

ANGEL (Heb. מַלְאָכִים, *mal-awk'*; Gr. ἄγγελος, *ang'-el-os*, both meaning *messenger*). In some cases the word is applied to human beings (Isa. 43:19; Mal. 2:7; Rev. 1:20), or even figuratively to impersonal agents (Exod. 14:19; 2 Sam. 24:16, 17; Psa. 104:4). The connection must determine its force. In its most common use in Scripture the word nevertheless designates certain spiritual and superhuman beings, who are there introduced to us as messengers of God. There are but few books of the Bible—such as Ruth, Nehemiah, Esther, the epistles of John and James—that make no mention of angels.

With respect to their existence and nature, we find the Scriptures presenting the same progress and development as with many other subjects of revelation. Thus it is that the doctrine of angels becomes more distinct in the later periods of Israel history, and is more full and significant in the New Testament writings. Angels appear most frequently and conspicuously in connection with the coming and ministry of our Lord. His words concerning the angels are of unmistakable meaning and value. According to his teaching they are personal, sinless, immortal beings, existing in great number, and in close relation not only with individual men, but also with the history of God's kingdom (Matt. 13:39; 18:10; 22:30; 25:31; 26:53; Luke 15:10; 16:22).

There is harmony between the teachings of our Lord upon this subject and those of the apostles and of the Scripture writers generally. Many questions that may be raised can receive no answer whatever from the Scriptures. Of the history of the angels we can know but little. It appears that some of their number "kept not their first estate," but fell under divine displeasure, and are reserved "unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6).

Aside from the teachings of Scripture there is nothing irrational, but quite the opposite, in believing in the existence of creatures superior to man in intelligence, as there are many inferior. But we depend wholly upon the Scriptures for our knowledge. The denial of the existence of angels, as that of devils, springs from the materialistic, unbelieving spirit, which in its most terrible form denies the existence of God.

The revelations of Scripture concerning angels, while they possess a subordinate value, nevertheless have a real value.

1. They furnish a necessary safeguard against narrowness of thought as to the extent and variety of the creations of God.

2. They help us in acquiring the proper conception of Christ, who is above the angels, and the object of angelic worship.

3. They give a wonderful attractiveness to our conception of that unseen world to which we are hastening.

4. They set before us an example of joyous and perfect fulfillment of God's will. "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," i. e., by the angels.

5. They put to shame the horrible indifference of multitudes of mankind with respect to the great work of conversion. "There is joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth."

6. They broaden our view of the manifold mercies of God, whose angels are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14; comp. 12:22).

7. They remind us of our high rank as human beings, and our exalted destiny as Christians. We who are "made but little lower than the angels."

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