

The Nature of Angels

1. Examine Hebrews 1:3-14, Luke 24:39, and Ephesians 6:12. What do you observe about the intrinsic nature of angels?

Angels are *spirit beings* who were created without a physical body. In Luke 24:39, the resurrected Jesus explains to his apostles that the spirit does not have a physical body.

Spirit beings are of the invisible world and cannot be seen; however, 2 Kings 6:14-17 is an example of where God provided special vision for humans to perceive angels. It was the story of the king of Aram who sought to capture the prophet Elisha. Observing king Aram's forces surrounding their home, Elisha's servant fears for his master's safety. To reassure his servant and revealing his own special vision of angels, Elisha prays to God and requests that his servant can see the angels protecting them.

Angels lack a physical body, because they were not created in the image of God. This knowledge adds to the context of Paul's exhortation to Christians of the spiritual war that they face in the unseen world in Ephesians 6:10-12.

As spirit beings, each individual angel occupies physical space in a different sense than humans can understand. In the example of Luke 8:29-30, a legion of angels resided in one man.

2. How does the nature of angels reconcile with Genesis 18 and 19? What about Genesis 3:14 and Revelations 12:7-9? How does this affect your understanding of the physical appearance of angels?

In Genesis 18 and 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, God visits Abraham accompanied by two angels. Abraham perceives them as three men. They eat and wash their feet. Lot and the men of Gomorrah also perceive the angels as men. The angels spoke, ate, and displayed supernatural power by blinding the men assaulting the home of Lot. And they also seized Lot and his family to expedite their departure before the impending judgment of Gomorrah.

This passage is an example of angels, temporarily with physical bodies, who function as normal human beings but with supernatural powers. Their appearances are not casual and seem to occur when there is a task for them to accomplish. In every case, when in the form of human beings, angels have always appeared as adult males. The Bible does not explain how they get a body or what happens to it when they are done.

In Genesis 3:14 and Revelation 12:7-9, Satan, who is an angel, appears as a small serpent and huge dragon. This means that angels can appear in non-human forms and in various shapes and sizes.

3. Study Mark 12:25, Luke 20:34-36, and Matthew 19:5-6. What else do you learn about the nature of angels?

In Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:34-36, Jesus makes a comparison between resurrected humans and angels, in which marriage does not occur in heaven; thus, angels do not marry.

Angels are immortal and not subject to death; but, because they were created, they are not eternal.

In Matthew 19:5-6, as Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about marital relationships, he defined the marriage relationship as including a sexual relationship ("so they are no longer two, but one flesh"). As spirit beings, angels not only do not marry, but they do not have sexual or procreative aspects to their nature among themselves.

The term angel is mentioned 273 times in the Bible and in 34 of the 66 books. Jesus Christ himself attested to the existence of angels; this tells us that God wanted us to know about angels. Given the popularity of angels in today's pop culture and entertainment, it is important that one is not confused by contemporary interpretive fiction and refer to the Bible to discern the biblical facts about angels and understand their role in God's redemptive process.

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