

What are Angels? Why did God create them?

A. What are Angels?

1. **Angels are created**, spiritual beings with moral judgment and high intelligence, but without physical bodies.

Angels have not always existed; they are part of the universe that God created. In a passage that refers to angels as the “host” of heaven (or “armies of heaven”), Ezra says, “You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host and the host of heaven worships you” (Neh. 9:6), Angels exercise moral judgment is seen in the fact that some of them sinned and fell from their positions (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6)

Since angels are “spirits” (Heb. 1:14) or spiritual creatures, they do not ordinarily have physical bodies (Luke 24:39). Therefore they cannot usually be seen by us unless God gives us a special ability to see them (Num. 22:31; 2 Kings 6:17; Luke 2:13). In their ordinary activities of guarding and protecting us (Ps. 34:7; 91:11; Heb. 1:14).

They are invisible thou from time to time angels took on a bodily form to appear to various people in Scripture (Matt. 28:5; Heb. 13:2).

2. Other Names for Angels. Scripture sometimes uses other terms for angels, such as “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1), “holy ones” (Ps. 89:5, 7), “spirits” (Heb. 1:14), “watchers” (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23), “thrones,” “dominions,” “principalities,” “authorities” (Col. 1:16), and “powers” (Eph. 1:21).

3. Other Kinds of Heavenly Beings. There are three other specific types of heavenly beings named in Scripture. Whether we think of these as special types of “angels” (in a broad sense of the term), or whether we think of them as heavenly beings distinct from angels, they are nonetheless created spiritual beings who serve and worship God.

A. The “Cherubim”: The cherubim were given the task of guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24), and God himself is frequently said to be enthroned on the cherubim or to travel with the cherubim as his chariot (Ps. 18:10; Ezek. 10:1–22). Over the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament were two golden figures of cherubim with their wings stretched out above the ark, and it was there that God promised to come to dwell among his people: “There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of testimony, I will speak with you of

all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel” (Ex. 25:22; cf. vv. 18–21).

B. The “Seraphim”: Another group of heavenly beings, the seraphim, are mentioned only in Isaiah 6:2–7, where they continually worship the Lord and call to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3).

C. The Living Creatures: Both Ezekiel and Revelation tell us of yet other kinds of heavenly beings known as “living creatures” around God’s throne (Ezek. 1:5–14; Rev. 4:6–8). With their appearances like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle, they are the mightiest representatives of various parts of God’s entire creation (wild beasts, domesticated animals, human beings, and birds), and they 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!’ ” (Rev. 4:8)

4. Rank and Order Among the Angels. Scripture indicates that there is rank and order among the angels. One angel, Michael, is called an “archangel” in Jude 9, a title that indicates rule or authority over other angels. He is called “one of the chief princes” in Daniel 10:13. Michael also appears to be a leader in the angelic army: “Now war

arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon.
So He is a Warrior

5. Only One Place at One Time. Scripture frequently represents angels as traveling from one place to another, They can be at one place at another

6. Do People Have Individual Guardian Angels? Scripture clearly tells us that God sends angels for our protection: “He will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:11–12).

9. Angels Do Not Marry. Jesus taught that in the resurrection people “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30; cf. Luke 20:34–36).

10. The Power of Angels. Angels apparently have very great power. They are called “you mighty ones who do his word” (Ps. 103:20) and “powers” (cf. Eph. 1:21) and “dominions” and “authorities” (Col. 1:16). Angels are seemingly “greater in might and power” than rebellious human beings (2 Peter 2:11; cf. Matt. 28:2).

11. Who Is the Angel of the Lord? Several passages of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, speak of the angel of the Lord in a

way that suggests that he is God himself taking on a human form to appear briefly to various people in the Old Testament. “I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude” (Gen. 16:10),

B When Were Angels Created? All the angels must have been created before the seventh day of creation, for we read, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (Gen. 2:1, understanding “host” to be the heavenly creatures that inhabit God’s universe). Even more explicit than this is the statement, “**In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them**, and rested the seventh day” (Ex. 20:11). Therefore all the angels were created at least by the sixth day of creation.

