

ANGELS – Part 1
Acts 12:1-19

As promised, we are entering a topical study this morning regarding ANGELS. It is my expectation that this study will take us into next Sunday as well.

For our springboard text we begin with our text in Acts, as we read it last Sunday...

Acts 12:1-19

We are going to make many points regarding angels. These points likely will not be in the same order that you or someone else might put them. They are in the order of MY mind and so that is what you will get...

(First of all...)

1. Angels are LIKE human beings.

A. They are like human beings in appearance.

In the scriptures, angels consistently appear in human form, and more specifically, in the form of **human males**. Consider just a few texts...

- In Genesis 18 we have the account of three men appearing before Abraham. These men eat a meal prepared for them and converse with both Abraham and Sarah. Later, two of the three make their way to Sodom and the Biblical text begins referring to them no longer as men but as angels.
- In Matthew chapter 28 – let's turn to that text – an angel appears to the women who had come to anoint the dead body of Jesus...

Matthew 28:1-7

- And from our morning's text: Acts 12:6-11

Angels are referred to in the Bible, altogether, some 305 times. The word angel comes from the Greek word $\alpha\nu\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ and it means **a messenger**. But the angels we read of in the Bible were not like some young messenger boy who a hundred years ago might be paid a nickel to ride his bike over to the sheriff's office to deliver a message.

No, these creatures consistently appear as **adult age men**, who **look** like men, **talk** like men and in every other way appear to be men. No wings, no halos, and regarding fallen angels (which we will address later) they have no pitched forks, red faces or horns on their heads. So ordinary are these angels that we read this most **AMAZING STATEMENT** about them, found in the book of Hebrews...

Hebrews 13:2

That one could literally entertain an angel (meaning invite one into one's house for dinner and possibly stay the night) and not even know that they were an angel is itself proof enough that angels can at least TAKE ON THE FORM OF A HUMAN BEING.

I can think of no reference to an angel in a **female** form. Why the scriptures would not mention such a thing (if it existed) is unknown to me. But, again, angels are LIKE human beings and particularly like human males.

B. They are also like human beings in that they have what people refer to as a "**free will.**"

Now before we move on, for those of you who are particularly theologically minded, YES, I have problems with the term "free will." Martin Luther, some 500 years ago...hold it...

(And I am sure we must tear down any statue of him as well as he said some very nasty things to say not only about the Pope but also about Jews. So write him off as an anti-Semite, tear down his statue, stop singing A Mighty Fortress is Our God and let's burn down all the Lutheran Churches around us. Oh, is there no end to this?).

Anyway, Martin Luther, some 500 years ago wrote a book entitled "*The Bondage of the Will.*" His point was that people often speak of humans having a "free will" as if we had no leaning or proclivity towards sin. But the truth is, we are all sinners, bound to sin, and even our most noble efforts at doing right are marked by sin and pride. So we have Luther arguing for BOUND wills, not FREE wills.

But in the sense that we have wills, and do **make choices**, in the interest of time consider how angels too have such wills.

Revelation 12:7-12.

Here we learn of how Satan (or the devil) AND HIS ANGELS were thrown out of heaven. In modern times these are often referred to as "fallen angels" meaning not only that they fell out of heaven but that they fell out of the good grace of God. We use this same kind of language to refer to Adam and how he "fell" into sin. And we use that same language to refer to ourselves: the fellow who is struggling with alcohol we say "fell off the wagon." All of this lends support to the idea that these angels, like Satan himself, **had a choice** and they **CHOSE** to go against God and His ways. In that sense, the angels were just like Adam and Eve who were given a choice to obey or disobey and they chose to disobey.

Jude 6. This issue of some angels not staying "within their own position of authority" is why a particular passage in the O.T. scriptures is quite commonly taken to refer to Satan...

Isaiah 14:12-14. This is the old "how art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning" as it reads in the King James Version. Bible commentators believe that this passage's first reference is to the king of Babylon, but if it indeed does **also** refer to Satan, it supports this notion that Satan, like the angels in Jude 6, **left his proper dwelling** – his proper place of being subject to God – thinking more highly of himself than he should have, and with that brought damnation on himself.

These texts support the idea then that the angels, like us, at least in the past, had a choice: to serve God or to go against him. In that sense we would call them, even as theologians refer to humans, as "**free moral agents.**"

And if that is what they were and are, it raises a very basic question as to **why God would have ever made us?** For one of the points one often hears about God's creation of humans is that God was desirous of a race of beings that might **love, serve and worship God both knowingly and willingly.** Dogs and cats (and worms and polar bears) all, we would say, serve God.

But they do so **without cognition** and it does not seem they understand anything of worship. So God made us.

But the angels were called upon to do the same exact thing. **They failed.**

Then God made us. And then **we failed.**

There is no suggestion in the scriptures that there is some sort of 3rd attempt with an entirely new species or entity. But it is worth pondering how similar the angels are to us not only in appearance but also in terms of their moral choice to obey or disobey their Creator God.

2. **Angels are UNLIKE human beings.**

(First of all...)

A. **They are unable to reproduce.**

Matthew 22:23-30.

Given that angels (can) appear like us and can make moral choices like us, this issue of REPRODUCTION is, as far as I can see, one of the most basic if not THE MOST BASIC reasons for human kind's creation.

