

vista

September 6, 2026



Angels Among Us

by Angelia Hemric

Angels. The word alone evokes a vast array of media images. Maybe you think of scenes from movies with angels in the outfield, in libraries, or gathered at dawn on the beach. Or maybe, each Christmas, you are reminded of the angel Clarence, trying to earn his wings by saving George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*? There are numerous depictions of angels in movies and TV, each with their own perspective on what angels are like!

Spirituality is soaring in America. The media serves up a wide variety of spiritual options at the all-you-can-eat market for the curious and the hungry. Go to Amazon.com and search “angels,” and you can find any number of books promising to enlighten you on topics as varied as talking to your angel and healing through angel oracle cards. Angels are spiritual beings; because of that,

what can't be explained or understood provides fertile ground for fiction and ambiguity. Spirituality does not necessarily equate to Christianity.

So rather than engage in the latest speculation or fabrications about angels, I have chosen to emphasize our source for truth—the Bible. A strong biblical knowledge of angels can serve as a sieve to filter out the misguided, misinformed opinions about angels that are so prevalent today. In the Bible, angels are described as being charged with multiple tasks and responsibilities. We'll look specifically at five qualities of angels that are described in Hebrews chapter 1.

Angels' Place in God's Kingdom

Hebrews 1:4 states clearly the spiritual chain of command in heaven, where it says of Jesus: "So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." Jesus has preeminence, and the angels are there to serve him. Only one time has that chain of command been questioned. Revelation 12:7–9 tells of the epic battle of the ages that took place when Satan led a group of angels to vie for a position of prominence that was not available to them. They lost focus of their place in God's kingdom and tried to grasp what did not belong to them. Angels fought angels, and the good guys won. Jesus himself stated, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). In their pride and jealousy, Satan and his minions lost it all. Their calling is to serve, not to rule. For a time, while he was on earth, Jesus became "a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:7),

but even then, the angels served him and protected his life. Jesus is the radiance of God, an exact representation of his being. He sustains all things by his word, and through his sacrifice we are purified from our sin. He fought through and completed his task, and now he sits at the right hand of God the Father. His sacrificial work is accomplished, and the angels still have much work left to do. Jesus is superior, and the angels do his bidding. That is their place in God's kingdom.

Angels' Primary Purpose in God's Kingdom

In Hebrews 1:6, the writer highlighted worship as the primary purpose of angels: "Let all God's angels worship him." These words were written in the context of Jesus' birth. On a quiet, starry evening, have you ever let your mind wander back to that miraculous night when the sky was filled with heavenly beings and the angelic song announced the birth of the Savior? Have you ever put yourself in the place of the shepherds who witnessed this most incredible moment in history with their own eyes! When the moment ended, they took off running to seek the newborn babe. Angels were made for worship. One day they will lead all believers as we stand by their side proclaiming together: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10).

Angels' Genetic Makeup

Unquestionably, angels intrigue us, and although they took on human form many times throughout the Bible, Hebrews describes them as ministering spirits (1:14). The verses that interplay with this description of ministering spirits paint the picture of winds. For example, in Hebrews 1:7 the writer stated, “He makes his angels winds,” (ESV) which is a reflection of Psalm 104:4: “He makes his messengers winds.” Angels are ministering spirits likened to the wind. Wind can vary in intensity from a gentle breeze to a destructive tornado. An angel may be like the gentle touch upon the shoulder that encouraged Elijah to get up and eat because the journey was too much for him (1 Kings 19:6) or the powerful warrior in Daniel 10 who fought against the spiritual unseen prince of Persia. Colossians 1:16 makes it clear that all things in and heaven and on earth—the seen and unseen—were created by God. So we recognize that angels are created beings and not confined by physical limitations. Beyond that, we know their effects can be like a comforting breeze or an unseen destructive force fighting battles for the faithful.

Angels' Job Description

It is not very clear who does what in the heavenly realms. Their number cannot be counted, and many of their names are not even spoken. However, it is very clear that angels bear certain responsibilities.