But can we be any more specific? There may be a hint at the creation of angelic beings on the first day of creation when we read that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), and then immediately after we read that “the earth was without form and void” (Gen. 1:2), but with no mention of the heavens in this second verse.

This may suggest that the uninhabitable state of the earth is contrasted with the heavens where, perhaps, God had already

created angelic beings and assigned them various roles and orders. This idea is made more believable when we read that **“the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”** at the time when God laid the **“cornerstone”** of the earth and sunk its **“bases”** in the process of forming or founding it (Job 38:6–7).

If the angels (“the sons of God”) shouted for joy when God was making the earth inhabitable, this could imply that God created the angelic beings early on the first day.

Sometime before Satan tempted Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:1), a number of angels sinned and rebelled against God (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). This event occurred apparently after the sixth day of creation when “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31),

C. The Place of Angels in God’s Purpose

1. Angels Show the Greatness of God’s Love and Plan for Us. Human beings and angels (using the term broadly) are the only moral, highly intelligent creatures that God has made. Therefore we can understand much about God’s plan and love for us when we compare ourselves with angels. The first distinction to be noted is

that angels are never said to be made “in the image of God,” while human beings are several times said to be in God’s image (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:6). Since being in the image of God means to be like God, it seems fair to conclude that we are more like God even than the angels are.

Angels also demonstrate the greatness of God’s love for us in that, though many angels sinned, none were saved. Peter tells us that “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). Jude says that “the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). And we read in Hebrews, “For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16).

2. Angels Remind Us That the Unseen World Is Real.

3. Angels Are Examples for Us. In both their obedience and their worship angels provide helpful examples for us to imitate. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”

(Matt. 6:10). In heaven God's will is done by angels, immediately, joyfully, and without question.

4. Angels Carry Out Some of God's Plans. Scripture sees angels as God's servants who carry out some of his plans in the earth. They bring God's messages to people (Luke 1:11–19; Acts 8:26; 10:3–8, 22; 27:23–24). They carry out some of God's judgments, bringing a plague upon Israel (2 Sam. 24:16–17), smiting the leaders of the Assyrian army (2 Chron. 32:21), striking King Herod dead because he did not give God glory (Acts 12:23), or pouring out bowls of God's wrath on the earth (Rev. 16:1). When Christ returns, angels will come with him as a great army accompanying their King and Lord (Matt. 16:27; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:7).

5. Angels Directly Glorify God. Angels also serve another function: they minister directly to God by glorifying him.

D. Our Relationship to Angels

1. We Should Be Aware of Angels in Our Daily Lives. Scripture makes it clear that God wants us to be aware of the existence of angels and of the nature of their activity. We should not therefore assume that its teaching about angels has nothing whatsoever to do with our lives

today. Rather, there are several ways in which our Christian lives will be enriched by an awareness of the existence and ministry of angels in the world even today. When we come before God in worship, we are joining not only with the great company of believers who have died and come into God's presence in heaven, "the spirits of just men made perfect," but also with a great throng of angels, "innumerable angels in festal gathering" (Heb. 12:22–23).

Moreover, we should be aware that angels are watching our obedience or disobedience to God through the day. Even if we think our sins are done in secret and bring grief to no one else, we should be sobered by the thought that perhaps even hundreds of angels witness our disobedience and are grieved.¹² On the other hand, when we are discouraged and think that our faithful obedience to God is witnessed by no one and is an encouragement to no one, we can be comforted by the realization that perhaps hundreds of angels witness our lonely struggle, daily "longing to look" at the way Christ's great salvation finds expression in our lives.

