

Lecture 23 – Angels

“Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King...Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.” Psalm 149:2, 5

Key Terms

Created, spirits, visible

Objectives

*Describe the contemporary worldview context of discussion about angels.

*Outline and locate scriptural teaching about angels.

Angels

I. Introduction

- A. Their use in western mythology obscures their character and calling.
- B. The recent explosion of angels in New Age and postmodernist spirituality
- C. The reduction of reality in the Enlightenment West
 - 1. Scientific secularization
 - 2. The real loss of the transcendent in “orthodox” dualism
 - 3. Reformed anti-dualism often comes across as anti-heavenly.
- D. Thesis
 - Reality is *more than* what merely appears before our eyes.

II. The Biblical Testimony Concerning Angels

- A. Preliminary comments
 - 1. *mal’ak, angelos*: messenger
 - 2. No focused analysis of angels in the biblical record
- B. The nature of angels
 - 1. They are created beings (Ps. 148:2, 5; Col. 1:16).
 - 2. They are spirits (Hebrews 1:4).
 - 3. They can become visible.
 - 4. There’s a whole bunch of them (Deut. 33:2; Matt. 26:53; Heb. 12:22).
 - 5. There may be classes of angels (cherubim and seraphim).
- C. Angelic activity
 - 1. They praise God (Ps. 103:20; 148:2; Lk. 2:13-14; Rev. 5:11-12; 7:11; 8:1-4).
 - 2. They minister to believers (Heb. 1:14; Acts 5:19; 12:6-11).
 - 3. Guardian angels (Matt. 18:10)
 - 4. They execute judgment upon the enemies of God (Ex. 14:19-20; 2 Kg. 19:35).
 - 5. They communicate God’s message to man (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).
- D. Angels and the ministry of Christ
 - 1. Present at key events (birth, temptation, garden, tomb, post-resurrection)
 - 2. But usually absent
 - 3. Christ is superior to angels (Hebrews 1:5-2:9).

III. The History of the Doctrine of Angelology

- A. Philo of Alexandria: Angels belong to the genus of souls.
- B. Medieval Christianity: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*
- C. Thomas Aquinas
 - 1. Developed Pseudo-Dionysius; chain of being
 - 2. Angels prove the rationality of minds without bodies.

3. Angels are objects of natural knowledge.
- D. Reformation
1. Focus on function rather than metaphysical speculation
 2. Calvin's reticence about angelic speculation
 - a. *Sola scriptura*
 - b. Pastoral principle
 - c. The praise due the sovereign God
- E. Post-Reformation period
1. John Milton (1608-1674), *Paradise Lost*
 2. Orthodox Protestantism: "The angelology of the weary shrug of the shoulders" (Barth)
 3. Enlightenment demythologization
- F. Karl Barth
1. Angels are "essentially marginal creatures. This is their glory."
 2. The representatives of heaven
 3. Witness to the divine activity