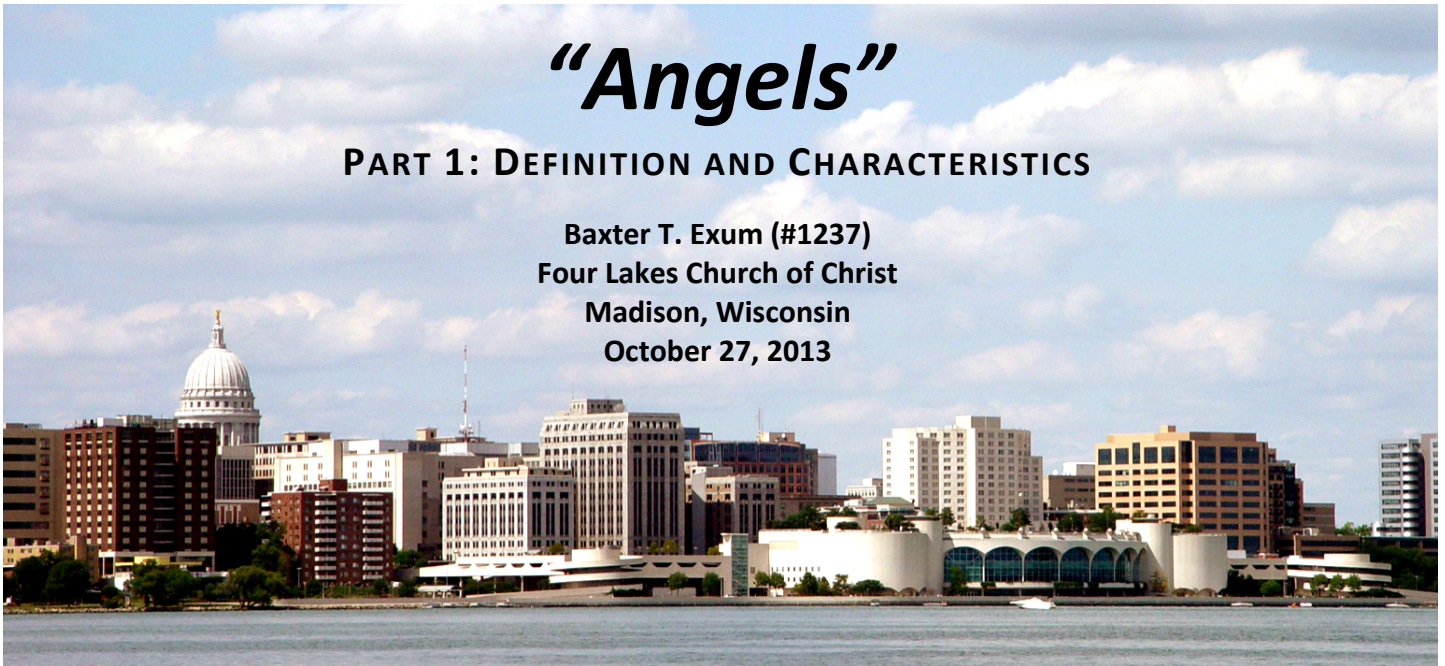


# *“Angels”*

## **PART 1: DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS**

**Baxter T. Exum (#1237)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
October 27, 2013**



This morning I would like for us to begin a series of lessons on a subject that has raised a number of questions among not only our own members but also among some recent visitors to our congregation. Over the past few months, we have received a good number of questions on the subject of ANGELS in the Bible. And as we begin, I would just ask: What do we normally picture in our minds when we think of an angel? Many people, of course, think about a beautiful woman or perhaps a chubby little baby. We think of a beautiful woman with a long, flowing robe, perhaps with huge wings and maybe a halo. We think of Valentine’s Day. We think of Cupid, the chubby little baby with a bow and arrow. And I am telling you that I have had a very difficult time finding any images for this series of lessons. I probably spent two hours on Google Images this past week searching for angels, and I will tell you that probably 90% of all angel images on the Internet fall into one of these two categories – beautiful women or chubby babies! I would estimate that a vast majority of the remaining 10% of angel images fall into one of two categories: 1.) Images that are inappropriate, or 2.) Images of some rather evil-looking creatures that we might find on various video games. But as we think about what we know about angels in the Bible, we start to realize that the creatures we read about in the Bible probably would have never starred in a Victoria’s Secret commercial! We will get into this a little bit more over the coming weeks, but when we look at what the Bible actually says, we find that angels are never pictured in the Scriptures as being women. As to why, I have no idea. But at least as far as our limited knowledge goes, whenever an angel appears in human form, it appears in the form of a man. Not only that, but whenever we find an angel’s name, it is a masculine name, such as Michael or Gabriel. Plus, whenever we read about angels, the Bible uses masculine pronouns (he, him, his, and so on). So, with that right there, we eliminate roughly half of all of the artwork depicting angels. I would also point out that in the Bible it is rare to read of any angels with wings. We read about the Cherubim and Seraphim having wings, but other than that, I can’t really think of any passages depicting angels with wings. So, a lot of what many people think about the appearance of angels is probably wrong. So we move on to the chubby little baby department. And again, never in the Bible do we find an angel depicted as a child. Instead, in their spirit form, angels are usually described as awe-inspiring figures – shining with brilliant light, carrying flaming swords and appearing in forms where the natural reaction of most people was to fall down in worship and fear. I don’t know about you, but whenever I see a chubby baby angel, my reaction is not usually terror. When I see that, I don’t really tremble in fear. So again, just by looking at God’s word, we have eliminated basically the other half of all angel-related artwork in the world around us.