2. Cautions Regarding Our Relationship to Angels.

a. Beware of Receiving False Doctrine From Angels: The Bible warns against receiving false doctrine from supposed angels: "But even if

we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

b. Do Not Worship Angels, Pray to them, or Seek them: “Worship of angels” (Col. 2:18) was one of the false doctrines being taught at Colossae.

c. Do Angels Appear to People Today? In the earliest period of the church’s history angels were active. An angel told Philip to travel south on a road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26), instructed Cornelius to send a messenger to get Peter to come from Joppa (Acts 10:3–6), urged Peter to get up and walk out of the prison (Acts 12:6–11), and promised Paul that no one on his ship would be lost and that he himself would stand before Caesar (Acts 27:23–24). Moreover, the author of Hebrews encourages his readers, none of whom are apostles or even first-generation believers associated with the apostles (see Heb. 2:3), that they should continue to show hospitality to strangers, apparently with the expectation that they too might sometime entertain angels without realizing it (Heb. 13:2).

Satan and Demons

How should Christians think of Satan and demons today? Spiritual warfare.

Demons are evil angels who sinned against God and who now continually work evil in the world.

A. The Origin of Demons

When God created the world, he “saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). This means that even the angelic world that God had created did not have evil angels or demons in it at that time. But by the time of Genesis 3, we find that Satan, in the form of a serpent, was tempting Eve to sin (Gen. 3:1–5). Therefore, sometime between the events of Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 3:1, there must have been a rebellion in the angelic world with many angels turning against God and becoming evil.

The New Testament speaks of this in two places. Peter tells us, “*God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment*” (2 Peter 2:4). Jude also says that “*the angels that **did not keep their own position** but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in*

eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

Both 2 Peter and Jude tell us that some angels rebelled against God and became hostile opponents to his Word. Their sin seems to have been pride, a refusal to accept their assigned place, for they “did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling” (Jude 6).

There is a reference to the fall of Satan, the prince of demons, in **Isaiah 14**. As Isaiah is describing the judgment of God on the king of Babylon (an earthly, human king), he then comes to a section where he begins to use language that seems too strong to refer to any merely human king:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.” But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. (Isa. 14:12–15)

This language of ascending to heaven and setting his throne on high and saying, “I will make myself like the Most High” strongly suggests a rebellion by an angelic creature of great power and dignity, the sin of Satan is described as one of pride and attempting to be equal to God in status and authority.

Angels are nonmaterial beings and according to Jesus do not marry

(Matt. 22:30), facts that cast doubt on the idea that “the sons of God” are angels who married human wives. Also, nothing in the context of Genesis 6 itself indicates that the “sons of God” should be understood as angels (this makes this passage unlike Job 1–2, for example, where the context of a heavenly council makes it clear to the reader that angels are being referred to). It is far more likely that the phrase “sons of God” here (as in Deut. 14:1) refers to people belonging to God and, like God, walking in righteousness (note Gen. 4:26 as an introduction to Gen. 5, marking the beginning of Seth’s line at the same time as “men began to call upon the name of the LORD”).

B. The Activity of Satan and Demons

1. Satan Was the Originator of Sin. Satan sinned before any human.

The New Testament also informs us that Satan was a “murderer from

the beginning” and is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). It also says that “the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8).

In both of these texts, the phrase “from the beginning” does not imply that Satan was evil from the time God began to create the world (“from the beginning of the world”) or from the beginning of his existence (“from the beginning of his life”), but rather from the “beginning” parts of the history of the world (Genesis 3 and even before). The devil’s characteristic has been to originate sin and tempt others to sin.

2. Demons Oppose and Try to Destroy Every Work of God. Just as Satan tempted Eve to sin against God (Gen. 3:1–6), so he tried to get Jesus to sin and thus fail in his mission as Messiah (Matt. 4:1–11).

The tactics of Satan and his demons are to use lies (John 8:44), deception (Rev. 12:9), murder (Ps. 106:37; John 8:44), and every other kind of destructive activity to attempt **to cause people to turn away from God and destroy themselves.**

Demons will try every tactic to blind people to the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4) and keep them in bondage to things that hinder them from coming to God (Gal. 4:8).

