

## Kingdoms in Conflict Confronting the Reality of Spiritual Warfare

### A. Three Observations

(1) *As there is a kingdom of God, so, too, is there is a kingdom of Satan. And the two are in conflict.*

“If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will **his kingdom** stand?... But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the **kingdom of God** has come upon you” ([Mt. 12:26, 28](#); see also [Acts 26:18](#) [“the dominion of Satan”]; [Col. 1:13](#) [“the domain of darkness”]).

(2) *Few Christians fully realize the extent of Satan’s influence. Nor do they understand their own authority. Two texts in particular make both points clear.*

a. [1 John 5:19](#)—“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

Observe the contrast. Whereas the “whole world” is *in* the evil one, we who are “of God” (v. [19](#)) are *in* God and *in* his son, Jesus Christ (v. [20](#)). The point is that **everyone is in someone!** “John wastes no words and blurs no issues. The uncompromising alternative is stated baldly. Everyone belongs either to ‘us’ or to the ‘world’. Everyone is therefore either ‘of God’ or ‘in the evil one’. There is no third category” (John Stott, 194).

Note: what significance is there in the fact that this passage was written *after* the cross, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus?

This forever shatters the illusion of *neutrality*, the idea that so-called “good” people who are not Christians are neither for God nor for Satan, are neither in God’s kingdom nor in Satan’s. The fact is, all people, young and old, male and female, belong to one of two kingdoms: the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. If one is not “in Christ” one is “in the power of the devil,” even if there is no visible, sensible awareness of being in the devil’s grip. Thus, *not to serve God is to serve Satan* whether one is conscious of it or not.

“**IN**” = languishes in helpless passivity; lives under the influence, power, and under the authority of Satan; in his grip and subject to his dominion (cf. [John 12:31](#); [14:30](#); [16:11](#); [17:15](#); [Acts 26:18](#); [2 Cor. 4:4](#); [Eph. 2:1–2](#)). Apply this notion to the “whole world”, i.e., to the financial world, business and industry, the stock market, the banking system, political institutions and parties, entertainment (TV, films, media, radio), sports, education, the family, the home, the neighborhood, civic clubs and social service organizations, country clubs, ... everything! PT: ***there is a satanic global influence with which we must reckon.***

This is a stunning, shocking revelation. It takes one’s breath away when the implications of such an assertion are unpacked. Indeed, it is a frightening revelation that could easily instill fear and dread were it not for another assertion that John makes.

b. [1 John 4:4](#)—“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

Christians are assured of victory over false prophets and heretics (*theological victory*—they have not succeeded in deceiving you; you know the truth and have rejected their lies). Why? How? Because “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world!”

Having contrasted Christians (“you”) with the heretics (“them”), he now compares the spiritual forces who are *in* the respective antagonists. Yes, Satan is great, but God is greater! Yes, Satan is powerful, but God is infinitely more powerful!

The “He” who is in the Christian = (1) God the Father ([1 John 3:20](#); [4:12–13](#)); (2) God the Son ([1 John 2:14](#); [3:24](#)); and (3) God the Holy Spirit ([1 John 2:20](#), [27](#)). John does not say “greater are *you*” but “greater is *He*”. It isn’t you, but *God in you* that brings the assurance of victory.

**(3) *People often respond to the call to spiritual arms in one of two ways: either with obsessive preoccupation (based on their focus on [1 John 5:19](#) to the neglect of [1 John 4:4](#)) or with complacent indifference (based on their focus on [1 John 4:4](#) to the neglect of [1 John 5:19](#)).***

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves [i.e., the demons] are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight” (C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 3).

In other words, it matters little to the devil whether you attribute the totality of evil to him or none at all!
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## **B. Twelve Reasons why Christians are tragically ignorant of and dangerously ill-prepared for spiritual warfare**

### *(1) Ignorance of the Bible*

Many simply do not know what or how much is said on the subject, nor are they acquainted with the tactics of the enemy. Consider the ramifications for the Christian life, even its most routine and seemingly mundane affairs, of Paul’s statement in [Eph. 6:12](#),

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Consider the man who wrote this, Paul, whose life was a constant battle, so it would seem, against *people, flesh and blood*: Pharisees, angry mobs, Roman authorities, false apostles in virtually every city, disloyal followers, etc. Yet, according to Paul, his own war, no less than ours, was not ultimately against them but against unseen demonic forces. Ignorance of this fact has contributed greatly to the lack of preparedness on the part of most Christians.

### *(2) Irrelevance of the Bible*

Some regard what the Bible says as irrelevant for our day. Belief in Satan and demons, so they argue, is on a level with belief in the Loch Ness monster and the search for Bigfoot! Related to this is the obstacle posed by

the ludicrous and comical way in which Satan and his demons are portrayed. It is difficult to get people to take the devil seriously when he is trivialized by both the church and modern society. Again, says Screwtape to Wormwood:

“I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that ... he therefore cannot believe in you.”

### (3) *The victory of the cross*

Many are unprepared due to their belief that, since the victory of Jesus was so complete and comprehensive, one need only rest passively in the security of one’s position in Christ rather than aggressively apply it on a daily basis. But one thing we will soon learn is that *protection against demonic attack is not automatic*. Simply being a Christian does not insulate you from demonic oppression. Compare [Col. 2](#) and [1 Peter 5](#).

