

Why did God make angels?

July 31, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning we have another really interesting question to consider – two questions actually –

“Why did God make angels? And why does God sometimes speak through angels and sometimes speak for Himself?”

Those are great questions that I’ll be honest: I haven’t thought a lot about. I’m a bit of a rookie when it comes to angels and I suspect that I’m not alone in that. In this post-modern, scientific age, we don’t spend too much time thinking about angels and when we do, they’re pudgy little cherubs shooting love arrows or ladies on clouds eating cream cheese but that’s not what the Bible says angels are like. The Bible’s vision of angels is quite different and so if we’re going to take God’s Word seriously, then we need to think about angels and what God created them to do.

We’re going to cover a lot of ground this morning, but I think that we need to start with a pretty basic question – what are angels? Are they saints who have died and gone to heaven? Are they gods in disguise? Are they all-powerful beings or are they limited in any way? Well, let’s think about this – what are angels?

Simply put, angels are spiritual beings created by God. They are not people who have died and gone to heaven; they are an entirely different class of creatures that God has made. At some point – we don’t know exactly when – God said ‘let there be angels’ and He created these supernatural, spiritual beings. They are higher than humans, in the sense that they are spiritual beings, more powerful than we are, but they are lower than God – they can only be in one place at a time and their power is limited. By and large, angels live and work in the spiritual realm that runs alongside our own, but they do cross over sometimes into our material world.

What do they *do* when they cross over into our world? Well, that’s where our question comes in – why did God make angels? To answer that, I’m going to borrow from David Jeremiah here¹ – he’s got a rubric that works pretty well I think – God made angels to be messengers and ministers, warriors and worshipers. God made angels to be messengers and ministers, warriors and worshipers. Let me address those one at a time.

So first, God made angels to be messengers.

Now if I had to guess, I’d guess that that is the angel job we are most familiar with. The word ‘angel’ literally means ‘messenger’ and probably the first time we ever heard about angels, it was Christmas and they were delivering the greatest news of all.

If you think of Luke 1 and 2, you’ve got the angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah to tell him that Elizabeth will have a baby, then off he goes to Mary to tell her about Jesus and then in the fields over Bethlehem you’ve got the throng of angels telling the shepherds that Jesus is born.

God created angels to be messengers.

And it's not just at Christmas that angels are delivering messages for God; angels are messengers all through the Bible.

Genesis 19 – angels appear to Lot telling him to get out of Sodom.

Judges 13 – an angel appears to Samson's mom and dad telling them that they're going to have a baby.

Acts 10 – an angel appears to Cornelius telling him to find Peter and listen to him.

And Acts 27 – an angel appears to tell Paul that despite being in a shipwreck, he's going to make it to Rome.

God created angels to be messengers and we find them delivering those messages all through the Bible.

God created angels to be messengers; God also created angels to be ministers.

And when I say 'ministers,' I don't mean 'ministers' like me, but 'ministers' in the sense of 'ministers of His grace' – 'public servants' almost - beings that extend God's mercy to us in times of need.

The key verse here is Hebrews 1:14 - NIV Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Heb 1:14 NIV).

Who are 'those who will inherit salvation?' Us. Christians. Which means then that angels were made to look out for our best interests.

This is the one verse that I remember very distinctly about angels from seminary – angels, though more powerful than us and more capable than are, are specifically sent by God to serve us in times of need.

I think that we see that in Genesis 16, when an angel brings food to Hagar and encourages her when she runs away from Sarah. I think we see that again in 1 Kings 19 when an angel brings food to Elijah. Matthew 4, same thing; Jesus resists the devil when He's out in the wilderness and then angels appeared to comfort and encourage Him (Matthew 4:11).

Broadly speaking, angels minister God's grace to us but I think that there are two very specific ways that angels do that. I'm adding to David Jeremiah's rubric here - angels are ministers of grace who serve us by being 'protectors and collectors' – protectors now and collectors later.

Those passage that I just pointed to – Hagar, Elijah, Jesus - they show angels being protectors and the theological basis for it is expressed in Psalm 34. Psalm 34:7 says "7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them" (Psalm 34:7 NIV) and that's

exactly what we seen in Daniel 3 – Shad, Meschach and Abednego in the fiery furnace and 6 – Daniel in the lion’s den.

Psalms 91:11 says “11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; 12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone (Psa 91:11-12 NIV).

