

8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

VIDEO
ACCESS
INCLUDED

*Finding Hope in God Who Reigns
over Heaven and Earth*

Angels

MELISSA SPOELSTRA

SESSION TWO

Angels in the Beginning

FINDING HOPE
IN THE SAVIOR

MEMORY VERSE

Rejoice with him, you
heavens, and let all of God's
angels worship him. Rejoice
with his people, you Gentiles,
and let all the angels be
strengthened in him.

DEUTERONOMY 32:43a

In the Garden

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Genesis 3

BIG IDEA

We face a foe who tempts us to question the goodness of our God.

“The word *angel* appears thirty-two times in the writing of Moses [Genesis–Deuteronomy].”¹

As we embark on this journey from Genesis to Revelation, we begin in the first few pages of the Bible. Genesis 1 reveals that everything God made was good, until something awful happened. Sin polluted God’s perfect garden.

When I first contemplated writing a study on angels, I asked women for feedback. I wanted to know what questions they had concerning angels and if they would be interested in deepening their understanding of God by developing a more robust angelology. I received many interesting responses that have helped shape this study, but a few people flatly rejected the topic. Their caution stemmed from their concern that a study of angels needed to address fallen angels like Satan, but they were wary of giving Satan their attention.

While I understand this concern, Scripture mentions spiritual enemies often and challenges us to stay alert and prepared (1 Pet. 5:8). In fact, we’ll see today that the first angelic encounter in Scripture is between Adam and Eve and Satan. One scholar said this about our enemy:

*He [Satan] should be taken seriously, for malice and cunning make him fearsome; yet not so seriously as to provoke abject terror of him, for he is a beaten enemy.*²

In this study we won’t overly focus on Satan or demons—angels that rebelled against God—but I do think it’s important to understand what God has revealed about them and why. What we will find is that while these fallen angels are real, their power is limited. We have nothing to fear—greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4)!

Note in the space below any cautions or questions that come to your mind as you begin this study.

TEMPTATION

READ GENESIS 3:1-7 and record the question the serpent asked in verse 1.

Here we discover the first mention of a fallen angel—Satan—who shows up in the form of the serpent. Genesis 3 doesn't give us any details about where Satan came from or why he deceived Adam and Eve. It's helpful to remember that when Moses recorded the first five books of the Bible, these accounts had been orally passed down through many generations. The original audience would have been familiar with the concept of God's enemy who misrepresented God's commands and character.

One of the practices that will be helpful for us in this study is to allow Scripture to interpret itself. Less clear passages like Genesis 3:1 can be better understood when interpreted by more clear ones.

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES FROM REVELATION. Underline any key words or phrases that confirm the serpent's identity.

This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.

REVELATION 12:9

He seized the dragon—that old serpent, who is the devil, Satan—and bound him in chains for a thousand years.

REVELATION 20:2

Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2 make the connection for us between the serpent and Satan, and 12:9 clarifies that Satan is a fallen angel. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent—“the one deceiving the whole world” (Rev. 12:9)—used his deception to question God's word and His goodness. About this text Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

The serpent's question was a thoroughly religious one. But with the first religious question in the world evil has come upon the scene. . . . This is the question that appears innocuous, but through it evil wins power in us, through it we become disobedient to God.³

Today, Satan’s tactics remain the same. He still targets both the commands and character of God in our lives. He wants to skew our understanding of God and deceive us into questioning whether we can trust the Lord.

In what situation could you be tempted to ask, “Can I trust the Lord with my _____?” Write down anything that comes to mind.

Perhaps, like Eve, you see something you want and wonder if God is holding you back. Others of you might have written words like *children, finances, health, job, singleness*, or something totally different. The first of God’s supernatural beings we encounter in Scripture is an enemy, and God wants us to be aware of his schemes. Rather than pretend he doesn’t exist, we can find hope by identifying his lies and recognizing God’s Word as truth.

Take a few minutes now to reflect on the truth of God’s character and commands. He can be trusted. Write out a short prayer, asking the Lord to help you identify the enemy’s tactics and strengthen your trust in God’s character.

Creator God,

In Jesus’s name. Amen.

CONSEQUENCES

Adam and Eve's disobedience had consequences—for them, for all future generations of people, and for the devil.

