

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Lesson 6 | The Armies of Heaven

“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, To keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Psalm 91:11-12

Imagine you are a tiny nation on the world stage. You are constantly being beat up by larger, more powerful nations, just like all the other little nations, but you believe something very different from all your neighbors. While everyone else thought reality consisted of their gods battling each other for control, you believed that your God created everything and alone held total power over all. Now imagine how confusing and embarrassing it must have been when your God allowed you to be captured and carried into a foreign country that worshipped other gods. Your God had warned you this would happen if you continued in your rebellion, but you continued rebelling anyway and faced the punishment. Still, you would be tempted to wonder if your God really is in charge, or if you were carried into captivity because your God wasn't really powerful enough to save you.

In the second half of the book of Isaiah (40-66), the prophet addresses the future captives of Judah knowing they would be asking these very questions. Not surprisingly, Isaiah will use one particular title for God over and over in this section: “Lord of hosts.” The word for “hosts” can mean “armies,” and although in some instances this may be talking about Israel's army, during the exile it meant that God is Lord of the armies of the heavenly council. “Lord of hosts,” then, emphasizes the fact that God rules the armies of heaven. He is the king over all the angelic host and can command them at His pleasure. God's power is seen by His command over armies more powerful than anything we could imagine here on earth. As we continue meditating on the theme of spiritual warfare, it's worth pausing to study what the Bible has to say about angels. Israel needed to be reminded that their God ruled over the armies of heaven, and such truths can be a comfort to us as well today.

How might we be tempted today by our culture to think that God isn't as powerful as He claims to be?

How might thinking of God as the “Lord of Armies” be an encouragement to us today?

In this lesson, we will begin with a few important truths about angels that will help us think more biblically about what angels are and how they work. Then we will take some time to look at what angels do and how they serve God as well as help us.

Key Truths about Angels

There is a lot of wrong thinking about angels today. One of Satan's tactics to keep people away from God is to get people to not believe in the supernatural, and part of the way he has accomplished that is by making the supernatural seem silly, ridiculous, and childish. Angels are a perfect example of this. What the Bible describes as powerful warriors are often thought of as soft, plump babies. This leads to two key truths that we should make sure we have right when we think about angels.

What are some other things that the culture generally thinks are true about angels that you can't

Angels are real.

This might seem to be obvious since the Bible describes angels and talks about them frequently. Do serious Christians doubt that the Bible teaches God created angels or that angels are real? In one sense, no, most Christians do not actually think angels don't exist. At least, if asked the question on a theology quiz they would put the right answer – angels are real and God created them. But most people don't live and act and think as if angels are real. Many are like the servant of Elisha, who saw the enemy but couldn't see what was going on behind the scenes. In 2 Kings 6:8-23, the Syrians send an army to stop Elisha from telling the king what they were up to. While the servant of Elisha only saw a massive army, what he couldn't see until the Lord opened his eyes was the even more impressive army standing around him, protecting him.

What would change if we thought of angels as being real and really watching all we say and do?

Angels are powerful.

Not only are angels real, but they are quite powerful. Many people have a very low view of angels compared to what is in Scripture concerning the heavenly host. Scripture depicts angels as fierce warriors, and those who find themselves in the presence of angels are almost always struck with fear (see for example Daniel 10 and Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds in Luke 1-2). The fact that characters in the Bible are regularly fearful in the presence of angels is surprising if we think of angels as fat babies. If we think of them as powerful warriors such fear makes sense, and is even appropriate.

Why does it matter that we think rightly about angels?

How will thinking rightly help us live rightly, and what difference will it make if we think wrongly about angels?

Service of Angels

Most people today use the word "angel" as a broad category to refer to all spiritual beings who serve God. Technically, the word "angel" means messenger, and being a messenger is one of the many functions God's supernatural servants have. In the Bible angels show can look like men (Genesis 19:1, 5), and have a variety of titles and descriptions such as cherubim (Genesis 3:24), seraphim (Isaiah 6:), sons of God (Job 1:6), spirits (Psalm 104:4), and of course angels. They can rule, bring God's message, serve as guardians, fight for God and His people, and worship God. In the rest of our lesson, we will briefly look at each of these functions.

