



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 3.4 – The Doctrine of Creation

### The Invisible World of Spirit Beings or Angels

The word “angel” as used in the Bible may refer to several different beings. The original word in the Hebrew and Greek languages means “messenger.” Generally, it is translated as “angel” or “messenger”. Sometimes in the Old Testament the word refers to the Son of God (the pre-incarnate Jesus), such as **“the Angel of the LORD”** (Exodus 3:2) who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. When this is the case, our English translations generally capitalize the word. At other times the word “angel” refers to invisible spirit beings, whom God uses to bring messages to His people on earth. In such cases these angels usually appear on earth as young men, often dressed in white clothing. Sometimes the word “angel” refers to human beings with whom God has entrusted messages which He wants conveyed to men. There are some instances when it cannot be determined absolutely from the context whether the word “angel” or “messenger” refers to the Son of God, a spirit being, or a human messenger. In this section we shall be examining what the Bible says about those angels that are invisible spirit beings.

Because they are invisible, there are many who deny the very existence of such spirit beings. For example, the sect of the Sadducees in New Testament times denied the existence of angels, for it is written in Acts 23:8: **“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection – and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.”** No doubt there are many in our modern world who also deny their existence. But there are others who not only believe in their existence but believe and teach all kinds of things about the spirit world that have no basis either in experience or in the Bible. Since most of us have never seen an angel that we could identify as an angel, it is difficult for us to believe in their presence. But since the Bible is God’s Word, it is necessary that we do believe what God tells us about the angels.

Sometimes these invisible spirit beings are called **“sons of God**, as in the book of Job. Job 1:6: **“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD.”** Sometimes these spirit beings are called **“holy ones”** or **“saints.”** When Moses blessed the children of Israel before his death, he referred to the giving of the Ten Commandments in these words: **“The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints; from His right hand came a fiery law for them”** (Deuteronomy 33:2).

The Bible clearly teaches that God created the angels during the six days of creation, since God created all things during those six days. But the Bible does not reveal on which of the six days the angels were created. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossi: **“He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers”** (Colossians 1:15-16). It was especially important that Paul referred to the angels as creatures of God in Colossi, because there were some in that community that were involved in **“the worship of angels”** (Colossians 2:18).

The letter to the Hebrews devotes a whole chapter to establishing the difference between created angels and the Son of God, who is Himself God. Jesus is **“so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”** (Hebrews 1:4). Jesus is God, but the angels are **“ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation”** (Hebrews 1:14).

When the apostle John was about ready to worship an angel whom God had sent to reveal a vision to him, the angel said to John: **“See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God”** (Revelation 22:9).

Jesus Himself teaches us that angels have no permanent human bodies. On the evening of His resurrection, He said to His disciples **“who supposed they had seen a spirit”**: **“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have”** (Luke 24:37-39). Of course, when these angels brought a message down from God, they assumed a temporary visible form. Abraham was once visited by what appeared to be **“three men”** (Genesis 18:2), but later we realize that one of these three men was the Angel of the LORD, who is the Son of God, and two angels. The women who went to Jesus’ tomb on Easter Sunday morning were greeted by **“two men...in shining garments”** (Luke 24:4). When Jesus’ disciples were looking up into the sky as Jesus ascended to heaven, **“two men stood by them in white apparel”** (Acts 1:10) who then informed them that Jesus would one day return as He had gone up.

Each angel is an individual personal being with feelings and emotions, but only two angels are given names in Scripture: Michael, called an archangel (Jude 9), and Gabriel (Daniel 9:21), whom God sent to Mary of Nazareth to inform her that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Son of God.

In connection with His teaching concerning the resurrection of the dead, Jesus pointed out: **“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”** (Luke 20:34-36). Therefore, we conclude that angels do not get married or reproduce, and that they do not die. Nevertheless, there are many thousands of them, for John on the island of Patmos **“heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands”** (Revelation 5:11).

## Questions

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1. What are the three ways in which the word “angel” is used in the Bible?
2. Why are there many people who deny the existence of angels?
3. What other terms are sometimes used in the Bible to refer to angels?
4. In what ways is Jesus different from the angels?
5. How did Jesus describe angels on the evening of His resurrection day?
6. In what form did the angels generally appear on earth to human beings?
7. What two angels are mentioned by name in the Bible?
8. In what ways are angels different from human beings?
9. What do the common people in your locale believe about angels or spirit beings?