They will also try to use temptation, doubt, guilt, fear, confusion, sickness, envy, pride, slander, or any other means possible to hinder a Christian's witness and usefulness.

3. Yet Demons Are Limited by God's Control and Have Limited Power.

The story of Job makes it clear that Satan could only do what God gave him permission to do and nothing more (Job 1:12; 2:6). Demons are kept in “**eternal chains**” (Jude 6) and can be successfully resisted by Christians through the authority that Christ gives them (James 4:7).

Moreover, **the power of demons is limited**. After rebelling against God they do not have the power they had when they were angels, for sin is a weakening and destructive influence. The power of demons, though significant, but less than the power of angels.

4. There Have Been Differing Stages of Demonic Activity in the History of Redemption

a. In the Old Testament:

Because in the Old Testament the word demon is not often used, it might at first seem that there is little indication of demonic activity. However, **the people of Israel often sinned by serving false gods**, and

when we realize that these false “gods” were really demonic forces, we see that there is quite a bit of Old Testament material referring to demons. This identification of false gods as demons is made explicit, for example, when Moses says,

“They stirred him [God] to jealousy with strange gods; with abominable practices they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons which were no gods, to gods they had never known.” (Deut. 32:16–17)

Moreover, in reflecting on the horrible practice of child sacrifice, which the Israelites imitated from the pagan nations, the psalmist says, “They mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons.” (Ps. 106:35–37)

These references demonstrate that the worship offered to idols in all the nations surrounding Israel was really worship of Satan and his demons.

This is why Paul can say of the false religions of the first-century Mediterranean world, “What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons

and not to God” (1 Cor. 10:20).

It is therefore fair to conclude that all the nations around Israel that practiced idol worship were engaging in the worship of demons. The battles the Israelites fought against pagan nations were battles against nations who were controlled by demonic forces and thus “in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

They were as much spiritual battles as physical battles: the people of Israel needed to depend on God’s power to help them in the spiritual realm as much as in the physical.

b. During the Ministry of Jesus: After hundreds of years of inability to have any effective triumph over demonic forces, it is understandable that when Jesus came casting out demons with absolute authority, the people were amazed: **“And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him’ ” (Mark 1:27).** Such power over demonic forces had never before been seen in the history of the world.

Jesus explains that his power over demons is a distinguishing mark on his ministry to inaugurate the reign of the kingdom of God among mankind in a new and powerful way: But if it is by the Spirit of God

that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (Matt. 12:28–29)

The “strong man” is Satan, and Jesus had bound him, probably at the time of his triumph over him in the temptation in the wilderness (**Matt. 4:1–11**). During his earthly ministry, Jesus had entered the strong man's “house” (the world of unbelievers who are under the bondage of Satan), and he was plundering his house, that is, freeing people from satanic bondage and bringing them into the joy of the kingdom of God. It was “by the Spirit of God” that Jesus did this; the new power of the Holy Spirit working to triumph over demons was evidence that in the ministry of Jesus “the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

c. During the New Covenant Age: This authority over demonic powers was not limited to Jesus himself, for he gave similar authority first to the Twelve (**Matt. 10:8; Mark 3:15**), and then to seventy disciples. After a period of ministry, the seventy “**returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’**” (Luke **10:17**). Then Jesus responded, “**I saw Satan fall like lightning from**

heaven” (Luke 10:18), indicating again a distinctive triumph over Satan’s power.

A fact consistent with the idea that ministry in Jesus’ name in the new covenant age is characterized by triumph over the powers of the devil (1 John 3:8).

d. During the Millennium: During the millennium, the future thousand-year reign of Christ on earth mentioned in **Revelation 20,15** the activity of Satan and demons will be further restricted, a much greater restriction of Satan’s activity than we see today.

