

STUDY 6 Angels

Four main points

1. Holy Angels
2. Satan
3. Demons
4. Spiritual Warfare

1. Holy Angels

Reading:

Heb 1:14; Ps. 148:2-5; Col. 1:16; Mt. 22:30
Isa. 6: 1-8; Dan. 9:20, 21; Lk. 1:19; Jude 8-10; Rev. 12:7
KTT 98-101
H & W 61-62

2. Satan

Reading:

Isaiah: 14:3, 4, 12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19
Matthew 13:19

3. Demons

Reading:

Matthew 4: 23-24
2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6

4. Spiritual Warfare

Reading:

Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 2:13-15
1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7

1. Holy Angels

Religions generally acknowledge the existence of a spiritual world but the existence of spiritual beings is difficult to prove and belief in them, along with everything that cannot be subjected to scientific scrutiny, has been doubted for centuries. In the Bible angels appear at a number of major events. The Greek word behind 'angel' can also be translated 'messenger' but the context is usually sufficient to guide in translation. The Bible speaks of the creation of the host of heaven but this could mean the stars. Some passages clearly speak of the creation of angels (Ps. 148:2, 5; Col. 1:16). Though angels are not mentioned in the six days of creation in Genesis it may well be appropriate to include them with the 'heavens' of day one.

Angels have no flesh and bone (Lk. 24:39), do not marry (Matt. 22:30), and are invisible (Col. 1:16). Angels sometimes appear in bodily form but it is hard to say whether these ethereal bodies are real or apparent. They are finite and limited and cannot be in more than one place at one time. Angels are personal beings and not ghosts. They are powerful and ready to do what God commands. They are immortal in the sense that they are not subject to death. The 'angel of the LORD' is sometimes given such authority by God as to make distinction between the angel and God himself difficult.

The number of angels is represented in Scripture as so vast as to be uncountable. Their full number was created in the beginning. Cherubim and seraphim are classes of angels but although there could be other groups (powers, authorities and so on) nothing definite can be said. The cherubim were celestial beings sent by God to guard the tree of life in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). They were represented symbolically on the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:18–22), in the tabernacle (Ex. 26:31) and temple (2 Chron. 3:7), and seen by the prophet Ezekiel in a vision of the restored Jerusalem (Ezek. 41:18–20). Only two angels are named in the Bible. Gabriel is given the task of special messenger. Michael is a valiant warrior for God and is the only being in Scripture designated 'archangel'. Other names come from Roman Catholic tradition.

Although we probably have a picture in our minds of an angel, this owes more to artistic licence than anything else. Angels (cherubim and seraphim) are sometimes said to have wings (as least symbolically). They are also described as men in white, shining garments. Angels praise God, serve God and act as messengers. They protect little ones (Matt. 18:10) and seem to be in the Church (Rev. 2:1) but the notion of personal 'guardian angels' is stretching the point.

2. Satan

Despite the opening of the Bible and the account of 'the serpent' who tempts Eve (Gen. 3:1), Satan is seldom mentioned in the OT. Later Rabbinic thought speculated about the number of the archangels and has variously come up with the number 4, 6, or 7. Some Christian thought has identified Satan as a fallen archangel, Lucifer, by making reference to Isaiah 14:12, which in fairness seems to refer more to the fallen King of Babylon than to Satan. Consequently there is a great deal of muddle around the person of Satan, with ideas coming from various sources (see also Ezek. 28).

In the New Testament the enemy of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ, is variously called 'the enemy', 'the evil one', 'the prince of this world', 'the adversary', 'the Devil' (37 times), 'Satan' (36 times), 'Beelzebul' (7 times). This is hardly marginal to the content of Scripture though it is fashionable either to disregard supernatural evil personalities as an outdated myth or to become obsessed with them.

Those who see angels and demons around every corner do not help the cause of the traditional view of the spiritual world. However, there are serious studies about spiritual beings and their influence in the world that merit consideration. The Bible gives no description of the appearance of Satan or of the fallen angels. Red body, horns, tail and trident are not Biblical images. Neither holy angels nor Satan are described in the Bible in any detail.

Whatever conclusion we reach about Lucifer, the weight of the Scriptural evidence is that Satan is a fallen angel who fell from his high position because of pride and is a leader of lesser, fallen angels (Mt. 25:41) whose purpose is to separate human beings from God and distract them from worshipping him. The name Satan means 'adversary'. He is a liar, a deceiver and an accuser of the people of God. His work is accomplished under many deceptive guises. He has great power but is not omnipotent.

