

Angels and Demons

Having looked at the doctrine and attributes of God, we now turn to see what the Bible teaches about the rest of the created world.

- This reminds us that there are only two kinds of things in existence: the [uncreated] Creator and the [created] creation.

Instead of looking first at the doctrine of man, we will consider the created beings in the heavenly realm called angels.

In many reformed circles, little to no attention is paid to the unseen angelic realm.

- This is likely due to an over-correction of the abuse of many Catholics, who often worship and pray to angels, and the abuse of Charismatics, who see a demon hiding under every rock, and the cause of everything from flat tires to debt.

To compound the problem, we live in a highly scientific world, whose worldview teaches that unless something can be observed or measured, it is to be rejected as foolishness and pre-scientific myth.

- Because of this skepticism of any world or any beings beyond those of our senses, modern people have by and large lost touch with the supernatural and preternatural.

Though Christians believe in God, many have unwittingly absorbed enough of the anti-supernaturalism of their culture that belief in angels seems foreign to them. As John Frame says, “It seems that belief in God is hard enough. Why add further difficulty by bringing angels into it?”¹

But if we are to take the Bible seriously, and even more, literally, we must deal with these supernatural beings that pervade the pages of Scripture.

In fact, the Scripture itself mentions angels over 300 times, which means we would be wise to take angels into account in the decisions of our lives.

¹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (P & R: Phillipsburg, 2014), 777.

Angels

As Frames notes, words translated “angel” occur 203 times in the ESV, and similar being appear under other names, such as “living creatures”, “cherubim”, “seraphim”, “sons of God”, “sons of the mighty”, “spirits”, “holy ones”, “watchers”, as well as the beings Paul calls “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” Even the “horses and chariots of fire” of 2 Kn. 6 were evidently driven by angels.

Two of them appear by name: Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26) and Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7).

The angels are vast in number, as indicated by terms such as “hosts”, “camp”, “legions”, and “thousands.”²

Though these beings appear often in the biblical story, Scripture never directly discusses their creation or nature³, and seems to be more concerned about the work of angels than about their nature.

However, the Scriptures do give us a small picture of their story:

- In Rev. 12:3-4, an apocalyptic passage full of powerful imagery, the apostle John describes a “sign that appears in the heavens.” Of it he says, “Behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.”
 - Though somewhat cryptic, most theologians are in agreement that this likely is retelling the story of the great rebellion that took place in the heavens sometime before Genesis 3.
 - Basically, there was an angelic coup d’état, wherein Satan, as leader of the opposition party, tried to overthrow the Lord GOD’s government

² These references were taken from Frame, 771.

³ It should be noted that in many instances, when angels are beheld by mere mortals, the result is terror and fear. However, in other instances (e.g. Gen. 18), these angelic beings are able to take on the appearance of humans (cf. Hebrews 13:2).

and rule. Again, we are not given many details (apart from other cryptic passages such as Isa. 14 and Eze. 28), but it seems that this mutiny is quickly and severely dealt with by the LORD of hosts. When the dust is all settled, Satan and a third of the angels – those who joined him in his plot to overthrow God’s rule – have been excommunicated from the heavens and given the earth as an habitation.

If this is correct, then the remaining two-thirds of the angels who did not rise up in rebellion against YHWH were not eternally cursed, and thus are still granted the privilege of being YHWH’s messengers and workers.

Regarding these remaining “good” angels, they carry out many God-given duties that the Scriptures enumerate:

- They are YHWH’s attendants, standing in His presence, worshiping Him day and night (Job 38:7; Isa. 6; Psa. 103:20; 148:2; Rev. 5:11).
- Some of them surround YHWH in His theophanic glory-cloud (2 Sam. 22:11; Psa. 18:10; 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16).
- They guard God’s sanctuary against intrusion, first in Eden (Gen. 3:24), later by their symbolic presence in the tabernacle and temple (Exo. 25-26, 36-37; 1 Kn. 6-8). The images of the cherubim in the temple picture their presence with the Lord Himself on His heavenly throne.

