

The Nature of Angels

A. Their personality

1. Definition

The definition of what a person is finds its roots in God, not man. Personality is characterized by the possession of intellect, sensibility (i.e. emotions) and will.

2. Cognition

Faculty of knowing or perceiving

a. Evidence of angelic cognition

- Angels possess intellect, they are capable of intelligent communication.

Matthew 28:5, “ And the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.”

- Angels desire to learn

1 Peter 1:12, “ It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven —things into which angels long to look.”

- Angels are able to know some things about the future or about people’s prayers as God reveals these things to them.

Luke 1:13-16, "But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

14 “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother’s womb.

16 “And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.” "

- God has also revealed to angels His plan for the world.

Revelation 10:5-6, “And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven,

6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there shall be delay no longer.”

Revelation 17:1, "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.”"

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- Even fallen angels know where they're going.
Luke 8:31; Matthew 8:28-29.

b. The extent of their ability to know

- Angels know more than man. They have lived a lot longer than man and have learned a lot more than man. Angels may perceive the intentions of man but they do not read the thoughts or hear the prayers of man.

Matthew 28:5, "And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.""

1 Peter 1:11-12, "seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven —things into which angels long to look."

- They know Jesus Christ and God's plan of redemption as it has been revealed to them, but they do not know the details.
- Angels know less than God, they are not omniscient.
- Angels do not know our thoughts. They may know what we are thinking because they have observed man since creation, but they do not read our minds.

3. Affections

Angels showed emotion at the creation of the material world, they rejoiced.

Job 38:7

When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Angels experience joy over a sinner who repents.

Luke 15:10, "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

4. Volition — Will

The faculty of will, or the ability to exercise will. It can be said that angels have "self-determination." In other words, angels can choose from various courses of action and carry through what they choose to do. The elect angels chose not to sin against God as did Satan and his followers; the power of choice is an aspect of volition.

Matthew 25:41, "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;'"

Unclean spirits responded to the commands of Christ.

Luke 8:29, "For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and yet

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he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the desert.”

Demons are deceitful spirits, and develop their own doctrine. In order to deceive in this way they require the ability to act.

1 Timothy 4:1, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”

The volition of angels can be seen in Satan’s influence upon the lost. Either through the spirit of the age engendered by his world system or through direct intervention by Satan or his demons, Satan works his will in and through unbelievers.”

Ephesians 2:1-2, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”

B. Their properties

Definitions

circumscriptive - limited, bounded.

eternal - endless, without end.

immaterial - not material, spiritual rather than physical.

immortal - living for ever, never dying.

incorporeal - not made of any material substance.

infinite - without beginning, always existing, from infinity past to infinity future.

omnipresent - present everywhere at the same time, synonymous with ...

ubiquitous - everywhere at the same time.

1. What type of beings are they?

Angels are spirits

a. Essence of their spirituality

Since angels are persons, they are beings. Angels are beings but they do not have material bodies as people do. Angels have always been spirits and are not the former spirits of men. Though angels can take human form and function as if they were human (cf. Genesis 18:8), they do not have permanent material bodies. We must not forget that though angels are spirits, they are not spirits in the same way that God is.

b. Extent of their spirituality

Although angels don’t have material bodies they are still confined to space. Angels are non-ubiquitous, that is they are always somewhere at any given moment. They cannot be everywhere simultaneously like God can. Angels are localized beings, they are not omnipresent.

Daniel 9:21-27, "while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in *my* extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. And he gave *me* instruction and talked with me, and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you

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insight with understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell *you*, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy *place*. So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” "

Daniel 10:11-14, "Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet *future*.” "

Angels are non-circumscriptive, in that they are not limited by material space. They are immaterial and incorporeal.

Luke 2:9-15, "And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

10 And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made know to us.” "

In other words angels are always at some place in time, but they are not limited to the confines of material places. Angels can move through walls, for example, but they cannot be in two houses at the same time.

Angels exist and act in time, but they are immortal, they don't die, but angels are not infinite. Angels have not lived from infinity past, they were created at some point and only then did they begin existing. Only God is infinite and eternal.

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2. Do they have bodies?

Scripture does not specifically state that angels have bodies, but we can infer that they do. So if they do have bodies, the bodies of angels are immaterial, and very different from anything we know. Angels likely have spiritual bodies in the same sense that we will after the resurrection of our bodies (or the rapture).

1 Corinthians 15:44 (cf. Matthew 22:30), “it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.”

Angels are not limited in the amount of space they can inhabit. We see that multiple demons were able to possess a single person simultaneously.

