

Angels and the Glory of God

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Too many people think about angels according to what Hollywood and Hallmark say and not according to what the Bible says. Clarence in the movie classic, “It’s a Wonderful Life”, is about as far from what a real angel is about as you can get. If you think of angels as chubby-cheeked cherubs with a harp, a halo, and wings, you are sadly, and badly, mistaken.

One Old Testament story that really grabs my attention is the account of King Hezekiah and Jerusalem, under siege by the world-famous savage, King Sennacherib, from the fearsome empire to the east, Assyria. The account of Sennacherib’s mockery of the One True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the resulting deliverance of God’s people is found in three places in the Old Testament. It’s in 2 Kings 18 and 19, Isaiah 36 and 37, and 2 Chronicles 32. One reason the story really grabs my attention is that God sent an angel to take care of the situation. Not an army of angels. Not a bunch of angels. Not even a couple angels. An angel. One. 2 Chronicles 32:21 says “*the LORD sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king.*” The prophet Isaiah and the writer of Kings both tell us “*that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.*” One angel against one army – and 185,000 of God’s enemies were destroyed.

The messenger from Sennacherib brought his king’s blasphemy before God: “*Do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand!*” The messenger from God delivered his king’s message in a most astonishing way: 185,000 dead in one night and a humiliated enemy riding home as fast as his horse could take him. (Read Isaiah 37 for the rest of the story.)

Angels in the Bible most often inspire awe: they wield swords (Genesis 3 and Numbers 22); they use swords (1 Chronicles 21); they shut the mouths of ravenous lions (Daniel 6); they roll away the tombstones (Matthew 28) and arrange for prison escapes (Acts 5 and 12); they bring messages of good news (Luke 2) and sometimes those messages inspire wide-eyed wonder (Matthew 1) and sometimes they inspire facedown awe (Judges 6 and 13).

Chubby-cheeked cherubs do not inspire awe. Kind-hearted “uncle-types” trying to get their wings do not teach us the most important things to know. Angels are messengers from God (“messenger” is what “angel” means) and they stand in the service of the Almighty, doing his will in both everyday and extraordinary ways, and always returning to the throne of glory to declare God’s praise. We may encounter them and not know it (Hebrews 13:2) but one day those of us who know God and are known by him to be his children (Hebrews 2) will encounter angels and know very well who they are and what they can do: *I heard the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* (Rev. 5:11-12)

A better understanding of angels will help us gain a better understanding of who God is and what God can do. Revelation 22, the last chapter in the Bible, includes an angel's message and it is most important: "*Worship God.*"

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Bible verses are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) and Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV).