



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 3.4.1 – The Doctrine of Creation

The Work of the Holy Angels

In the beginning God created all the angels as sinless spirit beings. In order to carry out the work God has assigned for them, God gave His angels the ability to move swiftly. He also gave them power beyond all human ability and superior intelligence. Moreover, God's angels are holy. They are therefore willing and eager to carry out faithfully all assignments given to them. The Bible tells us that while Daniel was praying for his people, God immediately answered his prayer by sending the angel Gabriel with a message for Daniel: **"While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering"** (Daniel 9:21). Apparently, angels are able to move swiftly to wherever God wants to send them.

David tells us about the angels' strength and their desire to please their Lord. He says: **"Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure"** (Psalm 103:20-21). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul calls the angels **"mighty"** (2 Thessalonians 1:7).

Angels have extensive knowledge, but there are limits to what they know. Jesus said that the angels do not know when the Last Day will come. He told His disciples: **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only"** (Matthew 24:36). In speaking of God's wondrous plan of salvation, the apostle Peter says that these are **"things angels desire to look into"** (1 Peter 1:12).

In the beginning all angels were sinless, for God pronounced all His creation **"very good"** (Genesis 1:31). But today there are two kinds of angels: evil angels and holy angels. The holy angels serve God without fail. That is why they are called **"holy"** in Mark 8:38: **"He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."** Since Paul calls the angels **"elect angels"** (1 Timothy 5:21), there is no possibility now that any of God's holy angels will disobey or betray Him.

God employs the angels in various ways. He has used them to convey messages to people on earth, as in the case of the prophet Daniel, the priest Zacharias, the virgin Mary, and the apostles Paul and Peter and John. His angels provide special protection at times for God's people, as when two angels saved Lot from the angry citizens of Sodom (Genesis 19), or when an angel brought the prophet Elijah food in the wilderness (1 Kings 19). God also protected His prophet Elisha from the army of Syria by sending angels. It was on this last occasion that God opened the eyes of Elisha's servant, so that he could see God's invisible army of protection. We read in 2 Kings 6:17: **"Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."** The servant of Elisha understood what the prophet had meant when he said to him: **"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them"** (2 Kings 6:16). God promises this protection also to us today in Psalm 91:10-12: **"No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone."**

We have similar examples and promises in the New Testament. Jesus once warned His disciples: **“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven”** (Matthew 18:10). This saying of Jesus has led some Christians to suppose that each one of us has a specific guardian angel watching over him or her. But this idea goes beyond what Jesus actually said. It is sufficient to know that the angels watch over us. God sent an angel to rescue Peter from a Jerusalem prison. Afterwards Peter declared: **“Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people”** (Acts 12:11). And in His story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, Jesus said that the angels carried Lazarus to heaven. The letter to the Hebrews summarizes the activity of the angels in the service of God’s people by asking: **“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”** (Hebrews 1:14). The answer to this question is of course yes; the angels are ministers or servants, not only of God, but also of all of God’s people who will inherit salvation.

Sometimes God uses angels as instruments of judgment. The two angels who visited Lot in Sodom said to him: **“We will destroy this place...The LORD has sent us to destroy it”** (Genesis 19:13). God also used an angel to wipe out the Assyrian army that was besieging Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah. The Bible says: **“It came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead”** (2 Kings 19:35). When King Herod allowed the people to call him a god, we are told: **“Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died”** (Acts 12:23).

The angels played an important role in the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. The first martyr, Stephen, told the Jews who were about to murder him that they **“have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it”** (Acts 7:53). The apostle Paul made the same claim, saying: The law **“was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator”** (Galatians 3:19).

As the angels serve God’s people on earth, so they also served Jesus, the Son of God, when He was a man on earth. Angels informing Zacharias and Mary of Jesus’ coming into the world. Angels announced to the Bethlehem shepherds that He had arrived. And the Bible tells us that **“angels came and ministered to Him”** (Matthew 4:11) after His temptation by Satan. After Jesus prayed His agonizing prayer in Gethsemane, **“an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him”** (Luke 22:43). The angels will also serve the Lord Jesus on the Last Day, **“when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God”** (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). See also Matthieu 13:39-43, 24:31.

Since some angels are called archangels or chief angels, it seems that there may be different ranks among them. But God has not told us exactly what these different ranks mean. All He tells us is that the angels are given different names. These names may indicate a different rank or duty. The Bible talks about thrones, archangels, seraphim, cherubim, dominions, rulers, powers, principalities, and simply angels. Much of what people today believe and teach about angels is pure speculation. We want to be careful not to go beyond what God actually reveals to us in His word.

Questions

1. How do we know that angels are strong, swift, and intelligent?
2. What were the angels like when God first made them?
3. What two kinds of angels or spirit beings exist today?
4. What did God allow Elisha's servant to see which we usually cannot see?
5. What does it mean that those with us are more than those with them?
6. How did God rescue Peter from prison?
7. Name some instances when God used His angels to send judgments on man.
8. How did the angels serve Jesus during His lifetime on earth?
9. What are the angels going to do on the Last Day?
10. Why can't we determine the various ranks among the angels?