

1. **Introduction:** Billy Graham in his book **Angels: God's Secret Agents** says, *"I do not believe in angels because I have ever seen one, because I haven't. I believe in angels because the Bible says there are angels, and I believe the Bible to be the true Word of God."*
  - That is where we begin. Angels are mentioned at least 273 times in the Bible. We believe the Bible is the true Word of God, therefore we believe in angels. Angels are an integral part of the Bible's story of God's creative power and saving grace.
  - Without the messages from angels the story of the birth of Jesus would make no sense?
  - James Montgomery Boice broadcast and published a study titled "The Joy of Christmas" about the importance of angels in the birth of Christ.
  - (1.) Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist.
  - (2.) Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus. (Luke 1:26-33)
  - (3.) In a dream, an angel appeared to Joseph to comfort him by explaining the virgin birth and tell him the child was to be named Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-21)
  - (4.) One angel and then a multitude of angels appeared to shepherds in fields near Bethlehem.
  - (5.) An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him to take the Child Jesus and His mother to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod (Matthew 2:13).
2. **Appearances:** 2-4 present key messages explaining the true meaning of the birth of Jesus.
3. **To Mary:** The appearance of Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) at Nazareth. Gabriel greets Mary and gives her the message. ***"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."***
  - Gabriel's message has four main points: (1<sup>st</sup>) Mary was to have a Son. (2<sup>nd</sup>) His name was to be Jesus. (3<sup>rd</sup>) He will be great, in fact, He will be the Son of God. (4<sup>th</sup>) His birth will fulfill the prophecies foretelling the coming of Messiah and of His eternal reign.
  - At that time, Judea was ruled by Rome through King Herod, a client-King of Rome.
  - In the past many prophets had brought the Jews revelations from God. But then, for over four hundred years, the prophetic voice had been silent. Malachi, in the fifth century before Christ, was the last of the prophets. No one since him had brought the sure Word of God to the people.
  - Had God forgotten His people and His promises to them? It seemed that way. But then angels appeared to Zechariah, to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. God had not forgotten. The time of fulfillment had arrived.
4. **To Zechariah:** Luke 1 begins with the appearance of Gabriel to Zechariah. During that appearance, there is a reference to the closing words of the OT which foretell the coming of Elijah before Messiah's appearance (Luke 1:17; Malachi 4:5-6).

- Luke 1 ends with Zechariah's great hymn of praise to God for His faithfulness (Luke 1:68-70).
  - Zechariah exclaims, *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old."*
  - God did not and has not forgotten His people. The God who did not forget us in Christ's first coming will not forget us when He comes again.
5. **To Joseph:** The second angelic message concerning the birth of Christ was to Joseph. He needed to hear the truth. The situation was such that, it appeared he must conclude Mary had been unfaithful. The angel explained that the baby was conceived by God's direct actions.
- Joseph believed the angel, trusted God and received a wonderful revelation concerning what the Savior would accomplish.
6. **To Shepherds:** The third angelic message concerning the birth of Christ was to shepherds in fields around Bethlehem. One angel appeared and a little later a multitude of angels.
- The angelic message to the shepherds was in 4 parts. Three parts by 1 angel, the 4<sup>th</sup> was by a multitude of the heavenly host.
  - (a.) Proclaiming great joy for all people. *"And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:9-10).*
  - (b.) Announcing Christ's birth. *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).*
  - (c.) Gave a sign by which the baby was to be identified. *"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12)*
  - (d.) The first angel was joined by a multitude of the heavenly host saying, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)*
  - The announcement to the shepherds began with a proclamation of good news that would bring great joy for all people. Joy is very different from happiness.
  - Happiness is determined by circumstances. When circumstances are "right," then there is happiness, but if the source of happiness disappears, so does happiness.
  - Joy is from God. It is based on God's promises and what He has done. Joy is given to believers by God and sustained by God. Only sin destroys joy.
  - The joy proclaimed by the angel was centered in the birth of the Savior. It is joy is for all who believe. The Savior brings the joy and peace of heart and soul that transcend understanding.
  - We celebrate the birth of Christ in recognition of the unsurpassed joy He brings to believers.

7. **Belief in Angels:** We believe in angels because the Bible speaks of them. They serve as servants of God who can interact with humans. Below are some Biblical facts about angels. Wayne Grudem's **Systematic Theology** is the principal reference.
8. **Angels are Created Beings:** *"You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you"* (Nehemiah 9:6).
  - The Bible mentions three types of angels: Cherubim, seraphim, and "living creatures."
  - **(1.) Cherubim:** (a.) They guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). (b.) God is enthroned above them (Ezekiel 10:1-22). (c.) God rides on them (Psalm 18:10). (d.) Two golden figures of cherubim sit above the Ark of the Covenant where God promised to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:22, also 18-21).
  - **(2.) Seraphim:** Only mentioned once in the Bible in Isaiah 6:2-7, where they continually worship the Lord saying, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."*
  - **(3.) Living Creatures:** Ezekiel and Revelation speak of other kinds of heavenly beings known as "living creatures" around God's throne (Ezekiel 1:5-14; Revelation 4:6-8). These living creatures appeared like a lion, ox, man, and an eagle, representing various parts of God's creation (wild beasts, domesticated animals, humans, and birds). The living creatures worship God continually: *"Day and night they never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'"* (Revelation 4:8).
9. **Angel Hierarchy:** An angel hierarchy is indicated by Jude 9. The angel Michael is called an "archangel"- a title that implies rule or authority over other angels. Paul says the Lord will return to earth *"with the archangel's call"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Bible doesn't say whether or not there is more than one archangel.
10. **How Many Angels:** God created angels in vast numbers. The Bible doesn't give a specific number. Revelation 5:1: Angels *"numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousands times ten thousand."* Ten thousand times ten thousand is 100 million but that is not intended to be a precise number. Hebrews 12:22 speaks of the city of the living God and an innumerable company of angels.
  - All angels were individually created simultaneously. Angels do not procreate. There are no new angels, no mom and dad angels, no baby angels. The number of angels does not change.
  - Some angels rebelled against God and were expelled from God's presence.
11. **Angel Characteristics:** The Bible gives some facts about angels but not an exhaustive list. The following comments apply to the "good angels," those who did not rebel. The Hebrew word for angel (*malak*) and the Greek word (*angelos*) both mean messenger. Angels have unending life.