Satan has been evil from the beginning (1 Jn 3:8) and is a dangerous enemy. Through temptation, Satan attempts to work for evil (Jn 13:2; Acts 5:3), by hindering God's workers (1 Thes 2:18), by accusing Christians before God (Rev. 12:10), and by controlling evil people who resist the gospel, (Rev 2:9, 13). He wields great influence but is nevertheless restricted and he is destined to be cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20: 10). Most importantly, Jesus, through his death and resurrection has won the final victory over Satan, by his blood.

3. Demons

Fallen angels or demons are created beings, personal, immortal, and incapable of reconciliation with God. They have great power as compared with humans, but little power as compared with God. The KJV uses 'devils' (plural) to translate the word that we now translate 'demons'. The Devil (singular) or Satan can be clearly distinguished from the demons. When God saw all that he had created he saw that it was very good. The spiritual beings must also have been very good. Yet there are now evil spiritual beings, which implies that some angels have fallen from their former state (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). The special sin of these angels has not been revealed but has generally thought to be that they exalted themselves against God and were dragged down by Satan in his fall.

Beelzebul (which might be a word related to Baal) (presumably Satan) is called a 'prince of demons' but there are other places where agents of the Devil are possibly named 'Belial' (angel of darkness) and the Anti-Christ. Like the 'holy angels' the evil, fallen angels have power but their use of it is destructive. While the holy angels eternally praise God, fight his battles, and serve him faithfully as angels of the light, the demons are, as powers of darkness, bent on cursing God, battling against him and Christ his anointed one, and destroying his work. The word 'spirit' is also used for a demon, along with a descriptive phrase ('evil spirit', 'unclean spirit'). Evil spirits tempt, deceive, and delude people, attacking, oppressing, hindering and accusing the people of God.

Satan and demons work according to a particular pattern. They deny the truth of the Word of God and challenge its statements; they deny the reality of death; and they appeal to human pride by telling men and women that they can become like God or be gods (Gen. 3:1-5). 'Demons are in constant revolt against God, seek to blind and mislead even the elect, and encourage sinners in their evil. But they are lost and hopeless spirits. They are even now chained to hell and pits of darkness, and though not yet limited to one place, yet, as Calvin says, drag their chains with them wherever they go' (Berkhof).

Jesus overcame the temptations of Satan, had authority over evil spirits (demons) and performed exorcisms. It is often said that demon-possession was a primitive way of referring to those illnesses of which we now have a more sophisticated understanding but the Gospel accounts make a clear distinction (see list in Matt. 4:24). The manner in which Jesus dealt with different circumstances is also shown. Sickness was dealt with by laying on of hands or anointing but demon-possession was dealt with by commanding the demon to go.

4. Spiritual Warfare

The two major words translated 'angel' appear almost 300 times in the Bible. The angel who announced the birth of Jesus Christ to the shepherds was joined by 'a multitude of the heavenly host' (Lk. 2:13, 14). Such expressions as 'the Lord of hosts' probably refer to God as commander of an army of angels. The notion of spiritual warfare is ridiculed both inside and outside of the Church. The Bible views the whole matter very seriously and the Apostle Paul seems to be saying that it is not just a matter of a war happening in the spiritual realm but that Christians are engaged in that war (Eph. 6:12).

The view that evil is just the absence of good seems inadequate not only in our understanding of History but also in our interpretation of current affairs. The human capacity for evil does seem to be beyond our imagination. Belief in the evil supernatural is at least a possible explanation of the monstrous evil that has been afflicting the world even to the present day. There is a very definite fight for good against evil that is a wrestling or struggle with flesh and blood. In fact our own bodily desires are often in conflict with what we know to be good, honourable and right. But that is not the entire extent of it - there is a combat also with the spiritual realm that is real if not flesh and blood. Against the deceitful wiles and destructive force of Satan and his cohorts the Christian must be alert (1 Pet. 5:8), armed (Eph. 6:13) and aware (Jas. 4:7). Because of the work of Christ believers are assured of victory (Col. 2:13-15) given by God's grace and received through our faith and obedience.

Christians do not need to fear the devil or evil spirits but that does not mean they are to be trifled with. Casting out demons, or exorcism, was a regular and frequent part of the ministry of Jesus. Prayer is an important weapon in spiritual warfare. When the disciples asked (Mk. 9:28) why they could not cast out a demon, Jesus replied that this kind comes out only with prayer. Other ancient manuscripts add 'with fasting'. Fasting is often coupled with prayer in waiting upon God. The Lordship of Jesus, his cross and his blood are the focus of victory. When Jesus was tempted he answered with correctly applied texts from the Bible.

We must not limit spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is rightly against astrology, ouija boards, fortune-telling, tarot cards, levitation, spiritism, satanism and possibly even the darker side of Halloween, heavy rock music, and religious or quasi-religious practices which seek to obscure the deity and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Spiritual warfare is also against the two most deadly sins in human history - pride and unbelief.