

## WHEN DID GOD CREATE ANGELS?

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Angels are a fascinating subject, yet one that rarely is discussed in either church pulpits or religious literature. As a result, on occasion most Christians are left with a gaping void in their knowledge concerning angels, and therefore they frequently turn to the media or other poorly informed sources for answers to their questions about these heavenly creatures. In this day and age, one need not look very far to find a veritable plethora of information on these oft'-misunderstood heavenly sentinels. Sadly, most of this "information" is nothing more than speculation, and thus the sincere querist goes away confused about what the Bible actually says concerning angels.

The word "angel" is the translation of the Greek *angelos* and the Hebrew *malawk*, meaning "messenger" (Woods, 1986, p. 179; Girdlestone, 1973, p. 41). Thus, the word actually says nothing about the **nature** of the being, but speaks instead to its **function**. The nature of the messenger must be determined from the specific context.

On occasion, the word angel is used of a **human** messenger (as we ordinarily think of that term). Haggai was referred to as "Jehovah's messenger [*malawk*]" (Haggai 1: 13). God, through Malachi, referred to a priest as "my messenger [*malawk*]" (Malachi 2:7). And, John the Baptist also was referred to as a "messenger" [*malawk*—3:1]. Matthew (11: 10) likewise called John the Baptist a "messenger" (*angelos*).

On the other hand, the word angel often is used to speak of a **spiritual** messenger—that is, one not composed of flesh and blood. In speaking about the word "angel," Guy N. Woods noted:

[T]he term is of varied usage in the Scriptures. Angels are both earthly and heavenly; possessed of flesh, thus men; not of flesh and blood, and hence heavenly beings, and **not** men. Angels of the latter classification are spirits, incorporeal beings, and thus without the characteristics of men in the flesh (1986, pp. 180-181, emp. in orig.).

Indeed, the Bible refers to angels as "spirits" (Hebrews 1: 14), and the Scriptures are explicit in their teaching that spirits have neither flesh nor bones (Luke 24:39). We know that these special messengers cannot marry (Matthew 22:30; see also Kaiser, 1992, pp. 33-38). And, since angels are created beings (Nehemiah 9:6; Colossians 1:16; Psalm 148: 2,5), while immortal (cf. Luke 20:36), they are not eternal, for only Deity is eternal and therefore worthy of worship (Revelation 22: 9). As Douglas Kelly observed, angels "are immortal, but only the Triune God is eternal" (1997, p. 93).

Angels worship and serve God (Isaiah 6: 2-3; Revelation 22:8-9), and in ancient times were able to take on the form of humans as they delivered messages for Him (an angel spoke to Hagar to provide instructions from God—Genesis 16:10-12; an angel told Mary that she would bear the Christ-child—Luke 1:26ff.; angels were mentioned by Stephen in his stirring speech recorded in Acts 7:38,53, which referred to Exodus 19:18-25 where God addressed Moses through an angel during the wilderness wanderings). In some way, angels act on behalf of Christians. The writer of the book of Hebrews commented: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?" (1:13-14). Eventually, angels even take the spirits of the righteous dead into a state of happiness (Luke 16:22).

In many ways, angels are completely different from humans. The "sons of God" (as Scripture sometimes refers to them—Job 1:6; 38:7) often surpass the "sons of men." For example, they are stronger (2 Samuel 24:16), more intelligent (Daniel 9:21-22), and swifter (Daniel 9:21) than any mere man. Furthermore, they will accompany Christ at His Second Coming, "rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). These heavenly beings exist to serve and praise their eternal Creator. Realizing their superiority to humans in certain areas, it is all the more amazing that they so fully devote themselves to God's service while we, who are the apple of God's eye, often fail to serve and obey Jehovah in even the most menial tasks.

Yet, in some respects we humans can relate to angels because like us, angels are intelligent (Daniel 9:21-22; 10:14; Revelation 19: 10) and have emotions (1 Peter 1:12—desirous; Job 38:7—joyful). They also possess free will and the ability to reason (Jude 6; cf. 2 Peter 2:4). We know that, like humans, angels are responsible to some kind of heavenly law, for some sinned (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and sin is transgression of law (1 John 3:4). Sadly, whenever they sinned, they were beyond the redemptive plan of God, for the atonement of Christ does not apply to them. The writer of Hebrews stated: "Not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham" (2:16). Yet while rebellious angels were without a redemptive plan, God prepared one for man (Ephesians 2:8-9; et al.). Little wonder, then, that the psalmist asked: "**Who is man that thou art mindful of him?**" (8:4, emp. added)!