READ GENESIS 3:8-15 and describe what verse 15 reveals will happen in the future to:

The offspring of woman

The devil

Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, meaning “the first gospel.” Here at the very beginning of the Bible we are given the gospel plan to send Jesus, the offspring of a woman who would one day crush the serpent. The relationship between God and His creation was broken by sin, and Genesis 3:15 hints at the plan of redemption. As we understand the enemy's role in temptation, we can also bask in God's grace. He didn't leave us alienated forever from Him. When sin entered the picture, God had a plan to send His Son to save us from the penalty, power, and ultimately the very presence of sin.

How have you experienced God's grace in your life this week?

God sent Jesus to redeem us from sin—all that sin in your past, the sin you are struggling with today, and the sin lurking in your future. We don't have to listen to the voice of the enemy. We can believe in God's goodness even in the midst of today's temptations and struggles.

GUARDIANS

While we do have an enemy who wants to weaken our trust in God's goodness, we know that not all angels rebelled against the Lord. He has a host of angels who carry out His commands in a variety of ways.

READ GENESIS 3:22-24 and sum up in a few words the purpose of the cherubim God stationed east of Eden.

DIG DEEPER

Genesis 6 mentions the sons of God marrying the daughters of men, resulting in a race of giants called the Nephilim. To dig deeper into this passage in Genesis 6, check out the article “Nephilim” at lifeway.com/angels.

Many translations say “guard” or “keep the way” in regard to the angels and the flaming sword. Adam and Eve could no longer eat from the tree of life, and God’s guardian angels blocked their access to it, essentially protecting them from the temptation to sin in that way again and putting them on the path to redemption. We will see angels guarding God’s boundaries as a repeated role they play throughout Scripture.

When the serpent questioned God’s instructions, he was lying. God’s words are true. We can believe everything He has said in Scripture and find hope in Christ, the Savior He promised!

PRAYER

Lord, You are the Creator, and Your work is good. Help me to believe Your Word and recognize the lies of the enemy. Thank You for redeeming me from sin through Christ. Help me to know more about You as I continue to study angels. Lead me away from temptation and deliver me from evil. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

RECAP

TODAY WE DISCOVERED THESE TRUTHS:

- The serpent misrepresented God’s character and commands.
- God planned to redeem His creation.
- God stationed angels to guard the tree of life.

As you consider these truths, what stands out to you about God?

How do these truths bring hope into your circumstances today?

A Divine Angel

My heart felt heavy as I climbed behind the wheel of the car. I had just left a group of women where I prayed with several facing trials of all shapes and sizes: a recent widow mourning the death of both a sister and a husband, a group of nurses who faced spiritual warfare as they sought to care for sick veterans, a diagnosis confirming that breast cancer had returned, a young woman who had just attempted to take her life earlier that week.

Do You see all this? I asked the Lord through my tears as I contemplated so much suffering.

Have you ever asked a similar question of God? If so, what were some of the circumstances that evoked your question?

I certainly don't have all the answers when it comes to the trials of life, but I do know the answer to my question. Even when it doesn't feel like it, God sees you. He understands when you are treated unfairly, struggle with pain, or feel the sting of loneliness. He sees everything.

AUTHORITY AND INTIMACY

READ GENESIS 16:1-15 and summarize in your own words the commands and/or actions of the angel of the LORD in the following verses (continues on next page):

Verse 7

Verse 8

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Genesis 16:1-15

BIG IDEA

God sees you and leads you.

The word *angel* (the Hebrew word *malak*) means “messenger.”⁴

LORD in all caps is YHWH in Hebrew, God's personal name, and is sometimes translated *Jehovah* or *Yahweh* in English.

Verses 9-10

Verse 11

What name did Hagar give to God in verse 13?

The angel of the LORD found Hagar in her distress and asked her questions regarding her location. He assured her that God saw her and had a plan for her. This angel promised to multiply descendants—something only God can do. Hagar also referenced “the LORD, who had spoken to her” (v. 13). It was the angel of the LORD who had spoken.