John describes his vision of the beginning of the millennium as follows:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while. (Rev. 20:1–3)

Here Satan is described as completely deprived of any ability to influence the earth. During the millennium, however, there will still be sin in the hearts of the unbelievers, which will grow until the end of the thousand years when there will be a large-scale rebellion against Christ, led by Satan who, having been “loosed from his prison” (Rev. 20:7), will come to lead that rebellion (Rev. 20:8–9).

The fact that sin and rebelliousness persist in people’s hearts apart from the activity of Satan, even during the thousand-year reign of Christ, shows that we cannot blame all sin in the world on Satan and his demons. Even when Satan is without influence in the world, sin will remain and be a problem in people’s hearts.

e. At the Final Judgment: At the end of the millennium, when Satan is loosed and gathers the nations for battle, he will be decisively defeated and “thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur” and “tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). Then the judgment of Satan and his demons will be complete.

D. Our Relationship to Demons

1. Are Demons Active in the World Today?

2. Not All Evil and Sin Is From Satan and Demons, but Some Is.

If we think of the overall emphasis of the New Testament epistles, we realize that very little space is given to discussing demonic activity in the lives of believers or methods to resist and oppose such activity.

The emphasis is on telling believers not to sin but to live lives of righteousness. For example, in

- † 1 Corinthians, when there is a problem of “dissensions,” Paul does not tell the church to rebuke a spirit of dissension, but simply urges them to “agree” and “be united in the same mind and the same judgment”
- † (1 Cor. 1:10). When there is a problem of incest, he does not tell the Corinthians to rebuke a spirit of incest, but tells them that they ought to be outraged and that they should exercise church discipline until the offender repents (1 Cor. 5:1–5).
- † When there is a problem of Christians going to court to sue other believers, Paul does not command them to cast out a spirit of litigation (or selfishness, or strife), but simply tells them to settle those cases within the church and to be willing to give up their own self-interest (1 Cor. 6:1–8).
- † When there is disorder at the Lord’s Supper, he does not command them to cast out a spirit of disorder or gluttony or

selfishness, but simply tells them that they should “wait for one another” and that each person should “examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor. 11:33, 28).

We need to accept our own responsibility to obey the Lord and not to shift blame for our own misdeeds onto some demonic force.

Nevertheless, a number of passages show that the New Testament authors were definitely aware of the presence of demonic influence in the world and in the lives of Christians themselves. Writing to the church at Corinth, which was filled with temples devoted to worship of idols, Paul said that “what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God” (1 Cor. 10:20), a situation true not only of Corinth but also of most other cities in the ancient Mediterranean world. Paul also warned that in the latter days some would “depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons”

3. Can a Christian Be Demon Possessed?

Absolutely not, the term possession was brought to the English bible but not found in the Greek text. A demon cannot enter a person without their agreeing to it. In extreme cases such as of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) this might have been true.

On the other hand, most Christians would agree that there can be differing degrees of demonic attack or influence in the lives of believers (see Luke 4:2; 2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 6:12; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8). A believer may come under demonic attack from time to time in a mild or stronger sense.

Before and After Pentecost

Jesus Gives All Believers Authority to Rebuke Demons and Command Them to Leave.

When Jesus sent the twelve disciples ahead of him to preach the kingdom of God, he “gave them power and authority over all demons” (Luke 9:1).

(Luke 10:17), and Jesus told them, “I have given you authority ...over all the power of the enemy”

† Moreover, he spoke at some length of the struggle Christians have against “the wiles of the devil” in his description of conflict “against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (see Eph. 6:10–18).

† James tells all his readers (in many churches) to “resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

† Similarly, Peter tells his readers in many churches in Asia Minor, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Peter 5:8–9).²⁴

“God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7).

This is very important, since the opposite of fear is faith in God. He also tells them to be bold in their spiritual conflict, so that, having taken the whole armor of God, they “may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). In their conflict with hostile spiritual forces, Paul’s readers should not run away in retreat or cower in fear, but should stand their ground boldly, knowing that their weapons and their armor “have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4; cf. 1 John 5:18).

James 4:7–8 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind.