

The Acts of Angels

“But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life”
(Acts 5:19-20).

The ministry of angels is biblical. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

Angels are mentioned nearly three hundred times in thirty-four books of the Bible. In the Book of Acts alone angels are referred to twenty-one times. In Revelation angels are mentioned in seventy-four references.

“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psalms 91:11).

Angel means, “messenger.” Angels are heavenly messengers created by God before He made the earth. Angels perform many activities at God’s command.

Originally, all angels were good. But, because they had freedom of choice, some joined Satan in his rebellion. These lost their heavenly role and became fallen angels. Both good and bad angels are active today. Good angels are concerned with furthering God’s purposes. They act under God’s authority. They cannot just do their own thing.

At times angels appear as human beings, but they never become human. In the Bible, angels of God usually appeared masculine (male), but they do not actually have a gender.

Good angels are seldom visible to us because we would be tempted to worship them.

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

Angels Declare Messages from God

Acts begins with the promise of power at Pentecost (Acts 1:8) and the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

Jesus’ friends watched Him going up to heaven until He disappeared into a cloud. They stood looking up into the empty sky. Suddenly, two men dressed in white robes appeared. They promised that Jesus would come again.

Angels Direct Souls to the Men of God

“He saw in a vision . . . an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius . . . Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter . . . he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:3-6).

God responded to Cornelius’s sincere prayers by sending an angel who told him that his

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prayers had come before God as a memorial and that he should send for Peter.

Angels cannot convey the message of salvation. Only humans can do that. However, often preaching the gospel is connected with angelic intervention and help.

Although angels never preach the gospel, they do rejoice when someone repents.

“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

Angels cannot preach the gospel because:

📖 The task of preaching the gospel has been assigned to men. Fulfilling the commission of evangelism is redeemed mankind's job.

📖 They cannot speak of the gospel from personal experience. The most powerful tool in preaching/witnessing is a person's testimony (experience).

Angels Set the Captives Free

The apostles had been arrested and put into jail for proclaiming the name of Jesus. The first of three “jail house miracles” recorded in the Book of Acts is in chapter 5. An angel came at night and opened the prison doors. What were the apostles to do now? The angel told them to go right back doing what they had been doing, preaching the gospel.

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Later, King Herod went after some of the preachers. He killed James and imprisoned Peter. Herod planned to kill Peter at the favorable time. But God had other plans. He sent an angel. The angel kicked sleeping Paul in the side and told him to get up, get dressed, and get out. Peter followed him to safety, thinking all the time that it was just a dream.

“And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:11).

Angels Reveal God's Assignments to Men

Philip was having a great time preaching the gospel and spreading the salvation message to large crowds. Then his direction changed for the sake of one Ethiopian man traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip left a place flowing with revival for a dry place where a lonely man waited to drink from the wells of living water.

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26).

Angels Have Power to Destroy

After Peter's jailhouse escape, Herod was still up to no-good. He beheaded those who had allowed Peter to escape. One day he appeared before the people, who sweet-talked and flattered him. And he believed it! He liked being referred to as the “voice of

God." God had enough and sent an angel to kill him.

"And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:23).

Angels Encourage and Inspire

Paul sailed to Rome on a ship that was headed for trouble. Paul warned, "I see only disaster ahead of us. It is too dangerous for sailing. Our lives are in danger." The crew ignored his warning. After all, Paul was a preacher, and they were trained seamen. Out at sea the storm struck, and they lost control of the vessel. The sailors lost all hope of rescue. Paul told them, "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete . . . And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship . . . For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:21-24).

Satan Transformed Into an Angel of Light

Satan is able to transform himself into an "angel of light." This spirit presents a gospel different from the one that the Scripture teaches. His deceitful workers will appear like ministers of righteousness. Adam Clarke says, "they would be as industrious and as generous in promoting error as the apostles were in preaching truth; they would endeavour as much to undermine the kingdom of Christ as the apostles did to establish it."

They sometimes "look like an angel of light, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness."

"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Let us briefly examine two situations.

A young camel driver named Mohammed meditated on many different religions and had frightening visions. His first thought was that these were demonic, but his wife persuaded him that they were divine. He listened to the angel (whom he decided was Gabriel) and received many so-called revelations. Islam was born. It combines the Bible with Mohammed's doctrines. These doctrines often contradict the Bible. They see Jesus only as a prophet. It is the second largest world religion after Christianity. Islam continues to grow.

A young man named Joseph Smith also sought to know which religion was right. This fifteen-year-old boy related a vision where it was revealed to him that all churches were abominations. He thought he was called to restore the true gospel. An angel of light appeared to him. Three years later another angel of light appeared to him, telling him about some gold plates on which the true gospel was written. Smith said that he found these plates on a nearby hill. He was able to translate the plates, using a special pair of glasses supplied by the angel of light. He founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

It Is Time to Think

This lesson has dealt mainly with “Acts of Angels.” Can you think of other examples of angels in the Old and New Testament?

Have you heard any story about angels in modern day?

Why is it that in African society (and many other places) you hear more about demons and demonic manifestation than you hear about angels?

Study Questions

1. How many times are angels referred to in Acts?

2. Who are angels?

3. How did bad angels (demons) come into existence?

4. Why cannot angels preach the salvation message (gospel)?

5. List five responsibilities (functions) of angels in the Book of Acts.

6. How does Satan transform himself into an “angel of light”?

7. Explain the origin of Islam.

8. Explain what you have learned about Joseph Smith in this lesson.