### (4) *The fear of imbalance*

Some do nothing, believing that *any* depth of study on the subject betrays a preoccupation with the demonic and is thus imbalanced. According to Timothy Warner, a lot of Christians “have become so accustomed to operating with no demonstrations of spiritual power that they are bothered by *any* demonstration” at all. In other words, to those who have seen virtually nothing, any seems like too much. Likewise, to those who have seen a lot, a little seems like none at all.

### (5) *The fear of sensationalism*

Some believe that “stressing spiritual warfare might lead to an unbalanced, experience-oriented theology centering on the spectacular” (Arnold, 26).

### (6) *Insulated life-styles*

Some people, good-solid-stable-buckle-on-the-Bible-belt-middle-class-American people, who have lived relatively docile and decent lives, find it hard to believe that any of this is necessary or helpful. Some have been heard to say,

“I’ve never encountered a demon or felt attacked by one. So why rock the boat? Surely Satan is more concerned with the gay community in San Francisco and the spread of voodoo in Haiti than he is with my routine struggles. Isn’t he?”

This all-too-common mindset reveals how ignorant most are of the nature and extent of spiritual warfare. The latter touches our routine struggles in life no less than the Mt. Carmel confrontations we read about in Scripture. Arnold agrees:

“Spiritual warfare is all-encompassing. It touches every area of our lives—our families, our relationships, our church, our neighborhoods, our communities, our places of employment. There is virtually no part of

our existence over which the Evil One does not want to maintain or reassert his unhealthy and perverse influence” (27).

The conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan encompasses how we use our money, what we watch on TV, how we raise our kids, the tone of voice with which we speak to our spouse, how we use our time, how we talk about our boss when he isn’t listening, indeed, every aspect of our lives.

(7) *The Christian and demonization*

A principal reason for passivity and indifference among many believers is their belief that a Christian cannot be demonized. This conviction has lulled many into inactivity and a false sense of spiritual security.

(8) *The paralyzing fear of fanaticism*

The excesses and extremes of certain deliverance ministries have evoked a disdain that often leads to outright denial. Related to this is the belief by many that those who actively engage in spiritual conflict are emotionally unstable and theologically illiterate. My immediate response to the latter point is: So what? I’m not condoning emotional instability or theological ignorance, but what does that have to do with whether or not spiritual warfare is a genuine threat? The issue is not what kind of people believe and engage in spiritual warfare. The issue is whether or not it is biblically true.

(9) *Compartmentalizing*

Others insist that spiritual warfare pertains largely, if not exclusively, to such things as ritualistic sacrifice, seances, ouija boards, tarot cards, and people such as Sean Sellers, Richard Ramirez (the California “Night Stalker”), Charles Manson, and Jeffrey Dahmer.

(10) *Western world-view*

Perhaps the most significant reason spiritual warfare is not of immediate concern to many Christians relates to their world-view. Spirit beings, whether angels or demons, are not a *functional* part of how they view the world and the way they live.

a. *Western world-view* = every effect has a physical cause; if you can’t see it, touch it, taste it, smell it, or hear it, it probably doesn’t exist; all phenomena can or eventually will be explained or accounted for scientifically; *reality* is material and mechanical; *if there is* a spiritual realm, it has no relation to or impact upon the physical realm.

Philip Johnson has defined scientific naturalism as “a story that reduces reality to physical particles and impersonal laws, portrays life as a meaningless competition among organisms that exist only to survive and reproduce, and sees the mind as no more than an emergent property of biochemical reactions” (*Reason in the Balance*, 197).

b. *Biblical world-view* = thoroughly supernatural; physical phenomena/nature are controlled by God; angels do his bidding; demons actively and energetically oppose his kingdom; miracles, physical healing, gifts of the HS are essential elements that constitute *reality*.

Arnold explains:

“The issue is often framed as a choice between accepting a modern scientific worldview or devolving into a gullible, uncritical acceptance of a primitive, prescientific worldview. Of course, this is not an issue of being scientific or not. It is an issue of whether we accept the predominantly naturalistic assumptions of certain understandings of science. It is in no way incompatible with the scientific method to give credence to a belief in a personal God—or, conversely, to believe in the evil spiritual dimension” (24).

Notwithstanding what has been said, many Christians remain *functional deists*. They don't deny that God exists or that there is a spiritual realm in which angels and demons are active. They simply live as if neither God nor spiritual beings of either sort have any genuine, influential, interaction with them. God isn't dead, but He might as well be. Angels and demons might exist, but what does that have to do with my life?

#### (11) *Mission-field mentality*

If there is such a thing as spiritual warfare, so some argue, it happens only on the mission field in the non-western world. People actually say that “demons are only operative in areas of the world where the gospel has not yet reached or where idolatry is still prevalent. They infer that Satan is just not as active in the Christian West” (Arnold, 25).

#### (12) *The insidious power of pride*

Timothy Warner explains:

“With the secularization of our worldview, the reality of spiritual warfare has almost disappeared from our thinking; and rather than risk the scorn of our peers, we seek to have as little to do with the world of demons as possible, being content to leave them in the realm of theory or theology. To bring them into everyday life would be to risk ridicule.”

In simple terms, the affirmation of the biblical world-view relative to angels and demons carries a social stigma that not many are willing to endure. Acceptance with one's peers often becomes a more powerful incentive than orthodoxy.

