



Angels and the Spiritual World

Leader's Notes



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Introduction

Western culture has become more sceptical about the existence of any kind of spiritual or supernatural world. Science has helped to eliminate many superstitious beliefs and TV shows featuring the supernatural are either very high tech or tend to be rather bizarre. However the popularity of psychic fairs, books on 'angelology' and guardian angel charms shows that interest in this area has broadened if anything.

Nearly all religions recognize the existence of a spiritual world. Christians, Jews and Muslims have always believed in angels. Mythology from many other cultures includes gods, half-gods, spirits and demons. How much does the Bible tell us about the creation and nature of angels? What is truth and what is popular myth?

The viewpoint portrayed here is that angels and demons are not psychological disorders, cultural forces, the ghosts of dead people or figments of our imagination. They are personal spiritual beings created by God - some in alliance with him, some in rebellion against him.

Five Modern Day Angel Stories

Man, angel, spiritual being, alien even. How do you tell the difference? It can be difficult. Modern day stories about angels and the supernatural are not too hard to find and you may have some of your own. Here are a few of our favourites.



Decide for yourself what you think about the identity of the helpful 'people' in these stories.

Richard's Story: the Cyclist's Note

The young people were devastated. Lois, only 17 years old had been tragically killed in a car accident. Richard and a few close friends visited the funeral parlour to say goodbye. They found it very distressing, particularly Richard. Outside, they did their best to support each other. It raised so many questions. Sophie, a Christian, challenged him "If you want to know whether there's a God or not," she said to Richard, "then why don't you ask him to show you." So he did, praying "God if you're really there, prove it."

The next morning Richard set off on his way to work as normal. So at 5.00 a.m. on a cold February morning in 2008, he was standing near Sainsbury's waiting for his lift. It was dark and the roads were empty. Richard was listening to his iPod and didn't take any notice of the approaching cyclist until he stopped to speak to him. The stranger handed him a piece of paper saying "Just to let you know that God loves you." The note had some Bible verses written on it. The funeral had not been planned at that point but when Richard went to the funeral a week later he immediately recognized the Bible verses that were read in the service as the same ones that were on the note.

Although Richard tried to find the cyclist again on a number of occasions, it was without success. He hasn't seen him since and none of the youth workers known to he or his brother knew anything about it. The incident really made Richard think. God continued to work in his life and 3 years later he became a Christian.

Story as re-told to us by Richard's brother, Adam. Used with permission

The Missionary and the Cyclists

"Whatever you do, don't leave this village over the next few days," the missionary had been warned. A local bandit leader was intent on killing him for some reason. But there was an urgent need for him to travel to the next village and there was no one who could even go with him.

He prayed about it and he felt strongly that it was right to go anyway. He would just have to trust God. But that didn't stop him feeling in fear of his life. He cycled along warily, conscious of the many places where bandits could hide. When he reached his destination safely he wondered if it had only been hearsay. The next day he saw the bandit leader in the market place and challenged him. Yes, it was true. The man had planned to kill him that day.

"So why didn't you?" asked the missionary. "I was alone and defenceless?"

"No you weren't," came the reply. "There were 12 other men on bicycles with you!"

Source unknown

Esther's Story: The Stranger with a Birthday Card

None of the nursing staff had noticed the gentleman visiting Esther that afternoon in Purley Hospital. Although elderly, her mind was still alert and she was surprised to get a visitor she didn't recognize.

"It's your birthday today!" said the stranger as he greeted her.

"No it isn't," she replied.

"Yes it is – it's your spiritual birthday – the day you became a Christian" came the response. "Oh yes, so it is" she exclaimed. "I'd quite forgotten." They chatted for a while and then he went, leaving her with a card. Neither she nor anyone in her family ever worked out who he was. None of them had been to see her that afternoon, nor had anyone from church and no one was really aware of the date she had become a Christian anyway. Her daughter-in-law suggested that it had just been a dream but Esther still had the card that he had given to her, which was proof of his visit.

My Grandmother – BL

Marie's Story: The Calming Stranger

With tears streaming down her face Marie got onto the tube to return to her university hall of residence. She had just broken off her engagement. It just wasn't right. She sat down oblivious to anyone else. The train wasn't crowded. At the next station she was aware of someone sitting down in the seat opposite her. There was a tremendous aura of calmness and serenity about this man. He never spoke but there was something about his presence that really settled her, giving her a real sense of peace. He left at the stop immediately before hers. She always felt that whoever or whatever he was, that he had been sent by God to steady her as she made her way back home that day.