Through the ages, numerous trustworthy and intelligent people have seen angels (cf. Luke 1:11,26ff.; Acts 12:7ff.,

etc.). Thus, at some point the Lord created them. But when? Truthfully, we have no way of knowing the exact time of their creation since the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to reveal that information to us in God's Word. In his book, *All the Angels in the Bible*, respected Bible scholar Herbert W. Lockyer observed regarding these heavenly messengers: "But just when, in the mysterious revolutions of eternity, they were called into existence is not a subject of divine revelation" (1995, p. 14). Wayne Jackson noted that there is an "absence of explicit testimony" regarding the creation of angels (1993, p. 208). Both writers are correct. Yet there are some "hints" in Scripture.

For example, we know that angels must have been created **on** or **before** the first day of creation, because Job 38:1-7 makes it clear that "the sons of God [i.e., angels] shouted for joy" when God laid the foundations of the Earth (vss. 6-7). This certainly indicates that the angels were present as eyewitnesses to the creation of the Universe.

Thus, the question then becomes, did the creation of angels occur on day one of the Creation week, or at some point before day one? It is important to remember that angels are messengers, thus necessitating someone to whom they could deliver a message. Jackson has suggested that "... a plausible opinion would be that they were brought into existence at the commencement of the creation week" (1993, p. 208). Why might this be so? Lockyer explained as follows:

The heavens include all that are in them created by God, and among these must be the angels (Genesis 2:1). Among the hosts of heaven the angels are the principal part. They are expressly called "**the heavenly host**" and "**the armies of heaven**" (Luke 2:13) [p. 14, emp. in orig.].

Nehemiah 9:6 also is used to speak to the very point Dr. Lockyer was making.

Thou art Jehovah, even thou alone; **thou hast made ...the heaven of heavens, with all their host**, the earth and all things that are thereon, the seas and all that is in them, and thou preservest them all; and **the host of heaven worshippeth thee**.

In commenting on this passage, Hebrew language expert Weston W. Fields wrote:

While the passages in Genesis...mention only the making of the firmament, sun, moon, stars, and animals, it must be carefully marked by the reader that in Nehemiah 9:6 the objects of God's making include **the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and the earth, and everything contained in and on it, and the seas and everything they contain**, as well as the **hosts of heaven** (probably angels) [1976, p. 61, emp. and parenthetical comment in orig.].

If you combine the various passages and concepts discussed by Lockyer, Jackson, and Fields, they seem to allow for a "plausible opinion" that the angels "were brought into existence at the commencement of the creation week."

Some, however, have pointed out what they perceive to be a serious "time problem" inherent in this particular viewpoint. Their suggestion is that if God had created angels on day one of the Creation week, then there would not have been enough time for Satan to rebel against Jehovah and to

be cast out of heaven (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) prior to the events recorded in Genesis 3 (see Gray, 2000, p. 73). But the problem is indeed "perceived" rather than real. How long could it take for the "sons of the evil one" (as Christ referred to them in Matthew 13:38) to engage in their ruthless spiritual quackery and rebel against their Maker? Adam and Eve accomplished it in a veritable heartbeat (Genesis 3: 1ff.). Why would it have taken the devil any longer?

Those who contend that the angels were created **prior** to the first day of the Creation week do not believe that the texts in Genesis 2:1 and Exodus 20:11 are speaking of angelic beings. In his widely used commentary on Genesis, H.C. Leupold wrote in regard to the "host" of Genesis 2:1:

Host may refer to the stars; cf. Neh. 9:6; Deut. 4:19; 17:3; II Kings 17:16, etc. It may refer to angels: I Kings 22:19; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 148:2. Here its connection determines its reference to the things just made. Since the creation account has up to this point said nothing about angels, it will hardly be safe to advance the claim that the angels are meant to be included in this term. The time of the creation of angels is as little fixed by this account as falling on this day as it is assigned to the fourth. We simply know nothing definite as to the time of their creation (1942, 1:101).

In this area, it is best not to be dogmatic regarding the time element involved in the creation of angels. Nevertheless, it is comforting to realize that even if we do not know all that we would like to know about certain matters (the "secret things of God"—Deuteronomy 29:29), we **do** have all the information we need to get to heaven (2 Timothy 3:16).

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