

What's the Angle on those Christmas Angels?

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*He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.
(Psalm 91:11)*

It is unconscionable that some people who call themselves Christians do not believe in angels. If the above Scripture is not true, then I ask, on what basis do you claim your salvation? If that promise is not reliable then how can we believe that *...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve* (1 Corinthians 15:3-5) ? In his classic publication on demons (I.e. fallen angels) entitled The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis said this, "Angels are given human form because man is the only rational creature we know. Creatures higher in the natural order than ourselves...must be represented symbolically if they are to be represented at all." That brilliant former skeptic had no problem what so ever believing in angels, and neither should any genuine, Bible believing Christian. During his fall series on Daniel Dr. Allen did a masterful work on that prophetic and apocalyptic portion of Scripture. One Sunday he briefly discussed angels and indicated that some in the audience may have thought him to be a bit loony to believe in such things as angels and their fallen counterparts, the demons. C.S. Lewis' anthropomorphic representation of an angel was alluded to on November 15, 2008 as Dr Allen read the following passage. *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.* (Daniel 10:4-5) The "man" was obviously an angel.

As we approach the Christmas season once more, we will again note the intervention of angels as they revealed God's plan of salvation to Joseph and Mary and the part they

would each play in that eternally significant event. We also read of their visit to shepherds as they announced the birth of the Prince of peace, King of kings and Savior

of the world. Throughout Scripture we find that angels have played a considerable role in the master plan of our sovereign Lord. The Father has used them as ministers of the Word, of mercy and wrath and to meet the needs of believers and Christ himself.

“The” Angel of the LORD versus “an” Angel of the Lord

When ever we read the Old Testament and the passages that tell about an angelic appearance we see a minute but highly important designation which regularly appears; “the” (a specific being), as opposed to “an,” angel of the Lord. The former represents what we know as a “theophany” or a pre-incarnate appearance of the 2nd Person in the Trinity, Christ. Though many examples of such theophanous visitations could be cited, I will simply allude to two. The first example is found in the book of Genesis regarding Abraham’s and his wife Sarah’s maid, named Hagar. You will recall that she had performed sexual relations with Abraham at Sarah’s insistence because the latter had not been able to bear any children with her husband Abraham. Then being jealous of the maid Sarah banished her from their Bedouin home. We thus find Hagar running away into the desert wilderness and finding an oasis. Moses recorded the event as follows:

***The** angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then **the** angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." **The** angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." **The** angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she*

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said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. (Genesis 16:7-15-emphasis

added) That passage deserves some explanation. As pointed out above "the angel" is the 2nd person of the Trinity. The LORD refers to Yahweh (Jehovah, God the Father), the 1st Person of the Trinity. Ishmael would become the progenitor of all Arab nations and that is why Muslims call Abraham their father, just as Jews and Christians do (through Isaac). The prophecy concerning *hostility toward all his brothers* has been proven over and over again throughout history as Arab countries have warred with one another, and especially as the descendants of Ishmael (Arabs) have warred against the descendants of his half brother Isaac for four consecutive millennia.

The second example that I would like to cite is recorded in the book of Judges as Christ appeared to the future parents of Samson; a man that God would raise up to become one of the recurring judges (in this case leaders) of Israel. Like Abraham and Sarah, this couple had been unable to conceive any children and so God chose to enable them to bear a child who would initially make them proud, but a man who would also succumb to the wiles of a temptress (Delilah) and reject God's call on his life.

*A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. **The** angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." (Judges 13:2-5)*

Once again we note that it was Christ who appeared to Manoah's wife. The term Nazirite could mean a life time of abstinence from wine and refraining from cutting one's hair or

merely a short period of commitment; such as some Christians engage in as a period of prayer and fasting. It does not mean that God was opposed to wine and vintners any more than he is opposed to haircuts and barbers. The apostle Paul took part in such a vow so as to identify himself with and endear himself to, fellow Jews as he was engaged

in ministry to Gentiles. *Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.* (Acts 18:18)

*Then the woman went to her husband and told him, "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death.'" Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "O LORD, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." God heard Manoah, and **the** angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. The woman hurried to tell her husband, "He's here! The man who appeared to me the other day!" Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the one who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said. So Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?" **The** angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her." Manoah said to **the** angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." **The** angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD." (Manoah did not realize that it was **the** angel of the LORD.) Then Manoah inquired of **the** angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?" He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond*

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understanding. "(Judges 13: 1-18-emphasis added) You will note that the angel of the LORD looked like a man when he appeared to the couple, just as C.S. Lewis has explained to us.

Christ had come once again to announce Yahweh's will concerning Israel's future and He

proved that He is a God who hears the prayers of the faithful. In my estimation, the most amazing portion of that passage of Scripture is found in the last two words; here translated "beyond understanding" (NIV) but interpreted as "wonderful" (in the New King James). The significance of that difference is found in the book of Isaiah (9:6) where we read a prophecy concerning "the angel of the LORD" when He would be incarnated. *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called **Wonderful**, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* One of His names was to be "wonderful;" that is, full of wonder and awe and truly "beyond understanding."

Since Christ was already incarnate when the New Testament was written, any appearance of angels during that time and since was limited to, and preceded by the expression, "an angel of the Lord." Two examples of the countless passages regarding "an angel of the Lord" are found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Pertaining to the nativity (incarnation) of Christ we read: *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, **an angel of the Lord** appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:18-21)

Next we find another barren couple being visited by one of God's messengers to deliver some good news. *In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. Once when Zechariah's*

*division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then **an angel of the Lord** appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. (Luke 1:5-15)* Like Samson, John the Baptizer would never drink wine or any other fermented drink, such as beer, from his birth to his death: He would be a life long Nazirite.