- Angels obey God's will with joy (Ps 103:21). They care for believers in trials (Mt. 4:11).
- Angels carry out God's will and are involved in much (all?) of God's external work.
- After his miraculous rescue from prison, Peter said, "***Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod.***"
- Angels are spirit beings (Heb 1:13-14). They are not normally visible to humans but can assume visible forms (Num 22:22-35). They are capable of emotion (Lk 15:1-10), are intelligent (2 Sam 14:20), have great power (2 Pet 2:11), and are immortal (Lk 20:34-46).
- Angels minister to believers who die in Christ (Jude 9; Lk 16:22)
- Angels are neither Omnipotent or Omnipresent. Like other created beings, angels are finite creatures, restricted to be one place at a time, and though powerful, not omnipotent.
- Angels travel from place to place (Gabriel "***was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth***" (Luke 1:26). In Daniel 10:12-14, an angel was delayed. Arcangel Michael's help was needed for the angel to succeed in getting away from Persia and be able to reach Daniel.
- Angels are not to be worshipped. They are a part of the divine order, created to have unending lives, but they are not divine. Only our triune God is to be worshipped.

12. **Angel Duties:** Angels have served at least 5 functions. (1.) Angels continuously worship and praise God (Job 38:7; Ps 103:20; Is chapters 1-3; Rev 4:8, 5:8-12).

- (2.) Angels communicate God's messages to people. They revealed the future to Daniel (Dan 10:10-15 and John (Rev 17:1, 21:9, 22:16) and helped in the giving of the Law (Acts 7:38, 53). Gabriel announced the births of John the Baptist (Mt 1:19-24) and Jesus (Lk 1:11-28, 2:9-12).
- (3.) Angels minister to God's people by guiding, comforting, and providing for them.
- Examples: A vast army of angels protected Elisha and his servant at Dothan (2 Kings 6:11-17). Delivered apostles from prison (Acts 5:19). Angels delivered Peter from prison (Acts 12:6-4), rejoice when sinners are converted (Lk 15:10), and are present within the church (1 Cor 11:10),
- (4.) After Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, angels came and "ministered" to him, taking care of His needs.
- (5.) Angels will be God's agents in the final earthly judgement and second coming of Christ (Rev 19:17-20:3).

13. **More Inspiring References to Angels in the Bible:** A few other Bible references to angels and their actions: The heavenly beings visited Hagar, Lot, and Jacob. They fed Elijah, saved Daniel in the lion's den, spoke to Zechariah, guided Philip to the Ethiopian, encouraged Paul when he was in a sinking ship, comforted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

14. **A More Recent Example of Angels Protecting Believers:** On a dark night about 150 years ago, John and Margaret Patton, missionaries from Scotland, were on an island in the New Hebrides attempting to evangelize local tribes who were actively hostile to outsiders.

- They were in their home by themselves that night when they heard drumming and shouts from cannibal warriors surrounding the house with the obvious intent of killing them.
- They were terrified and prayed fervently that God would save them. The drumming and shouting continued but there was no attack on the house. At dawn, they saw the warriors retreating into the surrounding forest.
- The couple thanked God for protecting them and continued their work of evangelization.
- About a year later, the chief of the tribe that had surrounded them was converted.
- At some point after the chief's conversion, John Patton asked him about that dreadful night of terror, asking specifically why the tribe had not attacked the house.
- The chief's answer was a question, "who were all those men who were with you?"
- John answered truthfully that he and his wife were there by themselves. The chief declared "There were hundreds of tall men in shining garments with drawn swords circling about your house, so we could not attack."
- God sent angels to guard them. The story of that night was eventually published by an Australian newspaper. In 1986 Billy Graham included the story in his book **Angels: God's Secret Agents**.
- It seems that God only opens peoples' eyes to behold angels when it serves His purposes. That was the case with Elisha and his servant at Dothan.

15. **Balaam and the Angel**: A comical example of confronting an angel is found in Numbers 22. God sends the Angel of the Lord to block the path of the wicked prophet Balaam. Balaam's donkey sees the angel, stops in her tracks and huddles against a wall, crushing Balaam's foot. Balaam cannot see the angel and beats his donkey. **Numbers 22:31**: *Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face.*

16. **More on Angels Next Time**