

# Angels

## 2: WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?

### THE BRIGHTNESS OF ANGELS

Second Corinthians 11:14 says, “*Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*” Why does Paul associate angels with brightness? Perhaps it is because many times in the Bible we see angels appear in all their brightness.

- Matthew 28:3: (The angel at the tomb of Jesus) “*His appearance was like lightning.*”
- Acts 10:30: “*Cornelius answered: ‘Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me.’*”
- Acts 12:7: “*Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell.*”
- Revelation 10:1: “*Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.*”
- Revelation 15:6: “*Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen.*”

The brightness angels possess is not of their own, it is the glory of God shining through them. When the angels made their announcement to the shepherds we read that “*The glory of the Lord shone all around them*” (Luke 2:9.)

It is interesting to note that at some angel appearances there was little doubt in recognizing them. When Jacob was on his way to meet Esau, he was met by a host of angels which he immediately recognized. His comment was, “*This is the camp of God!*” (Genesis 32:2.) Elisha encountered a remarkable event when he saw God’s angels at work as his warriors. 2 Kings 6:9-17 tells the account of Elisha and his servant. The king of Aram wanted to

fight against the Israelites. He would move his army this way and that in hopes of surprising his enemy. But every time he moved to his army, God told Elisha what was happening so he could warn the Israelite army. Finally the king was disgusted with Elisha and wished to kill him. Late one night the king had his army surround the house where Elisha and his servant were staying. When they awoke the next morning they looked out and saw that they were surrounded by the enemy. “*When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. ‘Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?’ the servant asked.*”

“*‘Don’t be afraid,’ the prophet answered. ‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’*”

“*And Elisha prayed, ‘Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.’ Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*”

These created beings often invoke pure awe and even fear when seen by mere mortals. The Bible records many instances when the sight of an angel was frightening. That is why many angels begin speaking with the words, “Fear not.”

- Daniel 10:11,12: “*He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel.’*”
- Luke 1:12,13: “*When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.’*”
- Luke 1:29,30: “*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.’*”
- Luke 2:9,10: “*An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’*”
- Matthew 28:5: “*The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for*

*Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.’”*

It is also true that in order for people to see angels, one’s eyes must first be opened. In Daniel’s vision of a man, only he saw the angel, not those who were with him. In the account of Balaam and his talking donkey, the donkey repeatedly saw the angel with a flaming sword but it wasn’t until later that God opened Balaam’s eyes to also see it. The account of Elisha that was mentioned earlier shows that he saw the angels in their flaming chariots but his servant could not. Thus he prayed that God would open his servant’s eyes so he too could see this awesome sight.

### **Discuss**

***Why must we always be mindful that angels only possess what attributes are given them by God? How do you picture what the shepherds saw in the sky on the night of Jesus’ birth?***

## **THE PLAINNESS OF ANGELS**

As we have seen, sometimes angels appear as a blinding light. Yet there are other times God sends his angels to appear in ordinary clothing. When the angels visited Abraham we are told, he treated them with hospitality as honored guests. *“The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant’”* (Genesis 18:1-5.) Notice these angels had the ability to eat, walk, and wash. Likewise when the two angels went on to warn Lot, he also treated them as guests.

We should be aware that angels sometimes appear to God’s people as ordinary human beings. Hebrews 13:2 gives us the advice, *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels **without knowing it.**”*

In all the angelic appearances in the Bible the angels took on the form of a male. The angels who visited Abraham, those at the tomb of Jesus, and the angels who appeared at the ascension were all called men or young men. Acts 1:10 says, *“They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two **men** dressed in white stood beside them.”*

## **ANGEL WINGS**

Revelation 14:6 says, *“Then I saw another angel **flying in midair**, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”* Perhaps the one thing that we identify with angels most is their wings. Children’s Bible story books or wall pictures all show angels appearing with wings. Do angels have wings? As we will see throughout this study, God can give angels any appearance he wishes for the occasion. Nothing in Scripture would lead us to believe that all angels have wings for flight, however, there are several instances where angels with wings are mentioned. Most of these refer to either cherubim or seraphim. (We will discuss types of angels later.)

On Mount Sinai God gave Moses detailed instructions for the design and decoration of his tabernacle. The walls of this tent of worship were to be ornately decorated with angel cherubim. Exodus 26:31 says, *“Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with **cherubim** woven into it by a skilled worker.”* In addition, the focal point of God’s house, the sacred Ark of the Covenant, was to be adorned with two cherubim facing one another. Exodus 37:6-9 gives the details: *“He made the atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. Then he made **two cherubim** out of hammered gold*



at the ends of the cover. He made **one cherub** on one end and the **second cherub** on the other; at the two ends he made them of one piece with the cover. The **cherubim had their wings spread** upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The **cherubim faced each other**, looking toward the cover.”