'Marie' was my flat mate at university. BL

A Teacher's Story

'Last school year, an elementary school teacher's classroom was made up of third-graders, every one of whom came from a difficult situation. Some were from single-parent families, some were from dysfunctional families, some were undernourished or uncared for, some lived in abusive homes, and others had been beaten, bruised, or raped by family members. One little girl's dad had died of AIDS, and the list goes on. The teacher's heart bled for these kids.

Before the 1999-2000 school year started, she and her husband went to her classroom and prayed over each desk in the room. They prayed that God would place an angel behind each and every child throughout the coming year, to watch over them and protect them.

A month or so after the year started, she gave the kids an assignment to write about what they would like to be when they grew up. Each was busy with his or her assignment when "Andrew" raised his hand. When she asked him what he needed, he asked her how to spell "mighty". After answering his question, she asked him why he needed to know. Andrew said it was because when he grew up he wanted to be a "mighty man of God". When he said this, "Mark," sitting next to him, asked, "So what's a mighty man of God?" The teacher, knowing she could not say anything about this herself in the classroom, told Andrew to go ahead and tell Mark what it was.

Andrew said, "It's a man who puts on the armour of God and is a soldier for God". After observing the conversation, the teacher, had begun to walk away when Andrew motioned with his forefinger for her to come closer. He whispered to her, asking if she believed in angels. She told him yes, she did. Then he asked her if she thought people could see angels, and she said she thought some people probably could. Andrew said that he did, and he could see an angel standing behind each child in the room.'

Extract from: The Beginner's Guide to Intercession by Dutch Sheets

What does the Bible tell us about Angels?

Most religions recognize the existence of a spiritual world. Mythology from many cultures includes gods, half-gods, spirits, demons, etc. Christians, Jews and Muslims have always believed in the existence of angels.

➤ **When were the angels created?**

- We don't know exactly. Jesus made them as part of his act of creation. It could have been before or during the creation of the heavens and the earth. It was definitely before the creation of mankind. Colossians 1:16 See also Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 3:10

➤ **How many are there?**

- Millions! John from the New Testament saw some angels in a vision and said "the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands." (Revelation 5:11 YLT).
- In the gospels one man was plagued by so many demons that he was known as 'Legion'. Mark 5:9

➤ **Who and What are they?**

- Angels have names but the Bible only tells us the names of two of them.
Michael Daniel 10:13; Jude 9
Gabriel Daniel 8 & 9; Luke 1

Angels are

- Immortal spiritual beings: Hebrews 1:14
- Intelligent beings with much knowledge: Gabriel was surprised when Zechariah thought he knew better than him. Luke 1:18-20
- Emotional beings: We know that they rejoice when someone becomes a Christian. Luke 15:10
- Self-willed beings: They have the ability and freedom to make choices. We know that some of them rebelled against God. Revelation 12:7; 2 Peter 2:4
- They appear to be asexual beings who do not marry. We think God created all of them at once, although he could easily create more at any given moment. Mark 12:25

➤ **The Status of Angels**

- Jesus created them and rules over them. 1 Peter 3:22 NCV
- For a very short time, when Jesus became human and lived on earth he was given a place lower than the angels alongside us. Hebrews chapters 1 & 2
- There are different ranks or types of angels. The most important appear to be the cherubim. Michael is an archangel, Jude 9. Some Christians believe that Gabriel and Raphael are also archangels.
- Although angels are powerful and important, they are not to be worshipped. Revelation 19:10

➤ **What do angels look like?**

- As spiritual beings, they can be visible or invisible.
- They can appear in the form of men even though they are not men. Hebrews 13:2
- Both cherubim and seraphim are very different to our usual image of angels. Seraphim have 6 wings for example. There are some spectacular descriptions of both of these types of angel in Ezekiel 10 and Isaiah 6.
- They are very beautiful as were the devil and the other fallen angels in their original form.

➤ **What can they do?**

- Even though angels do not have a physical body, they can move solid and heavy objects such as when they rolled away the huge stone in front of Jesus' grave. An angel opened prison doors in Acts 5:19 & 23 and Acts 12:6-11. God sometimes sends angels to protect people.
- Many 'ghost' stories are due to the activities of fallen angels. These sort are also behind activities such as levitation and Ouija boards. It isn't difficult to find modern stories of strange, unwanted spiritual activity.
- Angels can only be in one place at a time, but many of them can occupy a small space. We know this from the story of the man named 'Legion' (Mark 5:9) who was healed by Jesus. A group of scholars in a distant century once wasted a lot of time discussing how many angels you could fit onto a pinhead!
- Angels cannot hear people's thoughts. Only God can do that. Only God can hear silent prayers. Prayer to the one true Almighty God is far more powerful than any other prayer. Daniel 2:2-11
- The angels were all made at once and do not appear to marry or reproduce. (Genesis 6:1-4 is an isolated, mysterious passage best left to people with nothing better to debate.) Cherubs are **not** cute baby angels such as appear on Christmas cards. A cherub is a fearsome warrior angel. It was cherubim who were left to guard the tree of life. Mark 12:25
- They can perform miraculous signs up to a point. This explains how Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform some miracles in competition with Moses. The Bible warns us to be careful because the fallen angels are good at pretending to be friends because they want to deceive us. Revelation 16:14; Exodus 7 & 8