### C. Where the Battle began: A study of [Genesis 3](#)

The conflict in [Genesis 3](#) is important not simply because it was the first encounter between Satan and the human race, but because it is *paradigmatic of virtually all subsequent encounters* as well. This is not simply the beginning of spiritual warfare, this is the *essence* of it. Cf. Satan's confrontation with Jesus in the wilderness.

That the serpent is an animal is evident from the fact that he is twice compared to other members of the animal kingdom ([Gen. 2:19–20](#); [3:14–15](#)). Yet he is also quite clearly the instrument of Satan (see [John 8:44](#); [Rom. 16:20](#); [Rev. 12:9](#); [20:2](#)). The extraordinary nature of this beast and the nature of his attack is evident from several factors:

- 1) His ability to speak (it is interesting, however, that Eve was apparently not surprised that he spoke; in other words, his speaking is not represented as remarkable or unusual).
- 2) He possesses preternatural knowledge as seen from his statement to Eve: “Did God really say ...” How does the serpent know about the prohibition concerning the forbidden fruit?
- 3) He claims to know more about the fruit than God has revealed.
- 4) He impugns God’s character and motives by telling Eve, contrary to what God had said, “You shall *not* surely die ...” He implies either that God is selfish or deceitful, or both.
- 5) The fact that the serpent/Satan approaches Eve rather than Adam points to his craftiness. Whereas some have suggested this was because the temptation had a sexual component, the best explanation is “that the serpent demonstrates his cunning by accosting the person who indirectly learned of the prohibition and who was, therefore, more vulnerable.... The serpent directs his attack against the one who, at least as far as the biblical narrative is concerned, had not actually heard God give instructions regarding the biblical fruit” (Sydney Page, *Powers of Evil*, 17).
- 6) The serpent’s cunning is also revealed in his tactics. Rather than launching an overt invitation to sin he asks what on the surface appears to be an innocent question: “Did God *really* say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ ” ([3:1](#)).
- 7) He speaks of “God” rather than “Lord God” (the latter being the way God is otherwise described in the context). Does this suggest an unfriendly, perhaps rebellious, attitude on the part of Satan?
- 8) The serpent exaggerates the extent of the prohibition and thereby suggests that God has placed unreasonable and unfair limitations on Adam and Eve. “Furthermore, the question casts aspersions on God’s character and implies that it is the serpent, not God, who has the couple’s best interests in mind. Underlying the question is the assumption that a created being has the right to pass judgment on the Creator” (Page, 17).
- 9) The serpent/Satan disguises his true intent (“follow me in forsaking creaturely dependence on the Creator; form your own opinion about truth without appeal to the revelation of God”) by putting before Eve what seems to be a blessing (“become like God”).

The two-fold curse pronounced on the serpent/Satan tells us much about him:

The first element in the curse is found in [3:14](#). The curse teaches “that the crawling of snakes and the way they flick out their tongues, as if eating, have symbolic value. Having exalted himself so as to sit in judgment of God, the serpent is condemned to crawl on his belly; having led astray those who were created from dust ([2:7](#)), he is condemned to live in the dust” (Page, 19–20). Boyd points out that “crawling on one’s belly and ‘eating dust’ (something snakes do not do) were idiomatic ways of referring to defeat and humiliation in ancient Semitic culture (e.g., [Mic. 7:17](#)). Such references clearly refer to the loathsome behavior of snakes, but they do so metaphorically” (157).

The second part of the curse is in [3:15](#). The “offspring” of the woman is obviously the human race. If the serpent is indeed Satan, then surely his “offspring” cannot be limited to ordinary snakes but must encompass spiritual beings of a similar nature, i.e., angelic beings who, like Satan, fell from their original place of goodness.

Two issues must be addressed.

First is the statement, “he will crush your head” (v. [15](#)). The antecedent of “he” is “offspring”, a word that can have either an individual or collective reference. If it refers to an individual, the Messiah may be in view. If it is collective, the people of God are in view. The recipient of the blow (“he will crush *your* head”) is clearly an individual. The collective sense is supported by [Rom. 16:20](#), but the language in [Genesis 3](#) is too ambiguous to be dogmatic.

Second, does the curse describe a decisive victory over the serpent or simply a perpetual conflict? Both actions (“crush” and “strike”) are described with the same Hebrew verb (best translated “strike”). Still, though, the ultimate victory of the woman’s seed is implied: (1) “First is the simple fact that the struggle is divinely ordained. If God instituted the conflict, we may presume that he will bring it to a resolution” (Page, 22). (2) Since a blow to the “head” is more likely to be fatal than one to the “heel”, victory for the woman’s seed is suggested. It must be admitted, however, that the emphasis of the text is simply on the battle, not its ultimate outcome.

Three final issues:

- (1) There is nothing in the text to suggest that the serpent/Satan gained any new power or unique authority over the world because of Adam and Eve’s sin. In fact, the only thing Satan is portrayed as experiencing as a result of this event is *cursing*! However, one must still explain [Matthew 4:6](#); [John 12:31](#); [14:30](#); [16:11](#).
- (2) There is no support here for the so-called “serpent-seed” doctrine, according to which the serpent/Satan had sexual relations with Eve. Support for this idea has been mistakenly derived from Paul’s use of the words “pure virgin” in [2 Cor. 11:2](#) and his reference to Satan’s “deception” (“seduction”?) of Eve.
- (3) We learn from this narrative some of Satan’s tactics (more on this later). Two brief observations are in order.

Satan will always claim to know more about God than God himself has revealed. He will claim to have special insight into God’s motives for a command or a prohibition that God himself has kept secret. In other words, he will sow seeds of doubt in your mind concerning God’s goodness; he will lead you to believe that God has ulterior motives in what He does designed to deprive you of blessings you might otherwise experience. “God is not telling you the *whole* truth. He can’t afford to.”

Rarely, if ever, will Satan confront you as Satan. He will almost always approach you indirectly, disguised as someone or something who/that is more likely to win your trust (e.g., when Peter opposed Jesus’ going to Jerusalem in [Mt. 16](#)). He will come to you through something you hear or see, perhaps a movie, a lecture by a brilliant, articulate, but pagan professor, through a well-meaning friend, or as an angel of light. After all, if you knew it was Satan, you’d be less inclined to listen or say yes.



## The Existence and Activity of Angels

The problem of *evangelical deism*—For many years I readily acknowledged the *existence* of both holy angels and fallen demonic spirits, but relegated their *activity* to the pages of the Bible. As one who affirms biblical authority, I couldn't deny the reality of such beings, but as an evangelical deist, they played little if any role in the daily affairs of my life. Angels and demons were fine (in a manner of speaking), but only if they remained tucked safely away inside the two covers of my Bible. That I should ever encounter an angelic being, or a demonic one, was not something I expected and something that I would have quickly explained away lest I be regarded as theologically naïve or given to charismatic sensationalism. I hope these lessons in spiritual warfare will awaken all of us to the inescapable reality of angelic and demonic activity and the necessity of our preparation for the battle in which we are engaged.

[This lesson is concerned primarily with the holy angels and does not address the properties, personality or activities of demonic spirits.]

### 8 Questions concerning Angels

(1) *Do they really exist, and if they do, does it really matter?*

a. The word “angel” (*angelos*) occurs in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible: 108x in OT and over 165x in NT = @ 275 x in the Bible.

b. Jesus believed in and experienced the ministry of angels: (1) his conception was announced by an angel (Gabriel); (2) his birth was announced by angels; (3) he was tempted by a fallen angel; (4) he was ministered to by angels subsequent to the temptation; (5) his teaching is filled with references to angelic beings; (6) he experienced the ministry of angels in Gethsemane; (7) he could have appealed to twelve legions of angels ([Mt. 26:53](#)); (8) they were present at his tomb following the resurrection; (9) they were present at his ascension. The point is that angels were an integral part of Christ's birth, life, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and will accompany him at his second advent.

*To deny the reality of the angelic world is to undermine the integrity of Jesus himself.*

c. Consider the witness/testimony/experience of countless Christians ...

(2) *Where did they come from?*

a. Angels, no less than humans, were *created* at a point in time. [Ps. 148:2–5](#); [John 1:1–3](#); [Col. 1:16](#). Each angel is a direct creation: i.e., they did not descend from an original pair as we did; they do not procreate as we do ([Mt. 22:28–30](#)).



b. *When* were angels created? Most likely they were created before the events of [Gen. 1:1ff](#). See [Job 38:4–7](#).

c. In what *moral state* were they created? They must have been created righteous and upright for the simple fact that God does not directly create evil. Several texts assert or imply an original act of rebellion ([Rev. 12](#); [Col. 1](#)).

(3) *What are they like?*

a. personality

The basic elements of personality are intellect, emotion, will, self-consciousness, self-determination, a sense of moral obligation (i.e., conscience) and the power to pursue it, etc. Angels certainly are intelligent but not omniscient ([1 Pt. 1:12](#); [Mk. 13:32](#)), experience emotion ([Job 38:7](#); [Luke 15:10](#); [Rev. 4–5](#)), and exercise their wills ([Rev. 12](#)).

Were angels created *in the image and likeness of God*? The image of God entails, among other things, personality, dominion, capacity for relationship, self-consciousness, etc.

b. properties

1. *spirit beings*—immaterial, incorporeal; no flesh or blood or bones; they are “ministering *spirits*” ([Heb. 1:14](#)).

Although they are spirits, they have spatial limitations, i.e., they are not omnipresent. See [Dan. 9:21–23](#); [10:10–14](#) where we find both spatial movement and temporal limitations.

2. *spirit bodies*—in some sense of the word they have “bodies,” though not of a physical nature; i.e., they are spatially confined (their “form” or “shape” is not distributed throughout space); they are localized.

Do angels have literal “wings”? [Isa. 6:2, 6](#); [Ezek. 1:5–8](#); Gabriel is portrayed as flying to Daniel’s side ([9:21](#); cf. [Rev. 14:6–7](#)).

3. *gender/sex*—[Mt. 22:28–30](#); hence they do not procreate; they are always described in the masculine gender (but see [Zech. 5:9](#)).

4. *immortality*—they are not inherently immortal, but derivatively ([Lk. 20:36](#))

c. powers

1. they are able to assume the form and appear as humans: a) to the naked eye ([Lk. 1:11–13](#); [1:26–29](#); [Mt. 28:1–7](#)); b) in visions and dreams ([Mt. 1:20](#); [Isa. 6](#)); c) in the form of a man ([Gen. 18:1–8](#); in this case they were sufficiently “real” in their appearance that the homosexuals in S & G lusted after them; see also [Mark 16:5](#)); d) other forms ([Dan. 10:5–6](#); [Mt. 28:3](#); [Rev. 4:6–8](#)).