Ministers of God's People

As we noted previously, angels deliver messages from God to God's chosen ones. But they also minister to the needs of God's elect. This is taught to us specifically in the book of Hebrews. *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* (Hebrews 1:14) Those who will inherit salvation are the chosen, the elect of God. These are what we call our "guardian angels" and many of us can relate back to times in our lives, even before we were regenerated by the Holy Spirit (born again), when we experienced (though unaware of it at the time) their protective presence. The Bible tells us of numerous occasions when these agents of God met the needs of God's people. I will now simply illustrate those instances with a series of five Scripture

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references that are self explanatory. We will begin with four in the Old Testament and work forward to an example in New Testament times. These angelic visitations were experienced by Lot, the prophets Elijah, Elisha and Daniel and the apostle Peter.

*The **two angels** arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to*

the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. (Genesis 19:1-3; 12-13) They had come to rescue Lot and destroy this city where the heinous acts of homosexuality were rampant. The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." Note once again that these angels appeared to be men.

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything **Elijah** had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. (Kings 19:1-6) Realizing Elijah's state of depression, our merciful God sent the prophet's guarding angel orders to comfort and encourage him.

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Elisha and his servant were fleeing a host of enemies. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And **Elisha** prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15-17) Those horse draw chariots of fire were

driven by protective angels and Elisha had been fully aware of their protective presence.

*So the king gave the order, and they brought **Daniel** and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! **My God sent his angel** and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king." (Daniel 6:16-22)*

*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, **Peter** was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly **an angel of the Lord** appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹Peter followed him out of the prison,*

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but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. (Acts 12:5-9)

Ministering to Christ in His Human Need

When the Lord Jesus was led into the wilderness to be confronted by the Devil the long period of fasting and satanic altercation left Him sapped of physical and emotional strength. In response to that need we find these words: *Then the devil left him, and **angels came** and attended him.* (Matthew 4:11) The very angels He had created were

now in attendance to meet His human needs.

When Jesus was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night when Judas would betray Him and the night preceding His crucifixion, he offered up this prayer to the father and His anguish caused him to literally sweat blood. Dr. Luke, who could know the physiological potential that one could sweat blood, recorded the event as follows:

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

An angel from heaven *appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

(Luke 22: 42-44) The need to be strengthened by an angel was one more proof of the fact that Jesus Christ was not only 100% divine; He was also 100% human.

Informing Christ's Faithful Followers

When Jesus arose from the dead God sent an angel to announce His resurrection to His followers and 40 days later when he ascended into heaven angels explained what the disciples were watching take place and what would occur in the future. The events are described as follows:

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for **an angel of the Lord** came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on*

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it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." (Matthew 28: 1-7)

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly

two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11) The angels assured the disciples that Jesus would return bodily to the earth at some unknown date in the future. We are still awaiting that blessed day.

Angels as Ministers of God's Wrath

When the church has been safely translated (raptured) to heaven God will issue orders to some angels to start pouring out His wrath on the unbelieving world, only sparing the 144,000 Jewish converts (the remnant of God's elect in Israel) that He will miraculously save to begin a world wide evangelization to those who had not yet heard the gospel message. The Jewish conversions are described as follows: *After this I saw **four angels** standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw **another angel** coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.* (Revelation 7:1-4)

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Throughout the book of Revelation we read a great deal about angels in their various roles. First we see them composing a heavenly choir. *Then I looked and heard the voice of **many angels**, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"* (Revelation 5:11-12)

Next in chapter six the events that will take place during the tribulation begin to be told. In chapter eight we begin to read of the role that angels will play in that earth shaking, human heart rendering period of time. *When he opened the seventh seal, there was*

silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the **seven angels** who stand before God and to them were given seven trumpets. **Another angel**, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from **the angel's** hand. Then **the angel** took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Then the **seven angels** who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The **first angel** sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The **second angel** sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The **third angel** sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. The **fourth angel** sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light,

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and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other **three angels!**" (Revelation 8:1-13) I will not belabor the point further, but suffice it to say, angels will be used by God to wreak havoc on planet earth during the seven years of tribulation.

Finale

From what you have just read it must be patently obvious that angels are as real as are you and I. They are part of that unseen reality of which the apostle Paul wrote in the following passage of Scripture: *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* (2 Corinthians

4:18) The late theologian and apologist Francis Schaeffer has said that the totality of reality is composed of that which we see and that which we do not see; the latter being of a much greater content. Angels (both faithful and fallen as demons) are part of that reality as is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Our own souls, the seat of emotion, intellect, personality and will are also a component of that unseen world. How can a person believe in the triune God and the existence of the soul and still deny the existence of angels? The answer is, logically speaking they can't.

So then, what's the angle on angels? The point of view depicted by the Bible is that they are real. The viewpoint of all true believers is in agreement with the Bible. The perspective we gain from biblical revelation is that they are with us at all times if we are true Christians. The outlook of a Christian should be as follows: *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.* (Hebrews 13:2) Lot will verify the truth of that biblical imperative. As I sit here at my PC writing this essay, my guardian angel is at my side. To me he represents so much more than the symbolic angel we will position atop our tree as Christmas approaches. *Soli Deo Gloria*