In redemptive history, angels serve as God’s messengers to human beings:

- Often they were ministers of God’s word to His people (especially before they had their own Scriptures).
- They appeared to, ministered to, and protected, key ‘players’ in the drama of God’s redemptive plan (e.g. Abraham, Jacob, Elisha, etc. in the OT, and apostles like Peter and Paul in the NT [Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7ff., 23; 27:23; Rev.1:1]).
- They announced the giving of the law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).

- They announce key events in the great events of salvation (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; 10:5-6; Matt. 1:20-21; Luke 1:11, 26; Rev. 18:21; 19:17; 22:6, 16).

Angels had a special ministry in their relation to Jesus:

- Luke 1:26-38 (Gabriel's words to Mary).
- Luke 2:8-14 – the multitude of heavenly host praising God for Jesus' birth.
- During Jesus' wearying 40 days of fasting and temptation, Mark tells us that angels were dispatched to minister to Him (1:12-13). Matthew notes that they especially ministered to Him after passing this test (4:11).
- As Jesus agonizingly prays in Gethsemane, we are told that an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen Him in this (Luke 22:43).⁴
- After Jesus is raised from the dead, angels guard His tomb and deliver messages for His apostles and followers (Matt. 28:2-7, etc.; Acts 1:10).
- Finally, when Jesus returns, they will join again in the great events (Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thes. 1:7; Jude 14; Rev. 5:2, etc.), and have been commissioned to gather the elect (Matt. 24:31) and cast the ungodly into the fire (13:41, 49).

As concerns us, we may say, generally speaking, that God's angels are His divinely appointed "ministering spirits" who have been "sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

To summarize: the unfallen angels adore God and seek to carry out His purposes in the world, most notably:

1. Bringing God's Word
2. Fighting God's battles
3. Ministering to God's people

⁴ Many manuscripts do not include verses 43 and 44.

Satan and Demons

Not only are there ‘good’ angels; the Scriptures also clearly and frequently teach that there are ‘bad’ angels as well.

Since everything that God made was originally good, it follows that these bad angels – what we might call demons – must have defected from their good condition sometime after the original creation.⁵ But since the tempter of Genesis 3 was a fallen angel, the angelic fall evidently preceded the fall of mankind.

- Scripture does not narrate the fall of Satan and his angels, but Isaiah 14:3-21 and Ezekiel 28:2-19 deal with the defeat of the kings of Babylon and Tyre, respectively, using imagery suggesting analogies with the fall of Satan.⁶

That there are evil angels is clearly implied in the many the spiritual warfare texts in Scripture, Ephesians 6 being the clearest:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (verses 10-12)

The Scriptures seem to teach that there is a leader over these fallen angels: Satan.

- In Matt. 12:24, he is called “the prince of the demons.”

⁵ 2 Peter 2:4 seems to teach this. Is the “sin” Peter mentions their fall with Satan (pre-Genesis 3), or, is he referring to their sin in Genesis 6, when “the sons of God” mingled with “the daughters of man”? Though we are not told, Peter does say that God “cast them into Tartarus, committing them to chains of gloomy darkness, to be kept until the judgment.” Is this judgement referring to the flood, the extermination of Sodom, or the end-of-the-ages? Again, we are not told. Perhaps it is another both/and, which seems to fit the context of both 2 Peter 2 and 3. This also hints that demons were involved in the sins leading up to the flood, and the debauchery in Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁶ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 775. It can be noted that these kings have many ‘satanic’ characteristics and tendencies, including pride, vanity, hatred of YHWH and His people, and love of the world. This is clearly seen not only in the context of the prophets, but also clearly in the book of Revelation, where we see a close correlation between the wicked nations (led by their ‘kings’) and Satan himself. In the words of Jesus, we might say of these two kings, they are like their father the devil. Thus, contrary to the liberals who cringe at using these two OT texts to teach [secondarily] of some kind of angelic ‘fall’, there seems to be a good biblical-theological warrant for doing so.

- In Matt. 25:41 the demons are called Satan’s angels, inferring that he is their leader and commander-in-chief.

Contrary to the popular pop caricatures of Satan (ugly, pitchfork, horns, tail), the Scriptures teach anything but him being a weak, cute, silly personage.

