

Understanding Angels

When we read Scripture, what do we see angels doing?

1. Guarding the Garden of Eden
 - Genesis 3:24 – “So he drove the man out; and at the east of the Garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.”
 - In a similar way, Revelation 21:12 tells us that angels guard the gates of Heaven.
2. Carrying Out God’s Judgment
 - Two angels came in the form of men to Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah – “Then the two men said to Lot, ‘Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place’ for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it.” (Genesis 19:12-13)
 - Matthew 13:41-42 – “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
3. Appearing in Dreams
 - In Genesis 28, Jacob dreams about angels going up and down a ladder.
 - In Matthew 1:20-21, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream telling him about the coming of Christ. In Matthew 2:13, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream telling him to flee with his family in Egypt.
4. Bringing Answers to Prayer
 - Daniel prayed, and in Daniel 9:20-23, Gabriel comes and brings him an answer to that prayer.
 - In Acts 10:1-7, an angel appears to Cornelius to tell him God has heard his prayer.
5. Bringing Messages
 - In Luke 1:11-25, an angel appears to Zacharius to predict the birth of John the Baptist. In Luke 1:26-38, Gabriel brings a message to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God.
 - The angels (“messengers”) receive their authority from God. Galatians 1:8 makes it clear that not even angels have the authority to alter God’s Word – “But even if we, or an angel from Heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed.” While they bring messages, they do not preach the gospel. That has been entrusted to us as “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

6. Harvesting God's Crop

- In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of the tares among wheat. In verse 39, when he is explaining the meaning behind it, he describes the reapers as angels.
- Again, angels are carrying out God's will, not making their own judgments.

7. Ministering to Followers of God

- "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them."
– Psalm 34:7
- Hebrews 1:14 tells us that angels are sent to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation – to Christians. Many of the common folk stories about angels have to do with angels bringing others to Christ. That is not what this passage is addressing.

8. Leading People to Christians

- In Acts 8:26-40, Philip preaches the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch. Verse 26 tells us that an angel spoke to Philip to lead him to the Ethiopian.
- In Acts 10, an angel appears to Cornelius and gives him instructions on how to find Peter and bring Peter to his house. Again, in both those cases, the angels did not preach the gospel, but they led people to those who did preach to them.

9. Praising God

- Upon Jesus' birth, the heavenly host was praising God in Luke 1:13-14.
- The book of Revelation is filled with multiple examples of angels praising God before His throne.

10. Standing Before God's Throne

- Revelation 8:2 – "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them."
- Revelation 14:14-19 describes angels that do service for God.

11. Waging War

- Revelation 12:7-9 – "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angel waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down to him."
- Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12 that our battle is not against flesh and blood.

12. Binding Satan

- Revelation 20:1-3 – "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time." We need to remember that Revelation is dealing with figurative language, but we do see the picture of angels being used to bind Satan.

- Jude 9 – “But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” This reminds us that the power came from God, and that while there are things happening on the spiritual level that we cannot see, God is more powerful than any angel – good or fallen.

13. Gathering God’s People

- When Jesus speaks about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:22, He states: “Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.” We don’t know exactly how this happens, but it should provide us comfort to know that they will carry us to the Father.
- Revelation 7 also paints the picture of angels gathering those who are saved.

14. Herald the Second Coming of Christ

- Matthew 16:27 – “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to His deeds.”
- Matthew 25:31 – “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.”
- 2 Thessalonians 1:7 – “...when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.”

15. Being Present with the Church

- In 1 Corinthians 11:10, Paul is in the midst of a discussion about head coverings in which he uses the phrase “because of the angels.” Somehow, they were in the presence of the Christians.
- 1 Timothy 5:21 – “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.” We don’t know exactly what that means, but we know that angels understand what is going on with the Church.

Then what are angels doing today?

- We know that angels are God’s servants, and we know that they work to accomplish His will, not their own.
- We also know that while the first century contained miraculous events to confirm the message of God. Now that we have His Word in written form, that age has ceased. Rather than looking for angels and speculating about miraculous events, we realize that God uses angels to accomplish His providential will. That means God still acts (and His angels do on his behalf) to work in our lives in ways that don’t necessarily set aside the laws of nature.
- Some have taken the reference to “sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4 to mean angels and have theorized that angels came down and intermarried with humans. Since we know that angels do not marry (Luke 20:34-36), and that “sons of God” is also a name that refers to those who worship God, we can assume that these individuals were the descendents of Seth, who began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26).