

Question 1: What does the word “angel” actually mean?

Angels: Twelve Questions We Rarely Ask

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Most of us picture an angel before we think about the word: a shining figure, wings, perhaps a halo. But the Bible begins with the word, and the word surprises us.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word is *mal'akh*. In the New Testament the Greek word is *angelos*, from which our “angel” comes. Both simply mean “messenger.” They describe a task, not a kind of being.

So the same word is used of human beings:

- The prophet Haggai is called “the Lord’s messenger” (Haggai 1:13). The Hebrew is *mal'akh*.
- The name Malachi means “my messenger.”
- John the Baptist is the *angelos* sent ahead of Christ: “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face” (Mark 1:2).
- Many interpreters take the “angels” of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 to be the leaders of those churches.

The same word is used of heavenly beings who announce, protect, deliver and worship: Gabriel sent to Mary (Luke 1:26–27), the angel who opened Peter’s prison (Acts 12:7), the seraphim crying “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3). We shall come to these heavenly beings in the questions ahead.

Why does this matter? Because a messenger is defined by the one who sends him. A messenger has no message of his own. When Scripture says “angel,” the first question is always: who sent this messenger, and with what word?

That one question settles a great deal. An “angel” who comes at our summons, answers our meditations or offers guidance on its own account is not an angel in the biblical sense at all. In Scripture, angels are “ministering spirits, sent forth” (Hebrews 1:14). The sending is God’s, never ours.

It also reminds us that God’s messengers are not only heavenly. He has always sent people too, and He may yet send you.

For reflection: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

On Thursday, Question 2: Were angels created, or have they always existed?

— Peter