- In 2 Cor. 4:4, Paul says that Satan is “the god of this world.” As such, he has the power to blind the minds of unbelievers from seeing the glory of God in the face of Christ in the gospel.
- In Eph. 2:2, Paul calls him “the prince of the power of the air”, or, as the NLT renders it, “the commander of the powers of the unseen world.”
 - In this text, Paul tells us that unbelievers by nature follow him by⁷ following the ideologies of the world (whether atheism, agnosticism, or pagan religions void of the true and Triune God).
- In 2 Cor. 11:14-15, Paul tells us that Satan and his servants⁸ disguise themselves as angels of light.
- In Rev. 12:9, the apostle John says that Satan is like a devouring dragon who devours his prey by deceiving them (lit. “the deceiver of the entire inhabited world”). In Rev. 12:17, “the dragon,” furious that he could not destroy the Messiah, becomes furious with “the woman” who bore the Messiah and goes off “to make war with the rest of Messiah’s offspring – that is, on those who keep God’s commandments and who hold to Jesus’ testimony.”
 - Some he attacks through the deception of religion; some with materialism; some with atheism; some with false “Christs.” He cares not which lie those made in God’s image believe, as long as they are kept from seeing the true God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ The Greek literally says, that before they were sovereignly regenerated (2:5), these believers formerly were in a state [aorist participle] of being dead in their trespasses and sins (2:1), in which they characteristically “walked” [aorist] “according to” [*kata*] “the age of this world” which is ruled by the god of this age (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (NET). That Paul repeats the preposition *kata* means that he is likely using the two prepositional phrases in parallel. Simply put there is an overlap between following ‘the ways of this world’ (NIV) and following Satan. The latter may use the former as ‘bait.’ This is because the world naturally appeals to and incites and tempts the “flesh” (*sarx*, NIV = “sinful nature”).

⁸ Satan’s “servants” are likely *both* the false teachers in Corinth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25-26), *as well as* the fallen angelic host that he leads. In fact, the two are inseparable (i.e. false teachers are demonically influenced, whether they realize it or not).

- In John 8:44, Jesus Himself explains how Satan loves to lie and deceive and murder. This is because “he has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”⁹
- The apostle Peter says that Satan is the believer’s adversary, and thus be watchful of this one who prowls around like a roaring lion as he seeks some helpless victim to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).
- Finally, John calls Satan, “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). As a wicked prosecutor, he accuses God’s people “day and night” before God.¹⁰

Regarding Satan’s demons, Scripture teaches:

- These fallen angels support Satan’s activity in the world, which is always to fight against [the true] God’s kingdom.
 - Cf. Rev. 12:7-12; Eph. 6:12
- They have the ability to oppress and take possession of both humans and animals.
 - Humans: Matt. 4:24; 8:16, etc.
 - Animals: Matt. 8:31
- That these “principalities and powers” are behind the false religions and idolatry that pervades this fallen world.
 - Paul says that demons are the forces that are behind all of the pagan’s “so-called gods” in 1 Cor. 8:5.
 - In 1 Cor. 10:20, he teaches that when pagans offer their sacrifices to their idols, they are in reality offering them to demons (which is why the

⁹ Satan’s power thus lies in his power to deceive people with lies that appear reasonable, or, even as truth. Thus, our greatest defense against this is to be well-acquainted with the truth of God. He especially tempts and deceives God’s people by twisting God’s word (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). His servants do the same (cf. Eph. 4:14; 2 Cor. 2:11; 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; 2 Peter; 1 John 3; Jude; Rev. 2).

¹⁰ Satan’s other power lies in accusing us of sin. Remarkably, he is legit here. We have sinned. God should punish us with judgment. But praise be to Jesus that we overcome Satan’s accusations “by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11)!! We need to heed Luther’s words: “So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is, there I shall be also.’” Or, we can remember the lyrics of “Before the Throne of God Above.” Note: the Hebrew אֲשֶׁטָן (*hassatan*) literally means “the accuser/adversary.” This description later became a title for this serpentine demon.

believers in Corinth should play around with their pagan rituals and meals; to do so is to “participate with demons”).

