

# Understanding Angels

## Questions Concerning Angels

### The Heavenly Host = A Divine Council?

- In Greek mythology, it is common to see a picture of a “council of gods” gathered around to make decisions. There would be a “head god,” such as Zeus, that made the ultimate decisions. This was also common in other cultures around the Israelites. Because Israel believed in the one true God, they stood out from the other nations. Although we know that God is all-powerful and does not need advisors, there are references in the Bible to a “divine council” of angels that are around God as He makes judgments.
- Psalm 89:5-8: *The heavens will praise your wonders, O Lord; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies is comparable to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the Lord, a God greatly feared in the **council of the holy ones**, and awesome above all those who are around Him? O Lord God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds you.* Here, we see a reference to the council of the holy ones, which must be a reference to angels, since they fear God.
- Job 1:6: *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.* Job 2:1: *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.* This gives us a glimpse into the fact that there are apparently times when the angels all come before the Lord.
- 1 Kings 22:19-23: *Micaiah said, “Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. The Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will entice him.’ The Lord said to him, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then He said, ‘You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.’”* Here, we get an interesting vision of God working His will through angels.
- Isaiah 6:1-2, 8: *In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew...Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”* This seems similar to Micaiah’s prophecy, except in this case, Isaiah volunteers.
- Daniel 4:13, 17: *I was looking in the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed, and behold, an angelic watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven...This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.* Here, the “angelic watchers” are mentioned, though they are delivering the will of God.
- Daniel 7:9-10: *I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened.* Another vision that emphasizes the sheer number of angels present in the heavenly realm.

## Angels in the Life and Ministry of Christ

- In Matthew 2:13-20, an angel makes sure that Joseph and Mary take Jesus to Egypt, in order to avoid the murderous intention of Herod. Herod had heard from the magi about Jesus' birth and he was jealous of a child who was said to be king.
- In Matthew 4:11, after the devil left Jesus, angels came and began to minister to Him. We don't know exactly what they were doing to minister to Jesus. Edward Myers suggests that this should comfort us to know that angels aid us in a spiritual way after we resist temptation.
- In Luke 22:43, an angel appears to Jesus and strengthens Him. The next verse tells us that Jesus is sweating as drops of blood, which explains why the angel was strengthening Him.
- All the gospels attest to the fact that angels were present when Jesus was resurrected, and Acts 1:10-11 reveals two angels present at the ascension.

## What about the Spirits in Prison?

- This does not technically have to do with angels, but it is a question that comes from a difficult text concerning the "prison" or "tartarus" mentioned in the New Testament.
- 1 Peter 3:18-20: *For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.*
- This is a difficult passage to understand, and there have traditionally been 3 explanations – 1. During the time Jesus was in the tomb, Jesus went to Hades and preached to the spirits in prison. 2. After the resurrection, Jesus proclaimed His victory in the Hadean realm over these spirits. 3. Through Noah, Christ preached to the disobedient people before they died and were in prison.
- It seems to me that #3 makes the most sense. As for #1 - According to Luke 16, when both Lazarus and the rich man died, they were in a fixed position. We have no reason to believe those who have already died can change their fate. If a sermon were preached in prison, how would there be no responses?
- As for #2 - It also seems strange that Jesus would appear to the souls in Hades to announce His victory. What further convincing would these souls need that Jesus is victorious?
- As for #3 – Noah is referred to by Peter as a "preacher of righteousness" in 2 Peter 2:5. Since Jesus told the Pharisees that before Abraham was, He existed (John 8:58), it makes sense that Christ's work would be described in the Old Testament. The spirits are described as being "now in prison," yet that doesn't mean Jesus necessarily had to preach to them there. For instance, my family recently camped out at Lincoln campground in Indiana. If you were to ask a question like, "Where was President Lincoln born?" or "Where was President Lincoln's boyhood home?" everyone would understand what you meant. Even though Abraham Lincoln was not a President until he became an adult, we all realize what is meant by the question. The same principle can hold true for the reference of the "spirits now in prison."
- Peter is referring to the fact that the spirit of Christ through Noah preached to people who were disobedient, and their spirits are now in prison. He then goes on to make an analogy about the ark resembling baptism, so it makes sense that he would mention Noah's historical example.