We’ve said that some passages involving the supernatural realm could bring more questions than answers, and this is one of them. Theologians have spilled a lot of ink over the centuries regarding the identity of the angel of the LORD. At the heart of the debate is whether the angel of the LORD is actually an Old Testament appearance of the Son of God before His incarnation (John 1:1-14). Most scholars hold to one of these three views:

1. The angel of the LORD is an angel with a special divine commission.
2. The angel of the LORD is God showing up briefly in human form.
3. The angel of the LORD is the preincarnate Son of God temporarily appearing as human.⁵

As I’ve wrestled with the identity of this angel, a couple of key questions have risen to the surface:

- If the angel of the LORD is God Himself, why is He called an angel?
- If the angel of the LORD is just a regular angel, why does he say and do things only God can do or allow people to worship him?

Through my study, I’ve come to agree with a majority of conservative scholars who hold to the third view, the belief that the angel of the LORD is an Old Testament appearance of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. The text itself as well as the views

of the early church fathers lend support to identifying the angel of the LORD as the Son of God. In Genesis 16 and other passages, the angel of the LORD receives worship, speaks with the authority of God Himself, and bears God's own name. He also expresses an intimacy that is rarely found in other angel encounters. Hold onto these two characteristics of the angel of the LORD—authority and intimacy—as they will resurface in more texts surrounding this divine angel.

THE GOD WHO SEES ME

Whether you see the angel of the LORD in Genesis 16 as the Son of God or not, we don't want to miss the truth of these verses. The God who saw Hagar—a foreigner, a servant, an outcast—sees you today. How incredible that the first formal appearance of the angel of the LORD was to a “servant-concubine, Gentile-Egyptian, cast-out slave woman!”⁶ God wanted her to know she was seen and revealed His name to her. He is El Roi, “the God who sees me” (Gen. 16:13).

What does God see when He looks on your life today?

When God looks on me today, He sees me struggling with fatigue, navigating my days as a mom to adult-ish kids, and wrestling with some questions about angels. It encourages me that He sees me, and the possibility that the angel of the LORD could be the very Son of God brings me joy. I pray you are encouraged today that He sees you too.

Thinking of the Son of God being present in Hagar's story reminds me of another outcast standing by a water source. In John 4, Jesus encountered a woman at a well. Hagar was the first person to perhaps experience the Son of God as the angel of the LORD, and the Samaritan woman was the first person in John's Gospel to whom Jesus revealed His identity as the Messiah (John 4:26).

This connection helps me to understand Hagar's encounter with the angel of the LORD in anticipation of the gospel. The questions the angel asked were not out of ignorance but

a kind of spiritual probing. Today, Jesus continues to seek out the rejected, the sinner, and the outcast in an intimate way and show them (us!) grace.⁷

How have you experienced Jesus as One who seeks out the sinner in an intimate way? Take a moment to reflect on how He has been this for you or for a loved one.

This is the Jesus I know—the One who sees me, loves me, and calls me out of my sin with grace. He never grows weary of my tears, struggles, and questions, and He doesn't get tired of yours either. We find hope in the Savior who was and is and is to come.

PRAYER

Lord, You are the God who sees me. When I get overwhelmed by all the brokenness and difficulties—mine and those around me—help me to remember who You are. Help me to understand the Scriptures that talk about the angel of the LORD with clarity so I can know and worship You with my whole heart. Thank You for stretching my mind and revealing Yourself through Your Word. In Jesus's name. Amen.

RECAP

TODAY WE DISCOVERED THESE TRUTHS:

- The angel of the LORD has divine characteristics that set him apart from other angels.
- The angel of the LORD could be the preincarnate Son of God at work in the Old Testament.
- God sees us in our struggles, reveals Himself to us, and offers us grace.

As you consider these truths, what stands out to you about God?

How do these truths bring hope into your circumstances today?

Touched by an Angel

In the book *Angels: God's Secret Agents*, Billy Graham shares a story that reminds us God still sends angels to intervene in the lives of His people.

Dr. S. W. Mitchell, a celebrated Philadelphia neurologist, had gone to bed after an exceptionally tiring day. Suddenly he was awakened by someone knocking on his door. Opening it he found a little girl, poorly dressed and deeply upset. She told him her mother was very sick and asked him if he would please come with her. It was a bitterly cold, snowy night, but though he was bone tired, Dr. Mitchell dressed and followed the girl.

As *Reader's Digest* reports the story, he found the mother desperately ill with pneumonia. After arranging for medical care, he complimented the sick woman on the intelligence and persistence of her little daughter. The woman looked at him strangely and said, "My daughter died a month ago." She added, "Her shoes and coat are in the clothes closet there." Dr. Mitchell, amazed and perplexed, went to the closet and opened the door. There hung the very coat worn by the little girl who had brought him to tend her mother. It was warm and dry and could not possibly have been out in the wintry night.