Reactions to angelic appearances: mental and emotional agitation; fear; loss of composure; etc.

2. all angelic power is subject to God's power and purpose ([Ps. 103:20](#); [2 Pt. 2:11](#)).

[Gen. 19:12–16](#) (used of God to destroy S & G); [2 Kings 19:35](#) (one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians); [Mt. 28:2](#) (an angel moved the stone from Christ's tomb); [Acts 12](#) (an angel entered a locked prison and released Peter); [Acts 12:23](#) (an angel killed Herod); [Rev. 7:2–3](#) (angels influence the phenomena of nature); [Mt. 24:31](#) (angels gather the saints at Christ's second coming).

d. position

Angels are of two moral orders or categories: elect/holy ([Mk. 8:38](#); [1 Tim. 5:21](#)) and evil ([Lk. 8:2](#)). Evidently, after the rebellion/fall of Satan and his hosts, all angels were *confirmed* in their moral state: God preserves the elect/holy angels and will not redeem the evil ones. **Why do we deny the possibility of redemption for fallen angelic beings?** (1) there is no record of such in Scripture; (2) there is no record in Scripture of demonic repentance; (3) the impact of the cross on demons is always portrayed as judgment, never salvation (nowhere do we read of justification, forgiveness, redemption, adoption, regeneration, etc. being true of any angelic being); (4) [Hebrews 2:14–17](#); [Rev. 5:8–14](#).

4. *What are they called?*

a. “angel” = messenger (Heb. *Mal'akh* and Gk. *Angelos*)

b. “ministers” = serving God ([Ps. 104:4](#))

c. “hosts” = God's army

d. “watchers” = [Dan. 4:13, 17](#) (supervisors employed by God in governing the world); however, in some inter-testamentary writings such as the book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls the word “watchers” is used for evil spirits, not angels.

e. “sons of the Mighty” = [Ps. 89:6](#)

f. “sons of God” = [Job 1:6](#); [2:1](#); [38:7](#)

g. “holy ones” = [Ps. 89:6–7](#)

Special classifications or categories or kinds of angelic beings:

*Cherubim*—the highest order or rank; splendor, power, beauty; they guard Eden and prevent man's return ([Gen. 3:24](#)); they hover above the mercy seat ([Ex. 25:17–22](#); cf. [Heb. 9:5](#) = “cherubim of glory”); see also [Ezek. 1:1, 28](#); [10:4, 18–22](#). Cherubim are never explicitly called “angels” because they are not messengers: they proclaim and protect the glory and holiness of God.

*Seraphim*—lit., “burning ones” ([Isa. 6](#)); the name speaks of their consuming devotion to God; they are “afire” or “ablaze” with adoration of God; their principal task is worship.

*Living Creatures*—[Rev. 4:6–9](#); they could be either cherubim or seraphim or another class altogether.

Only two angels are named: a) Michael = lit., “who is like God?” in [Dan. 10:13, 20](#); he is assigned to protect Israel; he is the “archangel” ([Jude 9](#)) and the leader of the angelic host in their war against Satan

([Rev. 12:7](#)); b) Gabriel = lit., “mighty one of God” in [Dan. 9:21](#); [Luke 1:26](#); in each appearance he communicates or interprets divine revelation concerning God’s kingdom purposes.

In the apocryphal book of Tobit, another angel is named: Raphael. If one includes 2 Esdras under the apocryphal books, another name occurs: Uriel.

*The Angel of the Lord*—also called “the angel of God” or “the angel of the presence” ([Gen. 22:9–18](#); [Ps. 34:7](#); etc.). Was this the pre-incarnate Logos, the second person of the Trinity, or was he merely a created angelic being? On occasion this angel is distinguished from the Lord and sometimes, even in the same passage, he is identified with the Lord. In the account of confronting Hagar ([Gen. 16](#)) the angel of the Lord speaks to her in the first person: “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count” (v. [10](#)). Hagar even identifies him as “the God who sees” (v. [13](#)). The angel says to Jacob, “I am the God of Bethel” ([Gen. 31:13](#)). However, Abraham clearly distinguishes the angel from God: “He [God] will send His angel before you” ([Gen. 24:7](#)). It was “the angel of the Lord” who appeared to Moses in the burning bush ([Exod. 3:2](#); cf. [Acts 7:35, 38](#)), yet it was clearly God himself whom Moses encountered ([Exod. 3:13–14](#)).

Arguments for identifying the angel of the Lord with the Lord himself: (1) the angel explicitly identifies himself with the Lord on several occasions; (2) those to whom he makes his presence known often identify and speak of him as divine; (3) the biblical authors often explicitly refer to him as “the Lord.”

Arguments for identifying the angel of the Lord with a created spirit being: (1) God often so completely invests and authorizes his ambassadors or representatives with his character and word that they become indistinguishable from Him when they speak His message (see [Exod. 23:21](#)); (2) the OT prophets display this kind of identity with God when they identify His message with their message; (3) the “angel of the Lord” appears in the NT *subsequent* to the incarnation and thus would have to be regarded as someone/something other than the second person of the Trinity; “yet his actions (for example, [Acts 12:7, 15](#)) are also described as an act of the Lord himself, and he sometimes speaks in the first person for the Lord himself ([Rev. 22:6, 7, 12](#))” (Andrew Bandstra, *In the Company of Angels*, 49–50).