- Related to this, the OT teaches that the demons received authority to rule over all the nations of the world, except for Israel, which according to Daniel 12:1, was to be overseen by the archangel Michael.¹¹
 - Deut. 32:8-9 – “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.”
 - Deut. 4:19-20 – “And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.”
 - Psalm 82 tells us that “God [אֱלֹהִים] has taken His place in the council of gods [בְּעֵרַת־אֱלֹהִים]; in the midst of the gods [אֱלֹהִים] He renders judgment [on them].”
 - ➔ A favorite of Mormons and a plague to Protestants, this Psalm is a both/and situation: that is, God is literally judging the other “gods” (demons), who are unjustly ruling over their allotted nations. But God is also condemning the human kings and leaders (Israel’s especially) who likewise were divinely commissioned to rule over and administer justice to the nations as well (which ultimately belong to YHWH [cf. Psa. 24:1, etc.]).¹²

¹¹ Of course, with the coming of Christ, and His decisive defeat of Satan and his host by the cross (cf. Col. 2:14), Christ now has all dominion over all nations, and calls us to reclaim them for His name (through the preaching of the gospel).

¹² This is because in the mind of the ANE – Israel included – the god and his king [“son”] worked together ruling over their domain. For Israel, see how close YHWH’s rule of Israel is linked with the Davidic king’s rule in places like 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 2; 110, etc. This is why it was compulsory for the king to frequently read and memorize YHWH’s *torah* (see esp. Deut. 17:19). YHWH ruled His nation Israel *through* His “son”, the king. So also did the other demons/gods through their ‘kings.’ Which is why the physical battles between Israel and the nations, especially in the conquest era in Joshua/Judges is often interpreted as spiritual warfare (cf. Exo. 15; Judg. 5; Dan.10).

- In Dan. 10:13, the archangel Gabriel tells the prophet that he had to fight for twenty-one days against “the prince of the kingdom of Persia.” This is likely not the physical king, but rather the demon who was allotted Persia. So powerful was this demonic prince that his fellow archangel Michael had to come and assist him in battle.
- According to Ephesians 6:10, these “rulers” and “authorities” and “cosmic powers over this present darkness” and “spiritual forces in the heavenly places” do battle against God’s people. Paul calls this era of spiritual warfare the “evil day”.
 - The following context seems to teach that these evil hosts especially attack the believer’s grasp of it and belief in the gospel.

One day, thankfully, this battle will finally be over.

- When Jesus returns, He will decisively and easily destroy all of His enemies – whether human or demonic.
 - Though He dealt the death blow to Satan and his host through the cross and resurrection (cf. Col. 2:14)¹³, Jesus has promised to come and finish the task of eternal judgment all who refuse His reign.
- Matt. 25:41 – Jesus has already reserved¹⁴ the lake of fire for Satan and his angels.
- Rev. 20:7-10, 13-14 – “And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven¹ and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever...And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the

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¹⁴ This is a perfect participle, signifying that this is already a done deal.

lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Until then, Scripture commands us to resist the devil and his minions:

- James 4:7 – “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”
- 1 Pet. 5:9 – “Resist him, firm in your faith.”

Though our foe is mighty, he is a defeated foe. Christ has conquered and is conquering. And in Him, we are more than conquerors. Nothing can separate us from God’s great love for us in Christ, “neither death nor life, *nor angels or rulers*, nor things present nor things to come, *nor powers*, nor height nor depth, *nor anything else in all creation*”! (Rom. 8:38-39)

Because of the triumph of the cross, we may confidently sing with Luther:

*A mighty Fortress is our God / a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood / of mortal ills prevailing;
For still our ancient foe / doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great / and armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

*And though this world with devils filled / should threaten to undo us
We will not fear for God hath willed / His truth to triumph through us
The prince of darkness grim / we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure / for lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

Excursus

As we are now, in a sense, lower than the angels (cf. Heb. 2:5-9), so Jesus was *for a little while* lower than the angels. But He accepted that humiliation so that, having defeated sin, He could rise above the angels and bring His people with Him. We will be raised above the angels!! Paul even says that one day we will judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

Finally, it is worth noting that there is one thing we can experience that angels cannot: redemption. In God’s inscrutable wisdom and sovereign will (Eph. 1:11), He saw fit to provide salvation only for His image-bearers: humanity. The unfallen angels have the blessing of never experienced sin; however, they will never know

what it is like to praise God in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. As for the fallen angels, there is no redemption offered them, but only the fearful certainty of judgment (Matt. 8:29).