

100 BIBLE LESSONS

Give these lessons to people you visit, youth groups, hospital patients, church visitors and new members. Use them in Sunday School, bus ministry, jail services, nursing homes, Christian schools, small discussion groups and many other places. God's Word will answer your questions and help solve your problems.

LESSON 46 – ANGELS

INTRODUCTION – ANGELS

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak of created beings with individuality and personal identity who exist in a spiritual dimension that touches, but is not the same as, our material universe. Our attention is not focused on these beings, but the veil between us and the unseen world is pulled back slightly, and we can see glimpses of a reality that is closed to us now. What we glimpse is a spiritual universe within which an invisible war is continually being waged. This universe touches our own, for God is the Creator of both, and a single act is being played out on each stage. According to the Scriptures, although hidden from us, angels play a significant role both in our lives and in the whole course of history.

ANGELS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Hebrew word mal'ak means "messenger," "representative," or "angel." It is used of both human and supernatural messengers, and the context will usually determine which is intended. The mission of a mal'ak is to (1) carry a message, (2) fulfill a special, specific commission, and/or (3) represent the one sending him.

The supernatural beings called angels are also referred to by other names. They are called "sons of God" (KJV), a phrase meaning direct creations of God (Job 1:6; 2:1; and possibly Ge 6:2-4). They are also called "mighty ones" in Ps 29:1 and "heavenly beings" in Ps 89:6, as well as "holy ones" in Ps 89:5, 7; Da 4:13, 17, 23; 8:13 (twice).

The angels were created by God and were witnesses to the creation of the material universe (Job 38:7). They serve as members of God's eternal court (Job 1:6; Isa 6:2-4), and they are exhorted to praise Him (Ps 103:20-21; 148:2).

There are different orders and different types of these powerful beings. The cherubim, for example, have traits of both humans and animals (Ge 3:24; Ps 18:10; Isa 6:2; Eze 1:5-14; 10:19-22). One powerful archangel, Gabriel, is identified by name four times in Scripture (Da 8:16; 9:21; Lk 1:19, 26).

Satan was created an angel and named Lucifer. The New Testament tells us what the Old Testament hints at. Satan led a great rebellion in the unseen universe and was followed by many of the angels who fell with him.

While angels are not a major theme of the Old Testament, there are many indications of their importance to sacred history. Angels were associated with God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. God promised Israel, "I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared" (Ex 23:20). On a similar mission of protection an angel aided Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Da 3:28) and Daniel in the lions' den (6:22). One of the most graphic Old Testament stories of angelic protection is found in 2 Ki 6. The king of Aram had sent an army to capture the prophet Elisha. Elisha's servant stepped outside one morning to find the town of Dothan surrounded by an enemy force. He ran in terror to the prophet. Elisha quieted his fears and then asked God to open the servant's eyes. Suddenly the servant saw "the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (6:17). An angelic army was present to protect the Lord's prophet.

In addition, angels were involved in God's dramatic judgments on sinful people (Sodom, Ge 19:1; a plague decimating Israel, 2 Sa 24:17; 1 Ch 21:15; destruction of an Assyrian army, 2 Ch 32:21; Isa 37:36). Abraham reassured his servant by saying that God would send an angel to help the servant get a wife for Isaac (Ge 24:7, 40). Angels clearly are given assignments to guard and guide believers and to carry out God's judgments on sin.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

A number of references in the Old Testament single out a being identified as "the angel of the Lord." This distinctive personage is especially active at critical times in Old Testament history and is identified when contact with angels involves revelation of some special message from God to man.

The angel of the Lord is linked with key events in the lives of each of the patriarchs (Abraham and Isaac, Ge 22:11, 15-18; Jacob, Ge 31:11). The angel of the Lord called Moses to his mission (Ex 3), appeared to Gideon (Jdg 6), empowered Samson (Jdg 13), strengthened Elijah (1 Ki 19), and was the agent of revelation in a prophecy about Israel's future (Zec 1). He can be called on to protect (Ps 34:7) and to do battle against implacable enemies (Ps 35:5-6).

There has been much speculation about the identity of the angel of the Lord. Many suggest that he is actually the Second Person of the Trinity, appearing before the Incarnation. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the angel of the Lord not only serves as the agent of revelation in most contexts where he appears; he also speaks as the God of the covenant (Jdg 2:1-4). He is often viewed as God by those to whom he appears (Ge 16:9-13; Ex 3:2, 6; Jdg 13:20-22). Two conclusions seem evident: no clear distinction can be made between this angel and Yahweh, and where human beings encounter God in the Old Testament, they meet Him not in unmasked glory but in the person of the angel of the Lord.

ANGELS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament assumes all that the Old Testament teaches about angels and goes on to add fresh information. The New Testament word angelos also means "messenger." It is used some 175 times. The activity of angels in the New Testament concentrated around the birth of Christ (Mt 1-2; Lk 1-2) and will again be prominent at Jesus' return and the judgment to take place then (cf. Mt 13, 24-25, 1 Th 1, Rev).

Jesus' statement that those raised from the dead are "like the angels" (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:36) simply affirms that, like angels, the resurrected are not subject to the limitations of mortal life on earth.

The New Testament makes explicit what is hinted at in the Old Testament. Satan leads a host of angels (Mt 25:41). Like him, they fell from their original state; they choose not to "keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home" (Jude 6) and as a result are condemned to eternal judgment (also 2 Pe 2:4). Many believe that fallen angels are the demons that are spoken of in the New Testament. The angels who remained committed in their allegiance to God continue to serve Him and carry out the missions they are assigned.

As noted above, the New Testament associates angels closely with the first and second coming of Jesus. In the meanwhile, they are "all ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14). Angels seem to have a special ministry in relation to children (Mt 18:10). An angel was instrumental in releasing Peter from prison (Acts 12) and in preparing the way for the conversion of Cornelius (Ac 10-11).

Angels in the unseen world are all under Jesus, "who is the head over every power and authority" (Col 2:10). Jesus, not angels, is the focus of our faith.

What we glimpse about angels is intriguing and stimulates speculation. But the thrust of the Old Testament and New Testament is clear. Human beings, not angels, are the focus of God's concern. In return, God invites us to fix our thoughts and our faith on Jesus--not on angels. We can trust Jesus as Lord to supervise the unseen universe for His good purposes and for our benefit. We can concentrate our efforts on coming to better know and love the One who truly is Lord of all.

Adapted from the teaching of Lawrence Richard and Alban Douglas

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When and how did angels begin?
2. Give several references to prove the existence of angels.
3. Tell several things about the nature of angels.
4. List several outstanding feats of angels to demonstrate their strength.

5. Give a verse that gives some idea of the number of angels?
6. Give some possible causes of the downfall of angels.
7. Name several things included in the work of angels.
8. Men are superior to angels. True or False.
9. What lesson do we learn about angels from Rev. 22:8-9?
10. What comforting lesson do we learn from Luke 16:22, regarding angels?