➤ **What is their role?**

- The word translated as 'angel' often simply means 'messenger'. Gabriel, for example visited both Zechariah and Mary with important messages. Luke 1:18-19 and 26-28
They are also described as 'mighty'. People who saw one were often frightened at first.
- They surround God's throne forming a heavenly court. Isaiah 6:1-3 NLT
- They praise God. Psalm 103:20 NIV Also Luke 2:13-14; Revelation 5:11
- They are guardians & helpers of men
 - If you make the Most High your dwelling... he will command his angels to guard you in all your ways. Psalm 91:9-11 NIV
 - For the angel of the Lord is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear him. Psalm 34:7 NLT
 - An angel helped Elijah by giving him food. 1 Kings 19:1-8
 - Don't think these little children are worth nothing. I tell you that they have angels in heaven who are always with my Father in heaven. Matthew 18:10 NCV
 - All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help Hebrews 1:14 NCV
- They are spiritual warriors and fight battles.

- I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, (chief princes NIV) came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia. Daniel 10, especially vs. 10-14 NLT
 - After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:24 NIV
 - You who are his angels, praise the Lord. You are the mighty warriors who do what he says and who obey his voice. Psalm 103:20

➤ ***Does everyone have a guardian angel?***

There are different Christian views on this. Catholics teach that everyone does have a guardian angel. Other Christians would say that the Bible is not clear on this although they do believe that God often sends angels to help when needed. They are not invisible friends who are there to help us whenever we get into trouble.

Where can we find Bible stories that feature angels?

- Genesis 19 – angels rescued Lot
- I Kings 19:1-8 – an angel helped Elijah, providing him with food and drink to strengthen him
- Luke 1:5--38 – Gabriel visited Zechariah then Mary
- Luke 2:13-14 – angels visit the shepherds when Jesus was born
- Matthew 4:11 angels served Jesus after he had been tempted by the devil
- Luke 22:39-43 – an angel strengthened Jesus in Gethsemane
- Matthew 28:2-7 – angels rolled away the stone from Jesus' tomb
- Acts 10: 1-5 – Cornelius had a vision of an angel when he was praying
- Acts 12:6-11 – an angel rescued Peter from prison

What went wrong? How did demons come into existence?

They started life as angels in heaven along with the rest. Some of them were very powerful and splendid. Then one of the cherubs, who was a prince among the angels, became too full of himself and wanted to be even more important than God. He led a rebellion against God and was thrown out of heaven. The best insight into what happened is in Ezekiel 28. See also Isaiah 14:12-15 and Jude 6

➤ The Leader of the Gang: Different names for God's chief enemy

This 'fallen' angel became God's bitter enemy. The conflict between them became very fierce. Our world has always been caught up in it. Satan decided to attack Adam because mankind was the 'crown' of God's creation and meant so much to God.

We don't know his original name. Names and character descriptions always go together in with God, so his various names tell us something about him.

Satan: We first find the name 'Satan' in the book of Job, which is one of the very oldest stories in the Bible. It means the adversary or enemy. Job 1:6

Lucifer: The name Lucifer is a Latin translation of a word that means 'bright one of the dawn, day star, light bearer, morning star, shining one'. It refers to his original glory and beauty. This may be his original name. Isaiah 14:12. He is still able to disguise himself as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14

The Devil: We read much about him in the New Testament where he is often called the devil. The word 'devil' means 'the accuser'. Revelation 12:10 *It comes from the New Testament Greek word 'Diabolos'*

He is called the 'accuser' because he loves to make us aware of any wrong we have done in order to make us feel judged, condemned and forever worthless. He wants to prevent us experiencing God's forgiveness. He tries to make us continue to feel guilty even after we have admitted to God that we have done something wrong. He would like us to believe that we have to pay a price/penalty for this and can never be free.

