

## INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in our verse-by-verse study of Hebrews. The theme of this book is "Eyes on Jesus." In the last message we spoke on why Jesus is superior to the angels. In this message, we're going to talk about the truth about angels. The subject of angels is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the Bible.

That's why a few years ago I wrote a book entitled, *Angels Really Do Exist*. It's available in our bookstore, or you can order it online. If you want to learn more about what the Bible says about angels, I encourage you to get the book.

My daughter and son-in-law, the Holmans, have chickens in their backyard. My grandkids are big fans of the Star Wars movies, so they have named their chickens after Star Wars characters. There's Hens Solo, Princess Layer, and Chew bach bach bacher. If you remember the first Star Wars movie, Luke Skywalker and Obi Wan Kenobe enter a cantina filled with a variety of strange looking creatures. Some are bubbled headed creatures, others have long snouts, and some are furry. It's not that far out, but God's Word describes a variety of heavenly creatures including cherubim, seraphim, and a host of angelic warriors.

Here in Hebrews we're going to look at the single verse that best describes the ministry of angels.

Hebrews 1:13-14. "To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

So who are angels, and what do they do? They are spirits sent to serve those who are saved, that's us. I have observed there are two different extremes people embrace when it comes to angels. Some people have an unhealthy fascination about angels, and others are ignorant about what the Bible says about angels. When it comes to Bible truth, ignorance is not bliss. I majored in religion at Samford University in Birmingham, a Baptist school, but I never heard one professor ever mention angels. In addition, I spent seven years at a Baptist seminary getting my Masters and Doctorate, and never recall ever hearing any teaching about angels. I even pulled out my systematic theology book and checked; angels aren't even listed in the index. Yet there are hundreds of verses in the Bible that speak about angels. So let's study what the Bible has to say about angels.

### I. OUR CULTURE HAS EMBRACED POPULAR MYTHS ABOUT ANGELS

A lot of the things that people believe about angels are not from the Bible. They get their beliefs from television shows and movies. Here are three contrasting folklore with the facts from the Bible.

## **A. Folklore: Angels are people who have died. Fact: Angels are spiritual beings created by God**

It would be the pinnacle of presumption to think that human beings are the only beings God created. There is a world of heavenly beings we usually cannot see. But people never become angelic beings.

One of my favorite movies to watch at Christmas time is "It's a Wonderful Life" starring Jimmy Stewart. In the movie, Clarence is a man who died in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and went to Heaven. However, Clarence didn't have enough goody-points to get his angel wings, so he is sent to Bedford Falls to help out George Bailey. If he helps George through his money troubles he will earn his wings. At the end of the movie his family is restored and a bell on the Christmas tree tinkles and Zuzu says, "Teacher says, 'every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings.'" George looks up to Heaven and says, "Atta' boy, Clarence." Now if you don't shed a tear or two dozen at that movie, you may be a robot. It's a great movie, but it has terrible theology: People *never* become angels.

I spoke on this topic a year ago when we studied where Jesus said in Mark 12 that in heaven we will be like the angels. I want to repeat a response that Billy Graham wrote to one of the readers of *Decision Magazine*.

DEAR DR. GRAHAM: My sister lost her small son a little over a year ago, and on the anniversary of his death, she put a poem in the paper to remember him. It said something about him being an angel now. Is that what happens to us when we die and go to Heaven, that we become angels? —Mrs. L.C.

DEAR MRS. L.C.: I know your sister was sincere, and I respect her sorrow and her desire to remember and honor her son—but no, we don't become angels when we die and go to Heaven. The truth is, when we die and go to Heaven, we become even greater than the angels! The angels are spiritual beings who were created by God to be His servants, and God has given them great authority and power to do His will. And at the present time, the angels are greater than we are, because God made us "a little lower than the Heavenly beings" (Psalm 8:5). But the Bible also says that in Heaven we will be higher than the angels—and the reason is because we will be like Christ. The Bible says, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). All of that, I know, may seem like theological hairsplitting to you. But don't lose sight of the central truth: When we know Christ, we know that this life is not all, but ahead of us is the joy of Heaven. May your sister take comfort in this truth and in the fact that her little son now is beyond all the pain and suffering of this world. — Billy Graham

If you are a parent who experienced the death of an infant, you need to know that God has something in store for that child that is much more wonderful than becoming an angel. We know little children go directly to Heaven because in 2 Samuel, an infant son of King David dies. David makes a profound statement about his child being in Heaven. He said, "He cannot return to me; but I can go to him." (2 Samuel 12:23) If you've had a newborn, or even a pre-

born child die, you can hang onto the hope that if you know Jesus as your Savior, you can go to be where they are when you die, or when Jesus returns. You may be wondering, "How old will my child be in Heaven? And while we're on that topic, how old will I be in Heaven?" I've got the correct answer for that so listen carefully. Get ready to write it down. Ready? You'll be the PERFECT age—and only God knows what that is for you.