Ruling

Certain spiritual beings have been given the unique responsibility to have dominion or rulership over part of God's creation. Many of these angels, if not all of them, appear to have fallen and rebelled against God. Daniel describes this reality when he records the message he received from an angel who fought with "the prince of Persia" and "the prince of Greece" (Daniel 10:13-14, 20). In the NT, Paul tells us that we are fighting against principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). These terms refer to angels, and they make it clear that there is some kind of hierarchy involved among the fallen angels themselves. Satan himself is said to be the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and now he and his host are ruling against what God has decreed.

Why do you think Satan and his host would want to rule if they know that in the end they will be defeated and destroyed by God?

Fighting

God does not usually send divine warriors to fight directly on His behalf. For example, although there was an army of flaming chariots ready to protect Elisha and his servant, God sends blindness on the foreign enemies. On one occasion, however, a single angel wiped out the Assyrian army, the most powerful army of the era (2 Kings 19:35). If a single angel could devastate an army, imagine how much more impressive when Christ said that he could call down "twelve legions," or roughly 50,000-60,000 angels. That's a lot of firepower!

Why do you think God does not merely send in angel armies more often if there is so much firepower behind them?

When we see Scripture describing God as the "Lord of hosts," or the God of angel armies, we should remember how impressive that statement is. No army on earth today could stand up to a single angel, and God has thousands of angels at His disposal. Again, this is not a fairy tale, this is reality! The God we serve is a powerful God who is worthy of our worship!

Guarding

The Bible will often depict angelic creatures as guarding important places, especially where God is present. One creature in particular appears to be connected with this role – the cherub (plural cherubim). Cherubim are often found guarding God or the presence of God. For example, they can be found:

- Guarding the entrance to the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24)
- On the ark of the covenant where God's glory hovered (Exodus 25:18-20)
- On the curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies (Exodus 36:35)
- On the artwork in the temple (1 Kings 6:28-29, 32, 35)
- As part of the divine chariot God rode in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 10)

Although it is uncertain exactly what these creatures looked like, they appear to be powerful winged creatures who guard the presence of God.

Why do you think God would have angels guarding his presence if He is all-powerful?

But it is not just the divine presence that angels guard. Scripture makes it clear that angels also guard God's people. Although Satan twisted the verse out of its context, Psalm 91:11-12 does in fact teach that God gives commands to His angels to watch over His people. In Matthew 18:10 Jesus warns against hurting children, because their angels always behold the face of the Father in heaven. This does not necessarily mean that every person has an individually assigned angel, but it does mean that angels as a whole are tasked with the responsibility to care for God's children. As with many instances in this study, we might like to have more information about how this works, but we can trust that God gives us enough information even if he doesn't give us all the information.

How can knowing that God gives His angels instructions to guard us be a help to us?

How might the example of the temptation of Christ warn us against that truth being distorted?

Communicating

The term "angel" means messenger, and one of the primary functions of God's heavenly host is to deliver messages on His behalf. This is one of if not the main task of angels, which is probably why the term "angel" has come to describe all supernatural beings in God's service.

How many biblical examples can you think of where angels give a message for God?

Before there was such a thing as the internet or even a professional mail system, ancient people would often send messages by a messenger. Although God could (and at times did) talk to people directly, He often sent messengers to do this for Him. To carry a message for God, the One who created the worlds by speaking, is a high honor. We as Christians today are called to go forth with His message and share His truth with a lost and dying world.

In what ways is the task given to angels and Christians to share God's Word similar?

In what ways is it different?

Worshipping

Finally, we see that angels lead in the worship of God. The seraphim stand continually around the throne offering praise to God who is "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:1-3). By the time we get to the book of Revelation we see that this praise chorus continues (Revelation 4:8). In fact, the whole book of Revelation shows the praise of heaven for the God of all creation who does all things well. Angels are present at the birth of Christ and offer praise to God there as well (Luke 2:13-14).

How does the worship of God by angels magnify the glory of God?

Angels are an important part of God's creation. They are powerful, magnificent creatures who serve God faithfully and serve a variety of important functions – from fighting to guarding to sharing God's message

to worshipping God. Being aware of these glorious beings should inspire greater worship of God in us, since such creatures were made by God and serve Him. It is also incredible to think that although we are made a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5), according to Scripture we will one day judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). We should take comfort in the work of angels on our behalf, and also be humbled that God has a destiny for us in His redemption plan that is greater than even that of the angels.