But God doesn't want that for us. The Holy Spirit makes us aware of our wrongdoing (John 16:8) for the opposite reason. It is so that we can own up to God (confess) what we are like and really want to be different. He is then able to forgive us and accept us because of Jesus' death on the cross. It cost him much but he thinks we are worth it. 'Who can accuse the people God has chosen? No one...' Romans 8:31-34

Apollyon: He is also called 'Apollyon', which is Greek for 'destroyer' because he destroys whatever good he can. Revelation 9:11

Beelzebub: is a name used in some translations of the New Testament gospels. It is probably the same as Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, which means "the lord of flies," or, "the lord of dung," or "the dung-god." That rather sounds like a rude nick-name! Matthew 10:22-28

Other titles for him:

- the tempter Matthew 4:3
- the old serpent Revelation 12:9; 20:2
- the ruler/prince of this world John 12:31; 14:30
- the god of this world 2 Corinthians 4:4
- the prince of the power of the air Ephesians 2:2
- the accuser Revelation 12:10
- the prince of demons Luke 11:15
- the dragon Revelation 12:9

➤ **Satan's characteristics**

- He is god-like but he is nothing in comparison with the true God
- He has great power but not as much as he would like.
- He cannot create from nothing but he is skilled at taking something good, distorting it and turning it into something evil.
- Although he still has a lot of influence, he can't do just anything he wants.
- He has been defeated by Jesus so he has lost the overall war but there are still a few battles going on that he hopes to win or at least do maximum damage.
- One day he and his followers will be thrown out and he will lose everything.
- He is really proud which is what caused him to rebel in the first place. 1 Timothy 3:6
- He is very powerful but his power is restricted. Luke 4:5-6; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 6:12
- He is cunning, good at tricking people, deceitful, a liar:
- He deceived Eve at the beginning of creation and he still tells us lies about ourselves and about God. John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 11:14
- He is fierce & cruel, a murderer John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8-9;

Stories in Luke 8:29 and Luke 9:39 show how cruelly demons can treat people

Life Application

- What influence, if any do angels have over our lives?

God may send his angels to protect or encourage.

If we mess around with the occult, we open the door to negative, harmful influences by fallen angels.

- Does it work to pray to angels? Can they hear prayers? Is it better to pray to God who commands the angels?

Angels cannot always hear our prayers. They can only be in one place at a time and they do not have God's long range scanners that instantly know when someone is praying. They can never read our thoughts.

God's angels respond to his commands and not to our prayers. We can pray that God will send an angel to help when that looks like a good way to pray, but mostly we trust him to provide the best answer. Since God has good plans for us, any plans involving his angels will also be good.

Other spirits have their own agenda and it is dangerous to pray to an unknown spirit.

- Is there a difference between an angel and a 'spirit guide'? If we encounter a spiritual being how can we tell whether they are a genuine friend or a fake friend?

Yes, there is a very important difference. Any spirit whom God sends to help us will be comfortable with the name of Jesus. Any spirit who is only pretending to be a friend in order to get an opportunity to harm us will not like the name of Jesus being used. In some ways they are like sex abusers as they set out to gain people's trust for their own use.

- Do we need to be afraid of spirits that are evil?

We should be wary of them but we do not need to fear them. The battle against them was won when Jesus died and 'defeated all spiritual powers and forces' Colossians 2:14-15. Jesus gives us the power to defeat Satan in our lives and the lives of those for whom we pray. We have been instructed to pray in the name of Jesus, and those **who are in a good relationship with God** can exercise authority over evil spirits in his name, as the disciples found to their surprise. And now the Holy Spirit lives in us to enable us to overcome the devil and to overcome temptation.

This part of the theme is expanded in the set '**The Dark Side of the Spiritual World**'.

Other Reading

There are many books on his subject. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Systematic Theology by Louis Berkhof gives a thorough academic look at this subject.
- The article by Lynn Schofield Clark on the Bible Society web site might interest you.
[Autumn 1999 - Popular culture: replacing religion for today's teens?](#)
- She has also written the book 'From Angels to Aliens: Teens and the Supernatural'
- 'A Closer Look at New Age Spirituality' by Rob Frost gives some interesting insights into the New Age movement and experiences
- Youthwork Magazine articles:
Andy Angel: Are angels real? April 2013
Steve Griffiths on the devil: Feb 2013 <http://www.youthworkmagazine.co.uk/main/article/thedarknight>
- What the Bible Teaches about Angels by Roger Ellsworth, 2005
- Lifebuilder Bible Study: Angels by Douglas Connelly, 2004

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Bible translations used include:

NCV = New Century Version (Youth Bible)

NLT = New Living Translation

NIV = New International Version

YLT = Young's Literal Translation

NKJV = New King James Version

CEB = Common English Bible

Msg = the Message

NIRV = New International Readers Version