**B. Folklore: Angels are chubby babies with wings. Fact: Angels most often appear as ordinary men**

In Greek mythology Cupid was a god with wings who shot arrows of desire into the hearts of lovers. In 1961 Sam Cooke recorded a song that said, "Cupid, draw back your bow; and let your arrow go; Straight to my lover's heart for me."

Many of the popular depictions and figurines of angels are fashioned after Cupid. But in the Bible, angels are most often portrayed as men wearing brilliant white garments. Ordinary isn't the best adjective, because angels are extraordinary, but only two special categories of heavenly beings are described as having wings. In Isaiah 6, the Seraphim are described as having six wings. In Ezekiel 10, Cherubim are described as having four wings. God's ordinary angels are never described as having wings.

In fact, many times in the Old Testament angels are confused with human beings. In Genesis 18, Abraham encountered three strangers and doesn't realize until later they are angels. In Judges 13, an angel approaches Manoah, the father-to-be of Samson, and he thinks he is just a man. He even offers to feed the angel a cooked goat.

Have you ever seen an angel? Hebrews 13:2 says we should show kindness to strangers because in so doing some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

**C. Folklore: Angels are sweet creatures who play harps. Fact: Angels are mighty warriors who wield swords.**

In many pieces of art, angels are sometimes depicted as young women playing a harp. Every reference to an angel in the Bible is masculine, and they are mighty warriors.

The first mention of angels is in Genesis 3 after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden God posted cherubim there with a flaming sword to keep them from re-entering. In Joshua 5, the children of Israel are poised to enter the Promised Land and Joshua is out walking at night. He encounters a mighty warrior holding a sword. Joshua says, "Whose side are you on?" The man reveals that he is an angel and says, "I didn't come to take sides. I came to take over. I'm the Captain of the Angelic Army of the Lord." (Joshua 5:14)

On the way to the cross Jesus told Peter He could call twelve Legions of angels to rescue Him. One legion was a military word for 6,000 Roman soldiers. In Isaiah 35 we read where only one warrior angel went out and killed 185,000 Syrian soldiers. Every time you read the word, "Lord of Hosts" it literally means Lord of the Angel-armies.

But as mighty as angels are, the whole point of this passage is that Jesus is FAR superior to the angels.

## **II. ANGELS WERE ACTIVE DURING THE EARTHLY LIFE OF JESUS**

The angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus. Angels were with Jesus from the manger to the empty tomb. They appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem and announced the birth of the King. An angel warned Joseph to take the baby Jesus and Mary and hide in Egypt because Herod was out to kill Him. Then an angel told Joseph when the coast was clear to return to Nazareth.

Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days, and then he endured three episodes of temptation from Satan. After the devil tried to get Jesus to bow down and worship him we read in Matthew 4, Jesus said, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him and angels came and attended him." (Matthew 4:10-11)

The word "attended" is the same word used in the Old Testament when the angels came and fed Elijah in the wilderness. So these were probably chef angels who fed Jesus after his forty-day fast? What did they serve Him? In Psalms 78 we read that manna was called angel's bread. So they probably served Jesus manna—but they probably called it angel food cake!

Then when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was under so much pressure that He sweated drops of blood. The Bible says angels came to help Him in the Garden. Then the angels rolled the stone away to show the world the Tomb was empty. The angel asked, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen just as He promised!"

Then as Jesus ascended back into heaven, the disciples were standing there staring up into the sky. Two angels, described as men in white clothing said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11 NKJV)

## **III. ANGELS DELIVER COMMON MESSAGES TO GOD'S PEOPLE**

The word *angelos* literally means "messenger." I believe people today still have angel encounters. In my book, I relate several modern angel encounters. When I first started studying the subject of angels years ago I isolated every occasion when an angel spoke and I discovered there are three common messages they most often deliver.