Exodus 25:22 also mentions, “There, above the cover **between the two cherubim** that are over the Ark of the Covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”

Years after the tabernacle faded from existence, King David designed the temple, a new and permanent house of the Lord. This structure was to mirror the tabernacle only on a much grander scale. His son Solomon would be the builder. Again the theme of angels was used throughout. First Kings 6 describes the beauty of this place of worship, “For the inner sanctuary he made a pair of cherubim out of olive wood, each ten cubits (15’) high. One wing of the first **cherub** was five cubits (7.5’) long, and the other wing five cubits (7.5’)—ten cubits (15’) from wing tip to wing tip. The second cherub also measured ten cubits (15’), for the two cherubim were identical in size and shape. The height of each cherub was ten cubits (15’). He placed the cherubim inside the innermost room of the temple, with their wings spread out. **The wing of one cherub touched one wall, while the wing of the other touched the other wall, and their wings touched each other in the middle of the room.** He overlaid the cherubim with gold.

“On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, **he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers.** He also covered the floors of both the inner and outer rooms of the temple with gold.

“For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors out of olive wood that were one fifth of the width of the sanctuary. And **on the two olive-wood doors he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid the cherubim and palm trees with hammered gold.**” How awe inspiring it must have been for God’s people to see their house of worship adorned with God’s special creatures.

But there are still other references to angel wings. When Isaiah was chosen to be God’s prophet, he was given a unique glimpse into the throne room of God. He writes about what he saw. Isaiah 6:1-5 says, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the

LORD, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were **seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.** And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.’”

Ezekiel 10:5 mentions angels whose wings could be heard, “**The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.**” And while Daniel was in prayer, he mentions the angel Gabriel flying toward him. “While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, **came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice**” (Daniel 9:21.)

(Note: Many paintings depict the angels playing harps. This thought originates in Revelation 14:2, “I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.”

### Discuss

**If God emphasized the depiction of angels in his tabernacle and temple, why do we seldom show angels in our churches?**

### ANGEL’S NAMED

Although there are many angels mentioned in the Bible numbering in the thousands, only Gabriel and Michael are mentioned by name. Gabriel, (“Hero of God”) seems to serve as the chief messenger among the angels. He appears four times in the Bible, always bringing good news. It is fascinating to see Gabriel mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. In Daniel chapter 8, Daniel had a dream about a ram and a goat. While he was trying to understand the dream he was visited by Gabriel. “While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, ‘**Gabriel**, tell this man the meaning of the vision.’ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. ‘Son of man,’ he said to me, ‘understand

*that the vision concerns the time of the end”* (Daniel 8:15-17.) Shortly afterward in chapter 9, Daniel was once again visited by Gabriel. “*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision.’*”

We now fast forward 500 years to Luke 1 where we see Zechariah praying in the temple. “*The angel said to him, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news’*” (Daniel 9:19.) Later in that same chapter, Gabriel makes another visit to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus. “*In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you’*” (Daniel 9:26-28.)

In all three incidents it is remarkable how pleasant Gabriel is. Not only does he greet them with a friendly greeting but he simply lays out God’s plans to them.

The other angel mentioned in the Bible is Michael (“Who is like God?”) Unlike the messenger angel Gabriel, Michael is shown as being an archangel, a term mentioned only twice in the Bible. As such, he is an angel of strength, a warrior standing against the evil powers. First Thessalonians 4:16 says, “*The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*” Might the trumpeter be the archangel Michael? Coincidentally, Michael is also first mentioned in the book of Daniel. Three times his name appears. Daniel 12:1, “*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.*” Jude 9 relates a hazy incident when

Michael was involved in a dispute with Satan over the body of Moses. “*Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’*” (We note here that even the mighty angel Michael called on the Lord to rebuke Satan. We should follow his example.) The last mention of Michael is in Revelation 12:7,8 where we see his leadership abilities, “*Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.*”

(Note: The angel Raphael is mentioned in some religions but nowhere in Scripture. He is said to have been the angel who stirred the waters at the pool of Bethesda. He is also mentioned in the apocryphal book of Tobit plus he plays a part in the Mormon and Muslim religions.)

### **Discuss**

***How do you picture Gabriel and Michael? Did you know that the Christian church celebrates the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels on Sept. 29?***

## **ANGELS CAN BE NOISY**

There is a little known story in 2 Samuel where we find David constantly attacked by the Philistines. Prior to each attack David prayed to the Lord for deliverance from the enemy’s hands. In one inquiry the Lord said he would defeat the Philistines, however David must first maneuver his troops behind the Philistine lines. Then David was told to wait with his troops until they heard, “*the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees.*” Undoubtedly that was the sound of God’s mighty angels assisting David’s army. Angels do make noise. Revelation 10:3 says, “*[God’s mighty angel] gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.*”

Perhaps the most familiar encounter with noisy angels was when Isaiah was called. In his miraculous view into the throne room of God he saw the seraphim worshipping God. Isaiah 6:3,4 tells us, “*And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the*

*doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”*

Do angels sing? In answering that question no doubt our thoughts drift to the Christmas story where the angels sang to the shepherds. However the Greek word used here means they were likely telling that message to the shepherds. Job 38:7 does say that the morning stars sang and the angels shouted for joy during the creation.

Whether they sing like we do or have some other way of communicating their joy should not deter us from realizing that the angels are actively praising God in heaven. What that praise sounds like, we will one day experience. Revelation 5:11,12 says, “*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’”*

## TYPES OF ANGELS

The Bible implies that there are various classes of angels. God is a God of order, and as such his heavenly host is not a disorganized mob with little purpose or direction. Rather there is great detail and well-disciplined orderliness among the angels.

Early Christians put much effort into classifying groups of angels. St. Ambrose, St. Jerome and others set down a ranking of angels that went something like this:

*Highest Rank: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones*

*Middle Rank: Dominions, Virtues, Powers*

*Lower Rank: Principalities, Archangels, Angels*

Billy Graham in his book *Angels* organizes them this way: *Archangels, Angels, Seraphim, Cherubim, Principalities, Authorities, Powers, Thrones, Might, and Dominions.*

Although Colossians 1:16 alludes to a classification there is simply not enough evidence in Scripture to justify such ranking procedures. “*For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*” However it should be mentioned that although these terms are used for the good angels, the Lord also impresses on

us that the evil angels also can be described as such. In Ephesians 6:12 we read, “*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*” These words should alert us to the seriousness of the power and strength that the invisible world of Satan and his demons possess.

## SERAPHIM

(Seraph singular; “burning ones”)

Although we sing about the Seraphim angels in the wonderful hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy”, we find the seraphim only mentioned once in the Bible at the commissioning of Isaiah. However there are several things we learn about this special group of angels. First, we see them hovering over the throne of God. They dwell in the most holy place of the heavenly realms. They appear as winged creatures with two wings that cover their eyes from God’s glory, two to cover their feet for they are in the holy presence of God, and two wings for propulsion and movement. Next, we notice them calling to one another, perhaps in antiphonal voice, “*Holy. Holy. Holy is the Lord Almighty.*” Their praise is so powerful the foundations of the throne room are shaken.

### Discuss

*Why, after Isaiah saw and heard the angels in God’s throne room, did he remark, “Woe to me!” I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty?’” What happened immediately after that?*

## CHERUBIM

(Cherub singular; “one who intercedes”)

Cherubim are mentioned frequently in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. These angels are called upon to serve and protect the glory of God. This protection is first evident in Genesis 3:24 when God placed cherubim with a flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. “*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.*” David mentions these angels when he writes

a song of thanksgiving in 2 Samuel 22, “*In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. . . From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.*” We also noted that the shape of the cherubim was repeatedly used in the embroidery and carvings in the tabernacle and temple as well as on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant.



Today the image of the cherubim has been damaged by the cutesy paintings of chubby little cherubs darting around. This false notion originated in Roman folklore where they refer to cherub babies. These depictions are far from the truth. The cherubim display exceptional strength and power, and should not be relegated to becoming cute impotent creatures.

### **Discuss**

***What is the danger in teaching our children that the angels are cute chubby cherubs?***

***Read Ezekiel 1. How do the cherubim Ezekiel saw differ from what you picture in your mind?***

## **OTHER MENTIONS OF ANGELS**

**Hosts:** Hosts is the term used in Scripture for spiritual armies. Although many translations use the terms heavenly hosts or Lord of hosts, the NIV translates this Lord Almighty.

**Chariots:** Psalm 68:17 again shows the power of God’s warriors in calling them chariots. “***The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.***” Isaiah 6:15 says, “*See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.*”

**Holy Ones:** Angels are sometimes called holy ones referencing the holiness they receive from the holiness of God. Psalm 89:7 says, “*In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.*” In Moses’ speech to the people before his death he recounted

the visit of the Lord on Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy 33:2 recounts, “*The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones.*” Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 regarding the final judgment, “*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*”

**Mighty Ones:** Emphasizing the power of these servants of the Lord, they are also described as mighty ones in Psalm 103:20, “*Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.*” Lest we get carried away with details, suffice to say different terms used for the angels imply different aspects of these beings.

Scripture often refers to angels in powerful terms like mighty, flaming chariots, powerful, and warrior-like. Scripture shows time and again the important part angels play in fighting Satan’s evil ways and thwarting his devious plans. There are many instances angels fought and defeated the enemy of God. They helped Lot flee from Sodom. They defeated the army surrounding Elisha. They rolled the stone away from the tomb, and they freed the imprisoned apostles. Professor John Jeske writes in his paper, “The Ministry of the Angels”, “Planet Earth is a cosmic battleground. There’s a battle going on constantly between God and his angelic army, on the one hand, and Satan and his evil troops, on the other. . . Martin Luther often expressed the truth that whatever evil enters our lives comes not so much from natural causes as from the evil angels and the devil, and that if God through his angels did not check the fury of Satan, we could not live for one moment. If for just a single day God would withdraw his angels, Satan and his legions could very well destroy the human race.” How thankful we are for these brave warriors. We rejoice with David in Psalm 91:11, “*He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*”

### **Discuss**

***As we discover more about God’s angels, what does that say about the awesomeness of God?***