The first one, spoken of in Hebrews 1:14, is “to serve those who will inherit salvation.” It is apparent throughout Scripture that angels take their orders from God. Salvation is God’s biggest plan for everyone on earth; therefore, angels live to serve those who will inherit salvation.

Second, they speak God’s word. In Luke 1:11–20, an angel appeared to Zechariah and announced that Elizabeth was pregnant with John. In Matthew 1:20, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and instructed him to take Mary as his wife. Angels appeared again to Joseph and Mary throughout Jesus’ early years to instruct them so that Jesus’ life was protected.

Third, angels encamp around God’s people and deliver them (Ps. 34:7). One common link between Daniel, his three Hebrew friends, Elisha and his servant, and Peter’s imprisonment in the book of Acts is this: God delivered them all! God commanded his angels to guard them in all their ways (Ps. 91:11). When angels rescued God’s people, those who wished them harm witnessed God’s power and some even turned to worship God.

A fourth responsibility given to angels is to carry out God’s judgment. It’s critical to realize that angels are not themselves judges. Revelation is the definitive collage of the interplay between God as Judge and angels as the ones who carry out his commands. They speak God’s warning against the mark of the beast to those on earth (Rev. 14:6–13). There are angels who are ordered to take up their trumpets, initiating judgment in chapters 8 and 9. Another angel will wait for the nod from “one ‘like a son of man’” before taking up its sickle to harvest the earth (Rev. 14:14–15). Though their jobs may vary, one thing is clear: They do not act without a command from the One who is their superior.

Angels' Power

Every angel's power comes only from the One who spoke the original message—God himself. The power comes because they are messengers of God sent to carry out his orders and because they are connected to him. Angels are only conduits of his power. As God's representatives, they minister with his authority. Their word is binding because they speak the very words of God. "For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:2–3). The message spoken is the one that is woven throughout the Old Testament prophecies and fulfilled in the New Testament. It is the message of salvation, and only One has the power to lay down his life and take it up again. He is the one who reigns superior over all creation, the seen and the unseen—Jesus!

Critical Thinking—Group Opener

- Brainstorm a list of angels you have seen in movies, books, and television.
- Think on all the Bible experiences that involve angels. Note all you can think of.
- Evaluate the media images against the biblical portrayal of angels.

Here are some questions to consider:

1. Do the media angels act on their own power or take their orders from God?
2. Are the media angels ego-centered or others-centered?
3. Whom does the media angel worship?
4. Do media angels perform acts that are out of their realm of power?
5. Whose side of the spiritual realm would these media angels take?
6. Are these angels created beings or do they transcend to another life after their death?
7. Does their "job description" line up with serving those who will inherit salvation, speaking God's word, delivering God's people, and carrying out God's judgment? ●

Angels are ministering spirits likened to the wind. Wind can vary in intensity from a gentle breeze to a destructive tornado.



Continue learning about and praising the Lord at home with your family. Here's an idea how to do that.

THE JESUS FILM

The book of Hebrews focuses on the true deity and humanity of Jesus. It's crucial for your family's spiritual development to understand these essentials of orthodox Christology.

Set aside an evening to watch the *Jesus*, <https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch>, film with your family. This film is the most-watched movie ever made. Since it is shown all over the world in a variety of languages, no movie has ever received so much exposure. There is a kids' version of the movie that tones down the portrayal of the crucifixion without losing any of its impact.

After the movie, ask each other these questions: What did Jesus do to show us he was human? What did Jesus do to show us he was God? How did Jesus interact with his disciples? Why did it take them so long to fully understand Jesus' mission? ●