### **A. Scared? Cheer up!**

The most common statement by angels in the Bible is "Do not fear." That may be because when a human being sees an angel, their immediate reaction is fear. When Gabriel appeared to Mary his first words were, "Don't be afraid." An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife."

In Acts 27 the Apostle Paul is on a ship in the middle of a terrible storm in the Mediterranean Sea. Even the seasoned sailors think they are going to die, but an angel appeared to Paul and said, "Don't be afraid. Everyone on this ship will survive and you will make it to Rome." Paul delivered this message to the other passengers and even though they ran aground near Malta, nobody died.

Is that the message you need to hear today? Don't be afraid. These are scary times we are living in. According to Jim Denison, 60% of American voters say they can't imagine voting for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. Many are supporting a candidate simply because they dislike the other candidate. Terrorist attacks are in the news on a daily basis now. It seems our flags are at half-mast more days than at full-mast.

One man said, "Someone told me to cheer up because things could be worse. I cheered up and sure enough, things got worse." But in spite of it all, God still rules and reigns in the universe, and we are to be more than conquerors through Him who loves us. As Nehemiah wrote, "The joy of the Lord is our strength." God said, "I know the plans I have for you. Plans to give you a hope and a future." Perhaps God brought you here today to hear this message from His pastoral messenger, "Don't be afraid."

## **B. Sleeping? Wake up!**

There are many instances in the Bible when an angel wakes someone who is sleeping. In Acts 12, Peter is in jail sleeping and God sent an angel who punched him in the ribs and led him out of prison. So wives, you are being angelic when you punch your husband in the ribs during church and tell him to "Wake up!"

Elijah was exhausted and depressed and wanted to die. He fell asleep, and God sent him an angel who said, "Wake up and eat something."

Years ago when I wrote the book on angels I asked people to send me stories of where they thought they might have encountered an angel. Several of these stories related times when someone was driving and fell asleep, and they heard a voice that said, "Wake up!"

There is spiritual sleep as well. That's why Paul wrote in Romans 13 that it is time for us to wake up because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Is God sending you a wake-up call today?

## **C. Silent? Speak up!**

The third common message from angels is for us to tell someone about Jesus. There are no evangelist angels. They don't understand salvation, because they've never been lost. In 1 Peter, Peter is writing about salvation and he records that "even angels long to look into these things." (1 Peter 1:12) Angels don't share the gospel; that's our job. But many times angels direct people to share their faith.

In Acts 5 we read, "They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 'Go, stand in the temple courts,' he said, 'and tell the people the full message of this new life.'" (Acts 5:18-20)

In Acts 8, an angel directed Phillip to go to the desert where he would encounter an Ethiopian official who needed to hear the plan of salvation. Phillip obeyed and met the official and told him about Jesus. The man was saved and baptized that day.

## **CONCLUSION**

When I was a pastor in Alabama, we were involved in CWT, which is Continuing Witness Training. One evening, another man and I were out visiting prospects for the church. We arrived in a neighborhood to visit a family whose address we had. We rang the doorbell, but nobody was home. We were walking back toward the car, and I heard someone say, "Those folks aren't home, but the people in the next house down could use a visit." The voice came from a man who was sitting on a porch swing. I didn't think anything about it at first because we were on television so I figured this man recognized me. So we walked past that house to the next one and rang the doorbell. An elderly man and his wife opened the door and invited us in. After we talked about his family and interests. I asked him, "Suppose you were standing before God right now and He asked you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' What do you think you would say?"

The man admitted he wouldn't really know what to say. I asked his permission to share the plan of salvation, and he agreed. The conversation was amazing in that while his wife had accepted Christ, this man admitted he wanted to know how to become a Christian. At the end of the conversation, he prayed to receive Christ.

Then he told us that two days earlier he had been diagnosed with lung cancer. He said, "Last night I lay in bed and tried to pray. I said, 'God, if you're there, please send someone to tell me how I can get right with you.'" Then he said, "How did you know to visit my home tonight?"

I said, "Your neighbor next door sitting on his porch swing told us to visit you." Both he and his wife had a puzzled look on their faces. He said, "That house has been empty for two months; it's for sale. Nobody lives there now."

So who was that man on the porch swing a television viewer who decided to sit on a porch swing at an unoccupied house? Or was it an angel. I won't know until I get to heaven.

So be listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, or the prompting of angels, who may be telling you to share your faith.

But don't become obsessed with angels. Keep your eyes on the Master and Lord of all the angels. Keep your eyes on Jesus and worship Him alone!

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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