With this in mind, I have made some sheets available this morning, asking for your help. If you have any artistic skill whatsoever (and even if you do not), I would invite you to draw an angel. If you have any clue at all concerning what the Bible says about angels, I can pretty much guarantee you that your stick-figure will be more accurate than about 99% of the artwork that is already out there. So, I would appreciate your help.

And while we are talking about the appearance of angels, I would suggest that if any of you ever have a chance, if you ever have a day off of school or maybe a day off of work, if you are looking for a quick day trip – I would suggest that everybody make the drive down to Beloit (less than an hour south of here, right along the Illinois border), and that you visit the world's most extensive (and as far as I know, the only) angel museum. Back in the mid 1970's, Joyce and Lowell Berg were on vacation in Florida when they went to an antique store and fell in love with a little figurine of two angels on a seesaw. At that point, they were hooked and started collecting angels from all around the world. Back in the mid 90's (when we were in Janesville), an old church building along the Rock River in Beloit went up for sale (right on Highway 51), the community rallied together, and they were able to move their collection into that facility. The last I heard, their collection now numbers nearly 14,000 angels, and the museum is now one of Beloit's most popular attractions. We went there not too long after they opened, and it was an interesting experience, to say the least. Their angels range in size from 1/8 inch to life size made of over 100 different materials from fine porcelain to macaroni. Several years ago, Oprah Winfrey donated her own collection of more than 600 black angels. Most of those were sent to her by fans through the years. The museum has now had more than 185,000 visitors from all 50 states and from every continent around the world. But again, I would point out, although it is an interesting collection, most of those angels also fall into one of two categories: Beautiful women with wings and chubby little babies!

The point of this is: Most people are interested in angels, but most are terribly uninformed in terms of what the Bible actually says. After looking into this for several weeks now, I have a theory on why this is true, and here it is: Although angels are mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible, never is an angel the main point of the story. And that is the main point: Angels are never the main point! In other words, there are hundreds of references, but the story is never about the angel. Instead, the story is about the creation of the world, and an angel just happens to be mentioned. The story is about Abraham, and an angel just happens to be mentioned. The story is about Jesus, and an angel just happens to be mentioned. So, when it comes to angels, we normally read each passage trying to find the main point, angels are never the main point, and so we are tempted to just quickly skim over the details concerning the angels when they are mentioned. And I will admit: This has led to a challenge for me in terms of this series. My original goal was to do a series of expository lessons on several passages about angels, but as I looked into it, I really could not find any passages where angels were the main point. Instead, we have hundreds of passages spread out over 38 books of the Bible – 108 references in the Old Testament and 186 references in the New Testament, and all of these passages pretty much just mention a few details here and there, almost in passing.