The Bible says that angels are sent to be our protectors; it also says that they will be our collectors.

What I mean is this – there are a handful of places in the Bible that say that angels will serve us by carrying us into eternal life. Mark 13:26-27 says –

26 "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.
27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens (Mar 13:26-27 NIV).

Matthew 13:49 says - 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous (Mat 13:49 NIV).

And Luke 16:22 actually implies that it is angels who will carry us into the presence of God.

So, protectors now and collectors later; this is how angels serve us as ministers.

God created angels to be messengers and ministers, warriors and worshipers.

Warriors – I think this is where pop culture gets angels entirely wrong. We think of angels as these cute little things but think about how people react when they see them. The shepherds quake with fear when they appear in the sky over Bethlehem, Zechariah was ‘startled and gripped with fear’ (Luke 1:12) and Samson’s dad saw an angel and blurted out “We are doomed to die because we have seen the angel of God!” Angels are not chubby little cherubs, they’re warriors.

Psalms 103:20 calls them ‘mighty ones who do God’s bidding;’ 1 Corinthians 10:10 calls them destroying angels; 2 Peter 2:11 says they are stronger and more powerful than us.

King Herod learned that the hard way – Acts 12:23 says that “...an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died” (Act 12:23 NIV) and the king of Syria, Sennacherib, did too in 2 Chronicles 32:21 – “21 And the LORD sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king.

You don’t mess with an angel.ⁱⁱ

God made them to be warriors and God made them to be worshippers.

That's probably the other thing we're most familiar with. Isaiah 6, Revelation 7, Psalm 148 – we see angels standing around the throne of God worshipping Him for all He's worth. Hebrews 1:6 says that when Jesus was born, all God's angels worshiped Him. God made angels to worship Him and to share in His glory.

God made angels to be messengers and ministers, protectors and collectors, warriors and worshippers.

But here's where the second question comes in and I actually need to broaden it given all that we've just seen.

This person asked – 'Why did God make angels?' He made them to be messengers and ministers, warriors and worshippers; ok, fine, but why did God make angels to do things that He could do Himself? With the exception of the worshipers piece, God can do AND DOES all those things.

God sometimes speaks through angels, but sometimes He speaks directly. Yes, an angel appeared to Cornelius to send Him to Peter (that's Acts 10) but just the chapter before (chapter 9), Jesus Himself appeared to Saul to say 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

Acts chapter five, Peter is in jail and the Lord sends an angel to open the doors of the jail and bring him out (5:19); Acts 12, same thing happens. But then Acts 16, Paul is in jail and God just rips the doors off that place with a violent earthquake. Why didn't He send an angel to deliver Paul, or why didn't He just deliver Peter Himself?

Why did God create angels when He could just do what they do Himself?

That's a great question. And I have to caveat my response with a quotation from my seminary theology textbook: "...this one of the unusual and difficult subjects in all of theology."ⁱⁱⁱ But after a lot of thought and prayer I think I can answer it like this. And I'll actually give you two answers – one really complicated one and one really easy one.

First, the complicated one. I think that God made angels to do things that He Himself could do for when He knew He needed a personal touch.

You're going to break the news that somebody's pregnant; you do that in person. You don't send a text. You need a physical presence there with them when you tell them. Peter seems to be a little slower than Paul, so I suspect that God knew that Peter would need an angel by his side prodding Him out the door.

I think that God made angels to be personal ministers of His power to His people.

Not that we have ONE guardian angel personally assigned to us specifically; there was a Jewish tradition around the time of Jesus that we each have a guardian angel unique to us, but other than that, there's no solid biblical evidence that that's the case. And frankly, when the Bible talks about guardian angels, it's God sending a whole squad of angels to protect you. eg. Psalm 91 – God will send His angels.

What I mean by personal is that God made angels to be His Heavenly embodied representatives on earth. Sure, God can do things from Heaven, but if He needs something done that needs a physical touch on earth, that's what the angels are for.

Why doesn't He just pop down into earth? Well, God is Spirit, and He DID pop down into earth but that coming was so singular – He put on flesh and dwelt among us for the express purposes of saving us – the next time He comes, He comes according to 2 Thessalonians 1:7 - in blazing fire with his powerful angels (2Th 1:7 NIV).