##### 5. How many angels are there?

A “multitude” announced Jesus’ birth ([Lk. 2:13–15](#)). God is Yahweh “of hosts” ([Ps. 46:7, 11](#), et.al), i.e., He is head over a vast army of angels. Jesus refers to “twelve legions” of angels ([Mt. 26:53](#)) and a legion = 6,000, hence 72,000 angels. Often angels are associated with the stars, leading some to suggest they are equal in number ([Job 38:7](#); [Ps. 148:1–3](#); [Rev. 9:1–2](#); [12:3–4, 7–9](#)).

Some suggest that since each angel is a guardian of a Christian ([Heb. 1:14](#)), the number of Christians = the number of angels. It has even been argued that Jesus won’t return until enough people are saved to correspond to each angel! But, no text says that every angel serves in this capacity. Many, it would seem, never leave the throne of God (see [Rev. 4–5](#)).

Regardless of how many there are, their number seems to be fixed, for they neither procreate nor die ([Mt. 22:28–30](#); [Lk. 20:36](#)). [Rev. 5:11](#) refers to “myriads” (a “myriad” = 10,000), but nothing here suggests that

these are all the angels there are. See [Dan. 7:10](#) (“thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads”); [Deut. 33:2](#) (“10,000 holy ones”); [Jude 14](#).

## 6. *How are they organized?*

- a. Michael = “archangel” (a word found only in [1 Thess. 4:16](#) and [Jude 9](#)) = chief or first; in [Rev. 12](#) he is head of the angelic host. See [Dan. 10:13](#).
- b. [Job 1:6](#) and [2:1](#) indicate that there was a regular, periodic assembly of the angels. Cf. [Ps. 89:5–6](#) (“the assembly of the holy ones”). Why? Perhaps to report on service, receive instructions, etc. ([Ps. 103:20–21](#)).
- c. The fact that there are different classes or categories or types of angels would imply some form of organization.
- d. [Eph. 1:21](#); [3:10](#); [6:12](#); [Col. 1:16](#); [2:10](#), [15](#). Here we find six terms and thus perhaps six classes or categories of angelic (demonic) beings.
  - 1) principalities/rulers (*arche*)—a ruler must have someone or something over which to exercise dominion ([Eph. 1:21](#); [3:10](#); [6:12](#); [Col. 1:16](#); [2:10](#); [Rom. 8:38](#)).
  - 2) authorities (*exousia*)—again, authority, by definition, demands a subordinate ([Eph. 1:21](#); [3:10](#); [Col. 1:16](#)).
  - 3) powers (*dunamis*)—[Eph. 1:21](#); [Rom. 8:38](#). In [Mark 9:29](#) Jesus refers to a type of demon that “cannot come out but by prayer and fasting.” The point seems to be that some demons are stronger and more powerful than others. Hence, there is implied a hierarchy or differentiation based on spiritual strength.
  - 4) dominions (*kuriotetos*)—again, “lordship” or “dominion” over what, whom, and where ([Eph. 1:21](#); [Col. 1:16](#))?
  - 5) thrones (*thronoi*)—used of angels only in [Col. 1:16](#).
  - 6) world rulers (*kosmokratōras*)—used only in [Eph. 6:12](#).

If all angels and demons are of the same type or rank or carry the same authority, why are they described by such a variety of terms? It would also seem that with difference in rank comes difference in power, task, etc.

## 7. *What is their ministry?*

- a. worship—[Isa. 6](#); [Rev. 4:6–11](#); [5:11](#) (unending praise)
- b. service—of God and on our behalf. [Heb. 1:7](#) (“ministers” = *leitourgōs* = priestly service); [Heb 1:14](#); [Ps. 103:19–21](#) (open-ended service, i.e., whatever God should desire or decree). Often people will question the claim that an angelic being is responsible for some event by saying: “Where is that in the Bible?”, as if to say angels can only do what they are explicitly recorded as already having done during biblical times. But there is no basis for restricting angelic activity to what is explicitly recorded in Scripture. If, as [Psalm 103](#) indicates, they exist to fulfill God’s will and perform His commands, the scope and variety of their activity could be virtually limitless.

c. guidance and direction—[Gen. 24:7, 40](#) (the servant of Abraham who pursued a bride for Isaac); [Ex. 14:19](#) (an angel guided Israel in the wilderness); [Ex. 23:20](#); [Num. 20:16](#); [Acts 5:17–20](#); [8:26](#); [10:3–7, 22](#); [16:9\(?\)](#).

d. guard and protect—[Pss. 34:7](#); [78:23–25](#); [91:11](#); [1 Kings 19:5–7](#); [Dan. 6:20–23](#); [12:1](#); [Acts 12:15](#) (was Luke only reporting their belief without himself endorsing it? No. Does one’s guardian angel on occasion take on the physical characteristics of the one he guards?). A few texts deserve special note:

Considerable debate has surrounded the reference to the “angels” of the seven churches in [Rev. 2–3](#).