One author compared it to a botanist looking for information on trees and how trees appeared hundreds of years ago. He probably would not find too many paintings featuring trees as the main subject, the researcher will probably not find an ancient botany textbook featuring trees; however, he will probably find many paintings where trees might be in the background of paintings that feature a person, a scene, or an object. In the same way, angels are never really featured in the Bible, but they are often pictured in the background.

So, for our series of lessons, I would like to break it down like this (and we may take a break or make some changes here and there as we go along), but this is what I have in mind at this point:

- This morning I want us to do pretty much an overview – we will define the word angel, and then we will go through a number of passages looking at some of the major characteristics of angels.
- Next week we will think about Satan and his angels.
- For our third lesson, we will look at angels and their role in the life of Christ.
- In lesson #4 we will consider the work of angels in the world today.
- And then, if you guys are still with me, I would like to close the series by looking at the role that angels will play in the future – specifically, with reference to the coming judgment.

This morning, though, before we get into a list of characteristics, we need to at least define the term **“angel”** as it is used in the Bible. Both in Hebrew and in Greek, the term translated as **“angel”** literally refers to a **“messenger.”** An angel, therefore, is a messenger. Well, with a term that broad, as you can probably imagine, the term can sometimes refer to different things. It’s almost like the word “elder.” When we see the word “elder” in the Bible, we might be talking about an elder in the church, or we might just be talking about somebody who is elderly. It’s the same with the term **“angel”** or **“messenger.”** I would suggest three ways this term is normally used:

First of all, the term sometimes refers to God himself. Sometimes we read about **“the angel of Yahweh”** or **“the angel of the Lord,”** and there are times when this kind of angel is a divine being. In other words, sometimes this term does refer to God. We think about Genesis 16:10-13, for example, where **“the angel of the Lord”** met Hagar in the wilderness and promised to bless her with many descendants. Upon hearing the promise, the Bible says (in verse 13), **“Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, ‘You are a God who sees’; for she said, ‘Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?’”** Notice: Hagar addressed this angel (or messenger) as **“God,”** and she was not rebuked for doing so. We have several other similar situations spread throughout the Old Testament. We have several passages where somebody started out thinking they were dealing with an angel, and by the end of it, they found out they were actually dealing with God, and my view of these passages is that the Lord Jesus appeared in some kind of form before he was born. We know, for example, that Christ traveled along with the Israelites in the wilderness in the form of a rock. So, it should not surprise us, then, that the Lord would appear in some form, serving as a messenger, delivering some kind of message to his people, even before he was born in Bethlehem. So, sometimes the term **“angel”** is used with reference to an appearance of God.

Secondly, the term **“angel”** or **“messenger”** is also used to refer to various human messengers. In Haggai 1:13, for example, Haggai is described as being the Lord’s **“messenger,”** and the term for **“angel”** or **“messenger”** is used there. The same term is also used to refer to Isaiah in Isaiah 42:19. The same term is also used to refer to the priests in Malachi 2:7. The priests are described as God’s messengers. By the way, the Hebrew word is MALACH. I think you can see the name Malachi there. Malachi himself was a **“messenger”** of God.

So, sometimes the term refers to God, sometimes the word refers to various human messengers, but then we have the third and most usual sense of this word, a reference to “spiritual beings” – not divine, but not human, either. It is this third category that we will be focused on for the next several weeks. And as you can imagine based on the name that they have been given, the main role of an angel is to deliver a message.

- We think of the angels who delivered a message to Abraham in Genesis 22:11-18.
- We think of the angels who delivered a message to Lot in Sodom in Genesis 19.
- We think of the angel Gabriel who delivered messages to Zechariah and to Mary in Luke 1.

- We think of the angel who delivered a message to Paul in Acts 27, the message that Paul would not die in the shipwreck.

We could look at hundreds of other examples, but the main point here at the beginning is to define the term, and the word **“angel”** refers to a **“messenger.”** With this in mind, I want us to look at eight very basic characteristics of angels in the Bible. What do we know about them?