Yet, in eternity, even this difference will be gone. At least that is what Jesus was saying here in Matthew 22.

That I might have a **special relationship** with Ruth for all eternity...I can accept that. But that I will be **married** to her or have a **conjugal relationship** with her...NOPE, that's not in the cards.

So for all those Muslim men who are waiting for their **72 virgins** come eternity, I'm not sure what they think they will be doing with those 72 virgin women, but whatever they think, it is likely incorrect.

B. **Their natural habitation is heaven.**

Men and women – the offspring of Adam and Eve – have earth as our natural habitation. Our first parent **was formed from the earth**. At funerals it is often said, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

But not so with angels.

- A number of times in the gospels we have Jesus referring to "the angels **of heaven.**"
- In speaking about the coming great day of judgment Jesus said that no one knows the or the hour "not even the angels **in heaven**" (Mark 13:32)
- And in a passage we have already looked at – Revelation chapter 12 – there Satan and his angels are "**cast out of heaven**" implying that they had previously been in heaven.
- The book of Revelation speaks more about angels than any other book. In Revelation chapter 5 John, the author of Revelation, writes of being given a vision of heaven and seeing Christ in his glory. Let's read it...

Revelation 5:6-14

Heaven – the presence of God – is where we, as followers. of Christ, long to see and long to dwell in. But for angels, that was their natural habitation.

(A third difference between men and angels...)

C. Angels have TREMENDOUS power (unlike men)

In 2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 37 we have the same record of how God rescued Judah (the southern tribes) from the conquering hand of the Assyrian army during the reign of Hezekiah. This would have been in the 8th century before Christ. The Assyrians, under Sennacherib, had already conquered the northern tribes of Israel and now they were ready to invade the south, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Seeing no way out, Hezekiah, having received a letter from the Assyrian king telling him to, in effect, lay down their arms or die, went to the temple in Jerusalem and prayed to God. We pick up the narrative in Isaiah 37:14...

Isaiah 37:14-38

One angel, and 185,000 dead. Think of it!

Now, with that as a **context**, consider what Jesus had to say in Matthew chapter 26 at the time of his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane...

Matthew 26:47-54

A legion is generally taken to be a thousand. So 12 legions of angels means approximately **12,000 angels**. If ONE angel could alone kill 185,000 humans in a single night, then by extrapolation that means 12,000 angels could kill 2,220,000,000 people, or roughly 1/3 of the world's current population.

But in Revelation 9:14, at the blowing of the sixth trumpet the Bible speaks about God releasing "four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." There it says, "So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

So while we might estimate that 12,000 angels could kill a third of mankind, Revelation 9:14 suggests that that could be accomplished by just 4 angels.

The point is clear enough: **angels are INCREDIBLY POWERFUL creatures.**

So back to our sermon from last week when we discussed Peter's miraculous release from prison and I suggested words to the effect of "Who knows? Maybe the angel put some sort of Jedi Master spell over the guards and sentries so that they stayed asleep during Peter's escape," while that was meant to be a bit humorous the truth is: Who knows? Maybe angels can do that and even did that.

Furthermore, I would say that from the Bible one gets the impression that angels can simply **appear and then disappear.**

In one of the old black and white Superman episodes I watched as a kid, Superman (played by George Reeves) was experimenting with passing through walls without damaging the walls. John chapter 20, **TWO TIMES**, clearly gives the reader the impression that Jesus, in his resurrected body, had that ability. Maybe the angels have that ability as well.

Look...we have been living in an age for nearly 50 years now that has embraced angels. The New Age religion people embraced angels. Back in the 80s there were a number of television shows and movies that featured angels. But, by and large, the angels of these shows were often like Clarence - that angel that was sent to help George Bailey (played by Jimmy Stewart) in *It's A Wonderful Life*. In that film, if Clarence was successful, he could earn his wings, some thing that he had been trying to do for a long time.

In much the same way these television shows and more modern movies have often portrayed angels as being of that same benevolent, innocent, happy sort of figure that is just trying to do its best to earn its wings or better its own eternal estate.

How unlike these portrayals is what we read in scripture...

Genesis 19:1-11

Later in this same chapter one can read of how these angels helped Lot and his family escape the destruction that was about to fall upon Sodom.

So the point stands that the angels are of tremendous strength and power.

3. Angels have as their purpose the glory of God and the protection of the saints.

We're going to bring this to a close for today but first let us look at one passage...

Hebrews 1:5-7, 13-14

In verse 14 we are told that God's angels have been "sent out to serve." And just who are they serving? Well, of course, they are sent out as God's servants, so ultimately they serve him. But with God's direction they have been sent out to serve those who will "inherit salvation," meaning, the saints of God...Christians...believers.

Amy Grant long ago sang about "angels watching over me, every step I take." That is the EXACT TRUTH.

You may **live alone**. Maybe your mate walked out on you long ago.
You may **feel like you are all alone**.

But you are not alone.

The angels of God are watching over you...every step you take.
They see you when you are doing well
Just as they see you when you are doing poorly.

If you are drawn into some sin, they see you. They know what you
are doing. They are watching you.
And their goal is to see you do well.

We'll stop for now and pick this up next week...