1. A few have argued that the “angel” is the “pastor” of the church. Against this view are several points. First, it is contrary to the NT portrait of church structure. Nowhere in the NT is a single individual portrayed as exercising pastoral authority over a congregation. Rule by a plurality of elders is the standard NT perspective. Second, this view is historically anachronistic, for the existence of a single pastor/bishop was unknown until Ignatius (@ 110 a.d.). Third, the word “angel” is used some 60x in Revelation and always means a supernatural or spiritual being. Fourth, the word “angel” is nowhere else in the NT used to designate an ecclesiastical office. Fifth, we know from [Acts 20](#) that the Ephesian church was ruled by a plurality of elders.

2. Some suggest that the “angel” refers to a prophet or delegated representative of the church, i.e., someone who undertook the responsibility of maintaining communication with those outside the congregation. This would be an ambassador or secretary of sorts who handled correspondence, etc. Stress is thus placed on the literal meaning of the Greek term *angelos* = messenger (cf. [Luke 9:52](#); [James 2:25](#)).

3. In [1:11](#) the letters are directed to “the churches” (plural). So also at the end of each letter we read: “Let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*.” Thus the Lord speaks to the *whole church* and not just to an “angel”. This leads some to conclude that the angel **is** the church, i.e., a **personification** of the church. The Greek text would allow (but by no means require) this interpretation, being rendered, “to the angel *which is* the church.”

4. Another theory is that the “angel” of each church is its guardian angel. See [Deut. 32:8](#) (LXX); [Dan. 10:13](#); [12:1](#); [Matt. 18:10](#); [Heb. 1:14](#); [Acts 12:15](#). This is certainly a more likely view than any of the preceding three.

5. Beasley-Murray contends that “the most plausible solution of the problem recognizes the Danielic background of angels assigned to nations, but sees them as akin to the Persian *fravashis*, i.e., heavenly counterparts of earthly individuals and communities. *The angels of the churches are then heavenly counterparts of the earthly congregations*. The idea is not to be literalized, as though John thought of congregations seated in heaven above, answering to their equivalents on earth below. We help ourselves if we think of them as existentially in heaven though living on earth. John writes to people who form very earthly communities, whose life is characterized by the failures and weakness to which any human organization is prone. But these communities have one feature which marks them off from all others on earth: they are *in Jesus* (v. [9](#)), and so saints of the Most High, priests and kings with Christ to God, lights in the world through whom the Light of the world shines. It is

because their determinative life is in Jesus that John writes to the ‘angels’ of the churches. Their earthly conduct is the reflection of their heavenly relationship” (69–70).

Beasley-Murray also points to the fact that in [1:20](#) the *seven stars* in Christ’s right hand are said to represent the seven angels of the churches. In the ancient world the seven (then known) planets were a common symbol for sovereignty (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the moon, and either Earth or the Sun). He says: “Even in John’s day there were many who believed that the planets were gods, exercising a powerful and even fearful influence over the lives of men. From this it was an easy transition to make of them a symbol of the political power exercised by the Roman Caesars over the world, and in this sense the seven stars often occur on imperial coins. When John declares that the seven stars are in Christ’s hand, he is claiming that the sovereignty over this world resides not in the Caesars of Rome but in the Lord of the Church. These seven stars he then defines as the angels of the churches. The purpose of John’s prophecy, from its first page to its last, is to assure the saints of God that they are kings and priests to God through the redemptive grace of Christ. The purport of the symbolism of *the seven stars* = *the angels of the churches* is therefore plain: it declares that the sovereignty of this world belongs not to those who proudly claim to be the saviours and lords of men and who seek to crush the Church of Jesus. It belongs to the Christ of God and his people” (69–70).

[2 Kings 6:8–23](#)—Several implications: (1) angelic armies fight God’s battles; (2) angelic armies influence earthly affairs; (3) our knowledge of angelic armies and their role counters fear; (4) some are occasionally gifted to see into the spirit realm.

[Matthew 18:10](#)—An ancient custom prevailed in eastern court settings according to which those who stood “before the king” or were allowed to “see his face” were officers who enjoyed the king’s special favor and were privileged to enjoy the closest possible fellowship. The implication may be that *the highest ranking angels* are assigned and commissioned by God to watch over with loving care his “little ones”. Thus Jesus is saying, “Don’t despise my ‘little ones,’ for they are so highly regarded that God has appointed his most illustrious angels to keep watch over them.” Their continual presence before God, beholding his face, may mean one of two things: a) it may be a way of saying that our condition and needs are ever before God: he is always and ever alert to our situation in life; or b) their constant presence before him is for the purpose of quickly responding to whatever tasks God may assign them in their ministry to us. [If these angels “continually” stand before the face of God in heaven, how can they serve as daily or continual “guardians” of people on earth?]

e. comfort and encourage—[Mt. 4:11](#); [Lk. 22:43](#); [Acts 27:22–24](#).

f. reveal and interpret—Observe the role of angels in the giving of the Mosaic Law ([Gal. 3:19](#); [Acts 7:38, 52–53](#); [Heb. 2:2](#)). They also communicate and then interpret God’s will ([Dan. 9](#); Revelation).

g. assistance in response to prayer—[Dan. 9:20–24](#); [Dan. 10](#).

h. execution of judgment—[Gen. 18–19](#); [Ex. 12:23, 29](#) (is “the destroyer” an angelic being?); [2 Samuel 24:15–17](#); [2 Kings 19:35](#); [Ps. 78:49](#); [Acts 12:23](#); Revelation. Note: in [Gen. 19:12–13](#) the angels say that they will execute judgment on S & G, yet in [19:23–25](#) it is God who does so.