### 1. First of all, I would suggest that angels are **CREATED BEINGS**.

Exactly when were they created? I do not know. In my opinion, this is one of those questions that we will need to save for God until we get to heaven. However, we do know that angels were present at the time when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden. Remember: Cherubim were stationed there with a flaming sword, to keep Adam and Eve from reentering the Garden of Eden.

Beyond this, we simply know that angels were created by God. They seem to have been present at the creation of the world. We remember God questioning Job in Job 38:4-7, where God asked Job where Job was when the foundation of the earth was laid. Where were you, **“...when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”** So, it appears that there were some beings who **“shouted for joy”** as the earth was created. Beyond this, we know that everything around us was created by the Lord, including the angels. We think of what Paul said in Colossians 1:16, **“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.”** This certainly agrees with what John wrote in the opening verses of John 1, where Jesus is referred to as being the **“Word.”** And referring to Jesus, John says that, **“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”** We think of the praise offered to Jesus by the 24 elders in Revelation 4:11, **“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”** All things, then, were created by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that would certainly include the angels.

We have some interesting statements of praise scattered throughout the Bible. We think of the prayer offered by the leaders of Israel in Nehemiah 9:6, where the people praised God for making, **“...the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before You.”** We think of the opening verses of Psalm 148 as those verses were read for us earlier, **“Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! ... Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.”** We learn, then, that the angels are created beings.

### 2. Secondly, we also learn from the Bible that angels are **SPIRITUAL BEINGS**.

We have the rhetorical question concerning angels in Hebrews 1:14, **“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”** Angels, therefore, are spirits, and as spiritual beings, they have the ability to appear in different forms. If I were filling out the handout this morning, I might make a note here that angels can MORPH – because they are spirit beings, they can change their appearance. Most of the time in the Bible, angels appear as regular men, as they did with Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. The Bible tells us that three men showed up and that Abraham and Sarah fed them dinner. One of those men ended up being the Lord himself, but the other two were angels. These were the two angels that delivered the message of destruction to Lot in the city of Sodom in Genesis 19.

In the gospel accounts, according to Mark, the women who came to the tomb of Jesus saw a **“young man clothed in a long white robe”** (Mark 16:5). John’s account, though, tells us that it was an angel (John 20:12). Matthew tells us that the angel who rolled away the stone had an **“appearance like lightning, and his clothing white as snow”** (Matthew 28:3). So, we find that as spiritual beings, angels can take on different forms. Sometimes, they can even be invisible. We think of Elisha in 2 Kings 6 as the king sent a great number of chariots and soldiers to surround the city. Elisha’s servant was afraid, but Elisha said, **“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”** Elisha then prayed and said, **“Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.”** And at that point, the Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and he saw, **“And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”** (2 Kings 6:17). As spiritual beings, then, angels can even be invisible. Because they are spirit, they have the ability to change their appearance.

**3. We also learn from the Bible that there seems to be some kind of HIERARCHY among the angels – there is some kind of RANK OR ARRANGEMENT.**

In the Bible, for example, we read about **“chief”** angels or **“archangels.”** In Revelation 12:7, we read about Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. Michael, then, seems to be a leader of other angels. He is given the title of **“archangel”** in Jude 9, when he was arguing with Satan over the body of Moses. We have a reference in Daniel 12:1 that indicates that Michael is responsible for standing guard over God’s people. We also read about Gabriel in Luke 1:19, **“I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news”** (concerning the birth of John the Baptist). Gabriel seems to have some special standing there. Gabriel also appears two times in the book of Daniel, but it is more of a cheerful and encouraging role as opposed to the more of a military role played by Michael.

Beyond that, we also read about the Cherubim and the Seraphim. The Cherubim are referred to in Psalm 80:1 and also a number of times in the book of Ezekiel - Ezekiel 1:5-11 and 10:19. They are pictured as having four faces and four wings. Cherubim were placed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden, and the Cherubim were those creatures that were placed above the Ark of the Covenant.