WORDS from Wesley



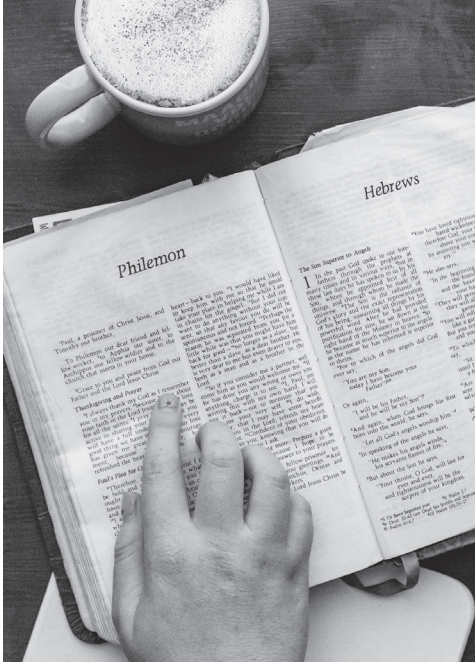
Hebrews 1:5

Thou art my Son—God of God, light of light; this day have I begotten thee—I have begotten thee from eternity, which, by its unalterable permanency of duration, is one continued unsuccessive day. *I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son*—I will own myself to be His Father, and Him to be my Son, by eminent tokens of my peculiar love. The former clause relates to His natural sonship, by an eternal, inconceivable generation, the other to His Father’s acknowledgment and treatment of Him, as His incarnate Son. Indeed this promise related immediately to Solomon, but in a far higher sense to the Messiah.

(*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, by John Wesley, M.A. Fourth American Edition. New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, 1818.)



THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR



Monday
September 7 Psalms 132–138

Tuesday
September 8 Psalms 139–144

Wednesday
September 9 Psalms 145–150

Thursday
September 10 Proverbs 1–3

Friday
September 11 Proverbs 4–7

Saturday
September 12 Proverbs 8–10

Sunday
September 13 Proverbs 11–13



SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



Christ Alone

THE FINALITY OF GOD'S SALVATION

Hebrews 1:1-14

Jesus alone is the source of redeeming grace.

INTO THE SUBJECT

Other than being a great teacher in the ancient world, what more do people need to know about Jesus?

INTO THE WORD

1. How does Hebrews 1:1-2 refute the claim that God has never been involved in history?
2. What works and ministries did the writer to the Hebrews ascribe to Jesus in verses 2-3?
3. If someone told you Jesus was a high-ranking angel, how would you answer them (vv. 4-9)?
4. What significance do you find in the fact that Jesus sat down at God's right hand "after he had provided purification for sins" (v. 3)?
5. How does the fact that Jesus occupies an everlasting throne (v. 8) help you face troubled times?
6. What evidence of Jesus' almighty power do you find in verses 10-13?
7. How will your worship of Jesus be more meaningful because of the portrayal of him in Hebrews 1:1-14?
8. How does this passage motivate you to tell others about Jesus?

INTO THE WORLD

Tell at least one person this week how Jesus gives you peace and confidence in the midst of troubling world conditions.

SERVE DOWNWARD

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:14)

Serving others brings me joy. I led a team of approximately fifteen real estate agents several years ago. And, as the team leader, I recognized the team was only as successful as our poorest performing agent. Thus, I spent more time helping the agents who performed poorly rather than focusing on the agents who were already successful and profitable. This did not go over well. The norm is to follow the 80/20 rule. Since 20 percent of the agents bring in 80 percent of the income, team leaders should focus on improving the productivity of the performing 20 percent even more. However, I felt that despite its theoretical accuracy in business, it was spiritually incorrect. It's important to serve and encourage the 80 percent who are struggling to perform. Rather than serve up the profitability scale, as most do, I decided to serve down and raise the performance levels of the 80 percent.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to follow Jesus' example and go after the lost sheep. It is not our primary focus to serve those who are already saved. That responsibility belongs to God's army—his angels are called to watch over us. They will protect us as we go forth to protect those outside of the family.

Spiritually, God's kingdom is designed to serve downward. When leaders learn to serve those who follow them, then God's kingdom profits from raising everyone up.

—Tara Klein

Hebrews 1:1–14

Look for an opportunity to be a servant leader.

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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House.
For more information,
call 1-800-493-7539, or go
online to wphstore.com.

ISBN: 978-1-63257-693-4



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