,000 x 10,000) a hundred million. That adds up 100 trillion angels. The last verse concerning the chariots of God has been interpreted to mean (10,000) times (1,000 x 1,000) a million. That adds up to ten billion chariots. Whether or not the terms are supposed to mean exactly those numbers can be argued. At any rate, the term is at least meant to indicate an innumerable number of angels and chariots. It would take a lot of angels to inhabit just the all the galaxies in the universe. According to astronomers, there are probably more than 170 billion galaxies in the observable Universe, stretching out into a region of space 13.8 billion light-years away from us in all directions.

According to Job, the elect angels (morning stars) existed before the world was restored in Genesis 1:1. Presumably, the fallen, rebellious angels were existent at the same time.

Job 38:4-7 “Where were you when I (*the LORD*) laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

At one time all the angels were at peace with the LORD. Satan himself was one of the guardian cherubim before the throne of the LORD.

Ezekiel 28:12b-17 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.

Besides the spiritual conflict that we see on earth, there is also ongoing in the heavens the ancient conflict between the angels of God and the fallen angels. It will be culminated at the end of the Tribulation.

Revelation 12:7-9 “And there was war in heaven.⁷ Michael ⁸ 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 serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Daniel 7:13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.⁹ He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.”

The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ not only affects the human race, it also affects the angels:

Colossians 1:19-20 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven,¹⁰ by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Evidently, as Job seems to attest, in eternity past, the angels also fell under the shadow of sin.

Job 25:4-6 “How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars (*angels*) are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is but a maggot-- a son of man, who is only a worm!”

The incarnation of Christ evidently had the same significance for the elect angels as it did for the believers of the Old Testament. As those Old Testament believers had

⁷ The term “heaven” in both Greek and Hebrew can mean one of three things: the sky of atmosphere around the earth, the universe, or the throne of God.

⁸ Daniel 12:1 “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.”

⁹ Anyone who has ever seen the full display of the Milky Way can understand that the “clouds of heaven” refers to the stars or here, the angelic inhabitants of the stars.

¹⁰ This verse seems to indicate that Christ’s death effected not only the reconciliation of the human race to God, but also the angelic creation. Some have alluded to Job 4:18 and Job 15:15 in support of the idea that the elect angels required reconciliation.

Job 4:18 “If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error,”

Job 15:15 “If God places no trust in his holy ones,¹⁰ if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes,”

looked forward for thousands of years to the coming of the promised Messiah and His reconciling work, so the elect angels had looked forward, possibly for eons, to that time when the Creator would become a Creature and reconcile all things to Himself.

Ephesians 1:9-10 “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he foreordained in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”¹¹

So, when you consider the gathering of angels over Shepherd’s Field outside of Bethlehem that saw the LORD incarnated in the little child laid on the bed of grain in the manger (feeding trough), you must understand this. They were not just impartial observers. The life and death of Christ was personally important to them and a source of rejoicing.

Luke 2:8-15 “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.¹² 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 of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem ¹⁴ and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’”

In the winter in Judea, it is the rainy season. It is generally covered with clouds as the prevailing moist winds off of the Mediterranean collide with the mountains of Judea to create cloudy and rainy conditions. It isn’t likely that it was “a midnight clear.” I believe it likely that the angels consisted of “the twelve legions of angels” who may have been Jesus’ honor guard.¹⁵ I believe they probably approached the earth through the clouds with their spokesman in the lead. First, he broke through the clouds and made his announcement. Then as he finished, the other twelve legions (60,000) broke through the clouds and filled the sky.

¹¹ Also in this connection, in Revelation 12:10 an elect angel describes believers as “our brothers.”

¹² This was the Shepherd’s field outside of Bethlehem where the sheep for the Temple sacrifices were kept. The word “flocks” is in the plural. Considering the sheep they had to be stockpiling for the upcoming Passover, there had to be tens of thousands of sheep being kept there. The number of shepherds was at least in the hundreds.

¹³ A feeding trough – reminiscent of a grain offering.

¹⁴ Remember that Bethlehem means “house of bread.”

¹⁵ Matthew 26:53 “Do you think I (Jesus) cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”

It occurs to me that this host of angels then ascended back above the clouds above Bethlehem and thus disappeared. They then for a time emanated the light which was seen as the “star” by the magi in the cloudless east where they came from.

Matthew 2:1 “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod,¹⁶ Magi from the east ¹⁷ came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’”¹⁸

The Focus of Angels on the Coming Life, Ministry, and Death of Christ Is Portrayed in the Tabernacle

The Ark of the Covenant, which is a picture of the birth (Gold Pot of Manna), the life (Tables of the Law), death and resurrection (Aaron’s dead rod which struck the rock and later came to life) of Jesus Christ. The Ark was surmounted by two cherubim gazing down on the Ark even as the angels later gazed down on the baby in the manger in Bethlehem:

Exodus 25:17-20 “Make an atonement cover of pure gold--two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover.”

¹⁶ *The rule of the Idumean Herod fulfilled the curse of Deuteronomy 28:43-44, that an alien among them would rule over them (the Jews).*

¹⁷ *These would have come from the region of Babylon where the study of the stars was a long practice. The number of Magi is not given, but the tradition of three Magi is probably based on the number of gifts, gold, incense and myrrh.*

¹⁸ *Between the birth, which coincided with the rising of the star, and the arrival of the Magi from the East could have been no less than eight days as that was the shortest time one could travel by fast camel to Jerusalem from Babylon according to ancient authorities. I believe it took about 30 days for the Magi to notice the stationary star that had risen above Judea (Jacob), to interpret it as the sign spoken about in the Old Testament as the forerunner of the Messiah, the King of the Jews (“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” Numbers 24:17), to organize an expedition, and travel to Jerusalem. Why didn’t the Jews notice the star? Because winter is the rainy season, when the sky is usually obscured with clouds. In the East where the Magi were from, however, it is usually dry and cloudless this time of year. Some have claimed it took the Magi two years to travel from Babylon or Persia. This is ridiculous! In Ezra 8, Ezra led a expedition of over 2,000 men and their wives and children from Persia to Jerusalem. This would have meant there were at least 8,000 to 10,000 people. It took exactly 4 months!*

The inside of the linen curtain walls of the tabernacle was also to be covered with angels, portraying their intimate concern with all that the tabernacle portrayed in its furniture and ritual:

Exodus 26:1-2 “Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn,¹⁹ with cherubim²⁰ worked into them by a skilled craftsman. All the curtains are to be the same size--twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide.”

Exodus 26:31-33 “Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain.”

A Few Other verses to think about:

Other verses where “stars” are associated with “angels.”

Genesis 15:5 “He (*the LORD*) took him (*Abraham*) outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your *seed* be.’”

Genesis 22:17 “In blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies..” ASV

Exodus 32:13 “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swore by your own self, and said to them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give to your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.” ASV

Judges 5:20 “From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.”

¹⁹ *It seems to me likely that blue stood for Jesus incarnation, as he came down from Heaven (blue). The purple stands for the fact that He was the promised King (purple). The crimson / scarlet stands for Jesus’ death and identification with our sin. Isaiah 1:18 “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’” Also, the red in “red as crimson” is the word Adamah from which the name “Adam” is derived.*

²⁰ *In Solomon’s Temple the curtains were replaced by gold covered cedar walls with cherubim carved into them (2 Chronicles 3:7).*

Job 38:4-7 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone--while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”

Psalms 148:2 “Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.”

Isaiah 14:12-13a “How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star (*Lucifer*), son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I (*Satan*) will raise my throne above the stars of God.”

Isaiah 40:22 “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.”

Jeremiah 12:3 “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

Obadiah 1:3-4 “The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,’ declares the LORD.”

Jude 1:13 “They (*false teachers*) are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars (*fallen angels*), for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.”

Ephesians 4:10 “He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.”²¹

²¹ *This seems to be teaching us that the whole universe will be filled with God’s children. God’s unlimited galaxies are our inheritance.*