The Seraphim are only mentioned once in the Bible as far as I can tell, in Isaiah 6:2 – those were the creatures with six wings, the creatures who constantly praise God saying, **“Holy, holy, holy.”** Some have said that the Seraphim are not really angels, and yet when we look at Isaiah 6:7, we find that the Seraphim gave a message to Isaiah. And remember: An angel is a messenger. I wouldn’t be contentious on this point (there is so much we do not know), but it seems that the Seraphim are a class or a rank of angel. So, the point is: There are distinctions between the angels. There are different kinds of angels or ranks of angels.

**4. I know some of this may seem a little random, but I would point out a fourth truth about angels here, and that is: ANGELS ARE NOT DEAD PEOPLE.**

Over and over again, I will hear people say something to the effect that this person who has departed from us is now one of God’s angels in heaven. So, I would just point out here very briefly that this is not taught in the Bible. Instead, when the door cracks open just a little bit for us in Luke 16, we find that the rich man was still the rich man in torment and Lazarus was still Lazarus in Paradise. We do not become angels when we die.

**5. For our fifth characteristic, I would point out something concerning the number of angels: THERE ARE MANY OF THEM!**

The writer of Hebrews tells us that there are *“myriads”* of angels. Some translations tell us that they are *“innumerable”* (Hebrews 12:22). When God gave the Law of Moses on Mount Sinai, the Bible tells us in Deuteronomy 33:2 that the Lord, *“...came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones.”* In Psalm 68:17, we find that the *“chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands.”* In Daniel 7:10 (in one of Daniel’s visions), Daniel saw God, and it says that, *“...thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him.”* In Revelation 5:11, we read about the apostle John, *“I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands.”* So, how many angels are there? There are many of them. In fact, like the stars of heaven, they cannot be numbered.

6. I would also point out that angels are LIMITED IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE.

This is brief and might be relatively minor, but unlike God who knows everything, angels do not know everything. We think about what the Lord said about his own Second Coming in Matthew 24:36-39, *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”* We also think of 1 Peter 1:10-12, where Peter wrote about God’s plan, *“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look.”* In other words, in times past, the angels eagerly looked forward to the time of Christ, but even they were not really aware of the details. They are servants, not managers. They are limited in their knowledge.

7. Angels are incredibly POWERFUL.

For one example, we think about what happened to the Assyrian army under the rule of King Hezekiah. The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, had Jerusalem surrounded. The city was under siege and was about to be defeated. However, King Hezekiah petitioned God, and in 2 Kings 19:35, the Bible says, *“Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead.”* One angel took out 185,000 enemy soldiers! In the New Testament, it was an angel that assisted Peter in his escape from jail in Acts 12:10, opening multiple prison gates and overcoming at least four squads of Roman soldiers in the process. The Bible even tells us that Peter was sleeping between two soldiers and bound with two chains, but those restraints were no match for an angel. Later in that chapter, it was an angel that struck arrogant King Herod with worms so that he died. We have a secular account indicating that Herod died an agonizing death and that the suffering went on for several days. An angel did that. Angels, therefore, have some amazing power and some amazing abilities.

8. In spite of these things, I would like for us to close with one final point here, and that is: ANGELS ARE NOT TO BE WORSHIPED.

In Colossians 2:18, Paul very specifically warns about something that must have been a problem at the time. He says, *“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels...”* This is something that the apostle John had to be rebuked for doing twice in the book of Revelation. The first record is in Revelation 19:10 where John is speaking to an angel, *“Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold*

***the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.***” It happened again just a few chapters later in Revelation 22:8-9, ***“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’”*** Angels, then, as mighty and amazing as they are, are not to be worshiped. They are not deity, but they are servants not only God, but us as well.

### **Conclusion:**

Hopefully, then we can pick up with our study next week by investigating Satan and his angels. Between now and then, I would invite you to write down any additional questions or comments you might have concerning angels – send me a message or an email – and hopefully we can try to answer some more questions as our series progresses. But, by all means, please do not forget to draw me an angel!

I realize that our lesson today has not really been practical (in terms of applying this information to our lives), but I do hope that we are starting to have at least a little bit of a deeper understanding of the angels. I do know something else about the angels, and that is, according to the Lord himself, ***“...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”*** (Luke 15:10). With that in mind, the Bible tells us that we must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, please ask, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, if you would like to cause some angels to rejoice, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)