



Angels

Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire. Hebrews 1:7

Look out the window and you'll see different kinds of birds flying about the trees, depending on where you live—robins, wrens, crows, maybe a heron or ibis. Think of the variety of flowers, fruits, gemstones, and birds alone. There is a great variety in creation. So, why would we expect every angel to be alike?

Much of this is still a mystery for us. But from passages of Scripture that speak of this, we learn there's an array of angelic beings. Isaiah 6 describes an order of angels known as seraphim, and Ezekiel talks about cherubim. Two angels—Michael and Gabriel—are called archangels. The Bible speaks of the heavenly hosts as if they are great angelic armies organized by rank (Psalm 103:21) or great choirs organized by voice (Luke 2:13).

Followers of Christ have a lot in common with angels. Sure, there are big differences. But twice in the book of Revelation, an angel described himself as a "fellow servant" with John. In Revelation 19:10, the apostle John was so overwhelmed by the angel, he fell down before him. The angel said, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!"

In Revelation 22:9, John again fell at the feet of a glorious angel, who said, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book."

If an angel appeared to you, you might be so startled you'd fall at his feet. But he would pick you up and reassure you of something. He would say something, like, "You and I are fellow servants. We are partners in ministry. We are here side by side to worship and serve God." What a glorious thought! Angels, like us, are soldiers in God's army, ready to march for His glory. How delightful it is to know that the angels are our fellow servants; that they are co-laborers with us in the Lord's kingdom.

When missionary John Paton and his wife were surrounded by hostile islanders, they prayed through the night for God's help. The next morning, they discovered the would-be attackers had fled. A year later they learned why. As the people prepared to attack, they realized the mission compound was surrounded by hundreds of men in shining garments with swords drawn. Only then did Paton and his wife realize that God had dispatched His angels to protect them.

That is certainly consistent with the description of angels in Hebrews 1:14: "ministering spirits" sent to help God's people, especially in times of danger. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, had that experience. When he and Mary escaped Herod's wrath by fleeing to Egypt with their baby, it was an angel who appeared to Joseph when it was safe for them to return to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-20). Whether in person, in a dream or vision, or by way of circumstances, angels are ready to intervene on our behalf.

When you need help, be aware of angelic hands that may reach out to lead you through your difficulty. But, remember, angels are not human beings. They are a special species created by God—living beings that are not humans though they may at times assume human form. The book of Hebrews says, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14, NIV).

During our Lord's life on earth, angels helped Him at many points, announcing His birth, comforting Him in the desert, strengthening Him in Gethsemane, and being ready to rescue Him from crucifixion if He had only asked (Matthew 26:53). They rejoiced in His resurrection and moved the stone to reveal His empty tomb. Angels played a role in Christ's earthly life, just as they do in ours. They work to fulfill God's purpose. They are not human; they are super-human and closer to you today than you realize.

Of all His stories, only in the account of the deaths of a rich man and a beggar (Luke 16:19-31) did Jesus assign a name to a character. Naming the beggar "Lazarus" suggests this story was true and conveys truth about God's care for His deceased saints.

Unique in this story is the role of angels at death. The poor beggar died "and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom"—a metaphor for Paradise, or the gathering place of the saints awaiting the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom (Luke 23:43). It's easy to look at death as an ending of life, and it is the end of the mortal, physical body. But immediately upon the beggar's death, angels from heaven came and carried him—that is, they escorted him—into the presence of God. The accompanying role of angels at death is just another proof of the continuation of life for those who die in faith. And evidence of God's continuing care.

Those nearing the end of life can expect to be joined by angels when they breathe their last, yet another reason to have no fear of death.

There are different types of angels with different purposes, just as with people; each is made to accomplish the tasks the Lord has for us. One day we'll work and worship side by side with angels. In fact, we're doing it now more than we know. But oh, how wonderful to see them face to face!