So, I think that rather than bringing history to a close by entering the world again, God made angels to be His personal representatives when He knew that what He needed to do needed a personal touch.

That's the complicated answer.

The simple answer – and again, this is speculation, but informed speculation – I think God made angels to do things that He Himself can do because He's willing to share His power.

I mean, think about it. God is, in Himself, Three-in-One. Father, Son and Holy Spirit share power in and of themselves. God spends six days exerting His power to create the world and then what do He do? He gives it away – He says – 'You – have dominion over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and everything else I've created.' He shares His power with His Son who comes to earth and then says (John 14:12) "... anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

You can never accuse God of being a miserly tyrant when it comes to His power. I suspect that God made angels to share His power around because that's just the kind of God He is. He retains His omnipotence but otherwise spreads His power around. I might be wrong on that, but that, I think is the best and easiest way to make sense of what we find about angels in the Bible.

Now, before we close, we need to think about the practical implications of this because for many of us, it's easy for us to discount the presence of angels. We can't see them and we don't often experience them and yet the Bible tells us they're there. And not only that, they are ministering spirits, sent to help us in our daily walk with Christ! That's a tremendous gift and resource that we have as believers. By and large, we need to be more open to and aware of the work of angels on our behalf in our lives.

That being said, we can't go too far and think that angels are all-powerful and a substitute for God. They're not. Time Magazine at one point wrote – 'For those who choke too easily on God and his rules... angels are the handy compromise, all fluff and meringue, kind, nonjudgmental. They are available to everyone, like aspirin.'^{iv}

And Christianity Today expresses the problem with that – 'Angels too easily provide a temptation for those who want a 'fix' of spirituality without bothering with God himself.'^v

They're right and that's just an absurd way of thinking. I mean, as awesome and powerful and important as angels are, the author of the book of Hebrews spends the first two chapters saying 'Jesus is even more awesome and powerful and important.' Go home and spend some time this afternoon reading Hebrews 1 and 2 because I think it puts things into the proper perspective.

Just to give you a taste. Hebrews 1:3-4 says:

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Hebrews 2:7-8:

7 God made him a little lower than the angels; [but then] you crowned him with glory and honor

8 and put everything under his feet."

Hebrews 1:7 In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."

The implication being – angels are servants –

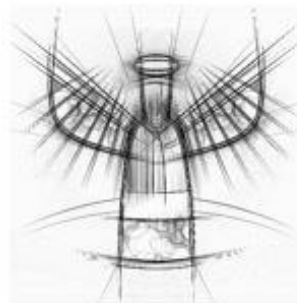
8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom" (Heb 1:3-8 NIV).

Angels are servants; Jesus is God. As great as angels are, they pale in comparison to the One they serve.

So yes, believe in angels. Know that they are ministering spirits sent to serve your wellbeing as messengers, ministers, protectors, collectors, warriors and worshipers; just know that God is in charge and put your ultimate faith in Him.

God made angels to be:

<p>Luke 1:11, 1:26, 2:9 Genesis 19:15 Judges 13:9, 21 Acts 10:3, 27:23</p>	<p>Hebrews 1:14 Genesis 16:6-11 1 Kings 19:7 Matthew 4:11</p> <p>* _____ Psalm 34:7 Daniel 3, 6 Psalm 91:11</p> <p>* _____ Mark 13:26-27 Mathew 13:49 Luke 16:22</p>	<p>Luke 1:12 Judges 13:21 Psalm 103:20 1 Corinthians 10:10 2 Peter 2:11 Acts 12:23 2 Chronicles 32:21</p>	<p>Isaiah 6:2-3 Revelation 7:11-12 Psalm 148</p>
<p>God sends an angel to Cornelius (Acts 10) Peter in jail (Acts 5, 12)</p>		<p>God speaks to Saul (Paul) (Acts 9) Paul in jail (Acts 16)</p>	
<p>* "...This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels" (2 Thessalonians 1:7) * Hebrews 1&2</p>			



ⁱ <https://davidjeremiah.blog/angels-and-demons-in-the-bible-part-one/>
ⁱⁱ <https://ccel.org/ccel/luther/tabletalk.v.xxiv.html>
ⁱⁱⁱ Millard Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 458.
^{iv} <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,979893-2,00.html>
^v <https://davidjeremiah.blog/angels-and-demons-in-the-bible-part-one/>
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1993/april-5/rumors-of-angels.html>