8. *What should be our response to angels?*

- a. respect and awe—[Dan. 8:16–17](#); [10:1–18](#); [Luke 1](#).
- b. we are to learn from their example in worship—[Rev. 4–5](#); etc.
- c. we must not worship them—(1) they themselves worship only God; (2) [Ex. 20:1–6](#); [Col. 2:18](#) (this refers either to worship in which angels are the objects [although there is little if any evidence of angels being worshiped at this time in the first century] or worship in which the angels themselves participate); all of Hebrews (esp. [1:5–14](#)); (3) the angels themselves forbid it ([Rev. 19:10](#); [22:8–9](#)).

Other important texts:

[Luke 16:22](#)

[1 Cor. 6:2–3](#)

[1 Cor. 11:1–10](#)

[1 Timothy 5:21](#); [1 Cor. 4:9–13](#); [Eph. 3:9–10](#)

In what sense are the angels in [1 Timothy 5:21](#) “elect” or “chosen”? Is this a way of referring to all angels that did not fall with Satan in his rebellion? If so, were they elect before his fall? Or were they in some sense “chosen” only after the fall of those whom we now refer to as demons? Or are these angels a smaller “select” or special group, such as the cherubim and seraphim, who are assigned the unique responsibility of keeping watch over the conduct of church leaders or church affairs in particular (note the context in which they appear)? Some have linked these “elect” angels with those whom the Dead Sea Scrolls refer to as the “angels of the Presence” ([1QSb 4.25](#); [1QH 6.13](#); see also [Jubilees 1.27–2.2](#); [1 Enoch 9.1](#); [20:1–7](#); [40.1–10](#); [Testament of Levi 3:4–8](#)), a higher rank of spiritual beings who stand before the “face” or “presence” of God, functioning as a royal court or council.

[Heb. 12:22](#); [13:1](#)

*A brief overview of the nature and role of angels in the book of Daniel.*

**[3:28](#)**

angels obey God, being sent to fulfill his purposes

this “angel” (pre-incarnate Son of God?) is unaffected by fire and has the power to protect humans from fire

**[4:13](#)**

these are called “watchers” and “holy ones”

they communicate revelation via dreams

they are empowered and authorized to mediate God’s purposes (“decree”, “decision”)

God delegates some measure of authority to them over the human realm (cf. [17b](#))



## **6:22**

this “angel” (pre-incarnate Son of God?) is sent by God, fulfilling his will  
the angel has power to restrain violent impulses of the lions (power over animal realm)

## **7:10**

innumerable angels are portrayed as “attending”(?) God  
innumerable angels are portrayed as “standing before”(?) God

## **8:10** (?)

## **8:13**

mediators of revelation  
conversation between two angels “overheard” by Daniel

## **8:16**

Gabriel provides an interpretation of divine revelation  
Gabriel is subject to God

## **8:17–18**

an angelic appearance is frightening to Daniel  
the angel makes physical contact with Daniel’s body

## **9:21–22**

an angel takes on the form or appearance of a man  
an angel communicates with and teaches Daniel

## **10:5–9**

an angel(?) takes on the appearance of a human  
the angel displays physical characteristics that symbolize spiritual truths (purity, royalty, holiness, power, etc.)  
the angel induces fear and physical phenomena in Daniel  
the angel is capable of selective appearance; i.e., only Daniel actually “sees” and “hears” the angel, whereas his companions are aware of the presence of something that terrifies them (cf. [Acts 9:1–7](#)).

## **10:10–12**

the angel makes physical contact with Daniel’s body  
the angel is acting in obedience to a divine commission  
angels can be the means by which God answers human prayers

### **10:13–14**

angels, both good and bad (demons), are engaged in conflict with each other (what is the nature of this conflict? how do they harm each other? how do they resist each other? what constitutes a victory or loss in such conflict?)

neither good nor bad angels are omnipotent

fallen angels (demons) “apparently have the capacity to bring about hindrances and delays, even of the delivery of the answers to believers whose requests God is minded to answer.... While God can, of course, override the united resistance of all the forces of hell if he chooses to do so, he accords to demons certain limited powers of obstruction and rebellion somewhat like those he allows humans” (Archer, 124–25).

### **10:15–17**

the angel again makes physical contact with Daniel’s body (“lips”)

the angelic presence is a humbling experience for Daniel (v. [17](#)); he addresses the angel as “my lord” = “sir” and asks how he, as a mortal man, could be allowed to converse with such a majestic being.

### **10:18–21**

by physically touching a human being an angel can impart both physical and emotional strength

both good and bad angels (demons) may be assigned (by God and Satan, respectively) a special authority or role with respect to entire nations

### **11:1**

even good angels grow “weary” and need strengthening

even good angels grow “discouraged” and need encouragement

not even the highest angel (Michael, the archangel) is self-sufficient or omnipotent

This overview does not include other statements concerning angels that may appear in the remainder of chapter [11](#) and chapter [12](#). E.g., [12:1](#) and [12:5–7](#).

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