Luke 8:30, "And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. Because angels are immaterial they are invisible and do not undergo decay. Therefore angels do not die and do not age. However, they can make themselves be seen as God allows it.

3. Do they have genders?

Angels do not have genders. They do not procreate as men do (Matthew 22:28-30). Angels are therefore not a race of beings.

Angels are almost exclusively referred to in Scripture in masculine terms, despite the fact that Hebrew and Greek have neuter alternatives (Zechariah 5:5-11 is the only exception).

Genesis 6 presents an interesting challenge if we say that angels do not have sex since they are likely the “sons of God” who took as wives whomever they chose from the “daughters of men.” The Nephilim of verse 4 are the offspring of this union between angels and humans. This event does not negate Matthew 22:28-30, where we are told that angels are not given in marriage. In fact, when understood in light of other passages that address this event, Matthew 22:28-30 supports the conclusion that the “sons of God” of Genesis 6 were angels who disobeyed God and did what they were forbidden from doing, what they are not to do —be married. These are the angels who Jude 6 tells us did not keep their own domain, but rather did what was improper. For this sin God has put them into bondage, in a prison of sorts until the day of the great judgment. These are the spirits to whom Jesus made a proclamation or an announcement to. After His death on the cross and before His resurrection, Jesus went to the prison where these fallen angels were and announced His victory to them, those who had disobeyed God in the days of Noah. This is an amazing story. It sounds more like a movie, but it is Scripture.

Why would angels want to interbreed with men? These fallen angels may have wanted to create an irredeemable race. The offspring of angels and humans would not be redeemed by the incarnate Christ, the Son of Man. This may have been a demonic attempt to thwart the plan of God to provide a redeemer for mankind.

Jude 6, “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

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1 Peter 3:18-20, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.”

4. Do they live for ever?

There is a difference between living for ever, and always having lived. Angels live for ever, but they have not always lived. As all other created beings, angels had a beginning to their existence. Since they have a beginning angels are not infinite, God is the only infinite being, the Creator of all. Angels have not always existed, but once they were created angels do not die. All angels who were created will continue to live for ever, the elect in glory with God, the fallen in bondage along with Satan.

Luke 20:34-36, "And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

5. Do they change?

Angels do not undergo change. Those who are fallen cannot be redeemed and those who are holy cannot be corrupted.

6. Do they have wings?

Some angels have wings. The seraphim of Isaiah 6 had six wings, two covering their face, two covering their feet and two for flying. There may be symbology associated with each pair. Similarly, the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 had four wings, and they used their wings to move swiftly and to make great noise. It is not clear if the wings that angels are said to possess are literal or merely symbolic, but it is clear that if they are literal wings they are not physical or made of anything we would know. Whether literal or symbolic, the references to the wings of angels do address their swiftness to obey God.

C. Their home (abode)

There are different places where we find the angels of God:

1. We find them in heaven

In Matthew 22:30 we are told that the angels in heaven are not given in marriage. In Galatians 1:8 we are told that the Gospel, that is Scripture, is truth that cannot be changed even by angels from heaven. Since heaven is where God is, those in His presence can be understood as being in heaven, such is the understanding for the seraphim in Isaiah 6:1-2, who are said to be in front of the throne of God, and also the four living creatures on Revelation 4:6 are said to be before the throne of God.

2. We may find them in the “Third Heaven”

In 2 Corinthians 12:2 Paul talks about himself having gone to the “third heaven.” Some people have speculated that this is the heaven where angels abide, or that there are different heavens since Paul qualified the heaven to which he went.

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Another speculative thought is that the reference to angels as “morning stars” (Job 38:6-7) or “stars” (Revelation 9:1) may imply some association with stellar space, that is that angels live in what we in our physical world would consider space.

3. We find them in the “heavenly places”

In Ephesians 3:8-10 we see the Church’s response to Paul’s preaching of the Gospel as the conduit through which the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to the “rulers” and the “authorities” in the “heavenly places.” The terms, “rulers” and “authorities” are understood as references to angels. The “heavenly places” is understood by some as atmospheric space. Though this is not clear, what is clear is that both elect and fallen angels are present there, since in Ephesians 6:2 we are told that our struggle is actually against angelic forces in the “heavenly places.”

D. Their appearance

Angels have appeared to people in Scripture in different modes. They have taken different forms in their appearances and have had powerful effects on those who have seen them.

