

Angels and Their Beginning

“I’m an angel.”

—Irish folk-rock drummer, Caroline Corr

Claiming to be a (mostly) good or innocent person is acceptable in today’s culture, even if the closest point of reference is a pure, holy spiritual being without any faults whatsoever. Such claims are prevalent especially in the public square. There, opinions about spiritual matters (and not simply God or Jesus) are so diverse that it staggers the mind. Therefore, we should not be surprised that a diversity of opinion extends to angels and demons as well. What seems to be in abundance is religious opinion; what is sorely lacking is religious fact.

1. Why do you suppose people have such diverse views about angels and demons? God and Jesus? spiritual matters in general?

The Creation of Angels

2. Read John 1:1–5 and Genesis 2:2–3. Although the Bible mentions angels in almost three hundred passages, no one passage tells us about their creation. Nevertheless, what can we conclude about the creation of angels from these two verses?

3. Read Psalm 148. What can we learn about the creation of angels from this great hymn of praise?

4. Read Colossians 1:15–17 and Nehemiah 9:6. What additional information do these verses provide about the creation and activity of the angels?

5. Luther said, “Moses writes nothing about the creation of the angels because . . . he describes only the creation of matters visible.” Why do you think that in Genesis 1, God through Moses only recorded the creation of visible things, and not the creation of the invisible angels?

6. Read Acts 23:8. In Jesus' day, a Jewish religious sect called the Sadducees denied both the bodily resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. Some people today also doubt their existence. What commandments do we break when we doubt their existence?

7. **Challenge question:** In the First Article of the Nicene Creed, when do we confess our belief in God's creation of the angels?

What Does *Angel* Mean?

The term *angel* does not designate the nature or essence of angels but rather their office as God's ambassadors or messengers. The Greek word for *angel* (*angelos*) is also used for human messengers like John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10).

8. Read Luke 1:26–38 and Matthew 28:5–8. What message did the angel Gabriel bring to Mary? What message did God's angel bring to the women on Easter Sunday?

9. Read Isaiah 6:5–7. What did the angel say to Isaiah? How did God impart forgiveness to Isaiah through the angel's ministry?

Creaturely Actions

As created beings, angels do what all of God's creatures do—worship God. They are not to be worshipped themselves, because they are created beings just like humans, although without physical bodies.

10. Read Revelation 22:8–9. What reaction did God's angel have when John fell down to worship him? What did God's angel tell John to do? What do we see angels doing in Revelation 5:11–12?

11. Read Deuteronomy 5:7 and Colossians 2:18–19. In connection to the First Commandment, why is Paul's warning to the Colossians not to be taken lightly?

Comparisons

- Eastern Orthodox:** “What are the *angels*? Incorporeal spirits, having intelligence, will, and power. What means the name *angel*? It means a *messenger*. Why are they so called? Because God sends them to announce his will. Thus, for instance, Gabriel was sent to announce to the Most Holy Virgin Mary the conception of the Saviour” (*The Longer Catechism of the Eastern Church*, questions 99–102).
- Lutheran:** “The angels in heaven pray for us, as does Christ Himself [Romans 8:34]. So do the saints on earth and perhaps also in heaven [Revelation 6:9–10]. It does not follow, though, that we should invoke and adore the angels and saints [Revelation 22:8–9]. . . . Nor should we divide different kinds of help among them, ascribing to each one a particular form of assistance, as the papists teach and do. This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone” (Smalcald Articles II 26).
- Reformed/Presbyterian:** “Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone: not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and, since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXI 2).
- Roman Catholic:** “This one only true God . . . created out of nothing, from the very first beginning of time, both the spiritual and the corporeal creature, to wit, the angelical and the mundane, and afterwards the human creature, as partaking, in a sense, of both, consisting of spirit and of body” (*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council* [Vatican I], III 1).
- Baptist:** “*Of the angels.* The angels were created by God to glorify him, and obey his commandments. Those who have kept their first estate he employs in ministering blessings to the heirs of salvation, and in executing his judgments upon the world” (*Confession of the Free Will Baptists*, IV 2).
- Liberal:** “The development of modern Christianity has been characterized by an increasing tendency to appeal to reason as a criterion of the truth . . . no element of religious faith or practice has escaped its influence . . . It is not enough that a belief, ceremony, or institution have the sanction of authority or custom; it must secure the sanction of reason by proving its truth or its worth” (Errett Gates, in *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion*, p. 434).

Point to Remember

“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.’”
Matthew 28:5–6

To prepare for “Who and What Are Angels?” read Hebrews 1:13–14.