



## Lesson 28

### ANGELS

#### Reading Hebrews 1

Angels are God's messengers. They can enter God's Holy Presence, so they must be sinless beings. We are not told how many angels there are, but we know there are an enormous number of them. (See Hebrews 12:22; Matthew 26:53.)

#### What do angels do?

- Give messages
- Guide
- Protect and Deliver
- Destroy

We will look at examples of each of these in turn.

#### 1. Examples of angels giving messages

The word 'angel' means 'messenger'. There are many examples of them giving God's messages to men. Here are a few of them:

REFERENCE	DETAILS
Genesis 18	Abraham was told that he and Sarah would have a son. The angels are described as 'men', and apparently looked no different from ordinary men. At other times angels can look very different, especially when they are showing God's glory.
Genesis 19:1-5	Two of the angels then went on to visit Lot and warn him that God was going to destroy Sodom. The men of Sodom thought angels were men.
Genesis 22:11,15	An angel called out of heaven to stop Abraham from killing his son, Isaac. The angel then blessed Abraham for his faith and obedience.
Exodus 3:2	Moses was told that God was going to send him to Egypt to deliver the people of Israel from their slavery. The angel who gave the message was in the fire of the burning bush.
Judges 6:11-24	An angel told Gideon that God would help him fight Israel's enemies. The angel disappeared in the fire Gideon had made.
Luke 1:1 1-19	Zacharias was told by an angel that he and his wife Elisabeth would have a son. This was John the Baptist.
Luke 1:26	The angel Gabriel told Mary she would be the mother of Jesus.
Acts 8:26	Philip was told to meet an Ethiopian. He was then able to teach him about Jesus and baptize him.  (Notice the angel is called 'the spirit' in verse 29.)

#### 2. Examples of angels guiding people

(i) Abraham wanted his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac - but it had to be the right woman! Abraham told his servant that an angel would help him (Genesis 24:7). And he did!

(ii) When Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, the pillar of cloud went with them. It protected and guided them. We are told that an angel of God was with them in this pillar of cloud (Exodus 14:19; Exodus 23:20,21).

It is important to note that even though God's angel was with the people of Israel all the time they were in the wilderness, yet they rebelled against God. The angel did not stop them sinning.

### 3. Examples of angels protecting and delivering men of god

(i) Daniel's three friends were delivered from the fiery furnace by an angel (Daniel 3:28).

(ii) Daniel himself was delivered from the lions' den. The angel shut the lions' mouths (Daniel 6:22).

(iii) An angel opened the prison for the apostles (Acts 5:19) and again for Peter (Acts 12).

### 4. Examples of angels destroying

(i) When Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army in the time of King Hezekiah, Hezekiah cried for God's help. An angel killed all the Assyrians (who had dared to belittle God). See 2 Kings 19:35.

(ii) King Herod, in New Testament times, was destroyed by an angel for his great pride (Acts 12:23).

### Angels do not sin

In the time of the Exodus, angels brought the destruction caused by the plagues. Describing this, the Psalmist says that God ...

"...cast upon them (the Egyptians] the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them" (Psalm 78:49).

The angels themselves were not evil, but were used by God to do things we regard as awful, but which were obviously necessary. There are no such beings as angels who sin.

But what about 2 Peter 2:4, which says:

"If God spared not the angels that sinned... "

The word which has been translated 'angels' can also be translated 'messengers'. It can either mean heavenly messengers (angels), or earthly messengers (human beings who took a message). The original language in which the Bible was written does not make it clear whether it is a heavenly or an earthly messenger that is being referred to. Occasionally the translators got it wrong. We suggest that 2 Peter 2:4 could well refer to what is recorded in Numbers 16.