1. The modes of their appearance

Angels have appeared in dreams, as an angel appeared to Joseph in Matthew 1 telling him not be afraid about marrying Mary, and to name her son Jesus. Angels have also appeared in visions, as the angelic army “of horses and chariots of fire” that became visible to Elisha’s servant in 2 Kings 6. However, most commonly, angels have appeared by natural sight.

2. The forms of their appearance

a. As men

The most common form in which angels appear to people in Scripture is as men. The angels who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18 ate with him, and in Genesis 19 the angels in Sodom were found attractive and desirable by the men of the city.

b. As man-like beings

Some times angels take the form of man-like beings. Daniel 10 describes the man as dressed in fine linen “whose waist was girded with a *belt of pure gold of Uphaz*” and whose “body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.”

In Matthew 28, the appearance of the angel who rolled the stone away from the tomb “was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow.”

c. As living creatures

The Apostle John describes the four living creatures in Revelation, what he wrote was the best description he could give of what he saw, using the best terms he knew. These beings he saw he could best describe as “living creatures,” all four living creatures were full of eyes in front and behind. “And the first creature *was* like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature *was* like a flying eagle” (Revelation 4:7). Each living creature had six wings and was full of eyes around and within.

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3. The effect of their appearance

Fear and even fainting is a common response to the appearance of angelic beings in Scripture. Zacharias was afraid when he saw the angel who announced Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist (Luke 1). The shepherds near Bethlehem were terrified when an angel told them about the birth of Jesus (Luke 2).

E. Their power

1. How powerful are they?

Angels are more powerful than men. From passages like Hebrews 2:5-8 we can see that angels are a higher order of creation than men.

Hebrews 2:5-8, "For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU REMEMBEREST HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT THOU ART CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? "THOU HAST MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; THOU HAST CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAST APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF THY HANDS; 8 THOU HAST PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him."

However, from passages like 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, it is clarified to us that not only Jesus was temporarily lower than the angels but that believers too are only temporarily lower than the angels because at the judgment of the world believers will even judge angels.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3, "Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?"

Some of the names by which angels are referred to characterize how powerful they are. In Romans 8:38-39, Ephesians 6:12 and Colossians 2:10,15 the following terms are used of angels:

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor **principalities**, nor things present, nor things to come, nor **powers**, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers**, against the **powers**, against the **world forces** of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*".

Colossians 1:16, "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or **dominions** or **rulers** or **authorities** —all things have been created by Him and for Him."

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Colossians 2:9-10,15, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all **rule** and **authority**;
15 When He had disarmed the **rulers** and **authorities**, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

- **Principalities or rulers**

In the Greek the term literally means beginning. In Ephesians 3:10 holy angels are referred to as “principalities.” In Romans 8:38 it is fallen angels that are referred to as “principalities.” And both holy and fallen angels are referred to by the same term in Colossians 2:10, which NASB translates as “rulers” here. Something that is principal is most important and prominent; something that comes before other things. The term addresses the prominence of angels.

- **Powers**

This term is used by metonymy (the substituting of one word for another) of angels, demonstrating the association of the term with angels.

- **Dominions**

The term denotes lordship, power and authority. The word “kuriovthte” comes from “kurivou” or “lord.” The same word is translated authority in Jude 8. The word is not exclusively applied to angels but does underscore their power.

- **Authorities**

The word denotes authority and has progressed “from the meaning of leave or permission, or liberty of doing as one pleases,” to “that of the ability or strength to exercise power.” (VINE) Closely associated with angels that it is also used as a metonymy for angels in the passages above.

- **Thrones**

Thrones are the seats of authority. Used of angels by metonymy to denote their power.

2. The extent of their power

Angels can impact the natural world and the affairs of men so long as God allows it. In Matthew 28:2 we see an angel causing an earthquake and in Acts 12:6-11 we see an angel breaking Peter out of prison.

Matthew 28:2, “And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. ”

3. The limits of their power

Though angels are great in power and might, they know their place and limits and do not revile other angels. It would seem that angels know that such judgment is for God’s prerogative only and don’t take part in that.

2 Peter 2:10-11, “And especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. ”

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Jude 9, "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." "

As great as the power of angels is, it is still sub-divine, or in other words, not as great as the power of God. Angels are not omnipotent.

Angels cannot create something out of nothing, especially something alive. All the work we see angels doing in Scripture fits within the limitations of created beings.

The power of angels does not enable of them to know the thoughts of men. Such ability is an omniscient attribute that is only possessed by God.

1 Kings 8:39, "Then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart Thou knowest, for Thou alone dost know the hearts of all the sons of men. "