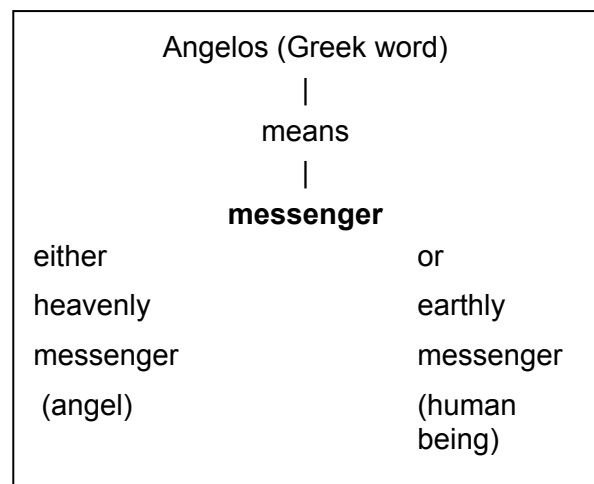
### What do angels look like?

Angels usually do their work without being seen by men. When Elisha and his servant were being hunted by the king of Syria, Elisha knew God would help, but his servant was frightened. Elisha asked God to open his servant's eyes. Then he saw that ...

"... the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17).

God's army of angels was there to protect!

We have already seen that the angels that appeared to Abraham and Lot looked like men (so they could not have had wings!) but we have also seen that the angels could be in fire and



cloud, as in the burning bush and pillar of cloud in the wilderness. So angels do not have any particular form and can just disappear (as the one who visited Gideon did).

## **Jesus and the angels**

Angels told Joseph, Mary and the shepherds about the birth of Jesus. They continued to guide Joseph by telling him to take the infant Jesus down to Egypt, and then he was told when it was safe to return.

Psalm 91 (verse 11) prophesied that angels would help Jesus and so, for example, in Matthew 4:11 we read that after his temptation in the wilderness, angels "came and ministered unto him". To 'minister' is to 'serve' and so it is likely that angels brought him food after his long fast.

In the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus knew his crucifixion was near, he prayed that he might do God's will. An angel strengthened him (Luke 22:43). He could have avoided being arrested and asked God to send twelve legions of angels to rescue him. But he knew that he had to die for us. It was the only way we could be helped out of our sinful state.

We might have expected God to make His Son like an angel, but he was a human being. Only in human form could he experience temptation, suffering and then death. Angels cannot die (Luke 20:36).

Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus was "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (see also Hebrews 2:16).

When he rose from the dead the angels were there. Imagine their joy! Having conquered sin and death, Jesus was raised above the angels. He no longer has human nature:

"When he (Jesus) had by himself purged our sins, (he) sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels... " (Hebrews 1:3,4).

The honour of sitting at God's right hand is for the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and no angel was ever privileged in this way (Hebrews 1:13). Instead the angels in this same chapter are described (in verse 7) as "spirits and his ministers a flame of fire". Verse 14 says:

"Are they (the angels) not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

(Notice the word 'all' - no room here for sinning angels.)

The angels work on behalf of those who will inherit salvation. We saw in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch how an angel brought him into a situation where he could learn the truth of the Gospel. We saw the apostles being helped out of prison. But angels do not help everyone! They minister for those "who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

## **The work of angels today**

Even though we do not see them, angels can help us today, but only if we are trying to please God. Psalm 34:7 says that God's angels are around those that fear Him. They may help us but it does not mean to say that believers will never have difficult times. The hard times of life are there to teach us lessons and bring us closer to God. Angels will not stop believers sinning either. (Remember how the angel in the wilderness did not stop the people of Israel sinning?)

## **The future work of the angels**

The Lord Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth, but no-one knows when, not even God's angels in heaven (Mark 13:32). When he does return, the angels will come with him. 2. Thessalonians 1:7,8 says:

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

The angels will be involved in bringing people together for judgement.

At that time, the believers will be made like the angels. They will no longer marry, or be able to sin, or die (see Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:36). No wonder there is joy in heaven (amongst the angels) when a sinner repents!

### **Summary**

1. Angels are messengers. They can also guide, protect, deliver and destroy.
2. They help those who are true believers, but do not stop people committing sin.
3. They are usually not seen. When they were seen they appeared in many different forms.
4. They cannot sin, do not marry, and never die. In the Kingdom, believers will be like this.
5. At first Jesus was made lower than the angels, but after his resurrection he was exalted above them.
6. The angels will accompany Jesus when he returns to this earth.

### **Chapters to read**

Look up the references given in the lesson. Read them through and you will have a good understanding of angels and the work they do for God.

### **A verse to learn**

Hebrews 1:14

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"