Could the doctor have been called in the hour of desperate need by an angel who appeared as this woman's young daughter? Was this the work of God's angels on behalf of the sick woman?⁹

As you think about your relationship with God, He may or may not have sent angels, but how has He intervened in your life?

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Genesis 18–19:29

BIG IDEA

God intervenes in the affairs of people, and sometimes, He sends angels.

"The fact that angels exist is as certain as the fact that God exists."⁸

I can't say that I've ever had an encounter like Dr. Mitchell, but God has helped me—through His Word, His Spirit, and His people—on many occasions. Today we will discover that God intervenes in the affairs of people, and sometimes, He sends angels.

SUPERNATURAL MEN

The next time we see an angel in Scripture is just a couple chapters after Hagar's encounter with the angel of the LORD.

READ GENESIS 18:1-15. Who appeared to Abraham (v. 1)?

How did Abraham respond when he met the three visitors (v. 3)?

What kinds of activities did the three men engage in (vv. 4,8,10)?

We know that the LORD—Yahweh—appeared to Abraham according to verse 1, but who are these three men? As we look at Abraham's use of singular and plural in his dialogue, we notice that in verse 3, Abraham seemed to acknowledge one of them by calling him "my lord" (in Hebrew, *adonay*).¹⁰ Then in verses 4-9, Abraham used plural nouns in his references. In verse 10, only one of them spoke the prophecy over Sarah, and the CSB translation identifies this one as "the LORD." The Lord *appeared* (v. 1) to Abraham and then *spoke* (vv. 10,13) to Abraham. Abraham seems to have recognized these men as more than men.

**Before we continue on in this passage, take a moment to reflect.
What do you learn about God through the angels' visit with Abraham and Sarah?**

PRESENCE AND PROMISES

READ GENESIS 18:16-22 and identify:

Who stayed with Abraham?

Who went on to Sodom?

Two of the men (19:1) went on to Sodom, and the Lord stayed with Abraham. In Genesis 18:23-33, Abraham approached the Lord regarding His plan to destroy Sodom. One commentator helps us navigate the singulars and plurals of this chapter by reminding us, “The final verse (33)—which recounts that after the Lord had finished speaking, ‘he left’—shows that the whole chapter is to be understood within the context of the Lord’s appearance to Abraham.”¹¹ While the singulars and plurals in this text help us sort out the characters in this dialogue, what we know for sure is that Abraham had a conversation with God.

What has been a recent topic of conversation between you and God?

Lately, I’ve been talking to God about my marriage, my kids, and our country. Your topics may be totally different, but here is what I know: God is with us, and He didn’t just create the world and then take His hands off. He still reaches down to touch His people. We find hope knowing that God reigns over both heaven and earth, and sometimes He sends messengers from heaven to earth.

ANGELIC ACTIONS

READ GENESIS 19:1-29 and summarize the words or actions of these angels in the following verses (continues on next page):

Verse 10

Verse 11

Verses 12-13

Verses 15-16

Verses 17-22

“The LORD” destroyed the city. His angels represented Him but remained distinct from Him. They spoke the Lord’s messages and warnings. They got physically involved, pulling Lot into the house and seizing him by the hand when his obedience was slow. They had some authority from the Lord because they were able to grant Lot’s request to settle in a small village instead of the mountains. But God enacted the judgment.

What do we learn about God and His relationship with His people from this story?

This story is fraught with disturbing details about lust and destruction. What we don’t want to miss is God’s response to Abraham’s request to save Lot (v. 29). He heard and sent angels to preserve Lot’s family. He hears us as well when we cry out to Him. Sin brings destruction, but we serve a God who saves. The New Testament sheds additional light on today’s truth that God intervenes in our lives and sometimes uses angels.

ACCORDING TO HEBREWS 13:2 IN THE MARGIN, what should we not forget and why?

Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

HEBREWS 13:2

Angels can appear as strangers—they did for Abraham and Lot. Perhaps Dr. Mitchell encountered an angel at his door. Who knows what or who we may encounter this week as we serve a God who intervenes.

RECAP

TODAY WE DISCOVERED THESE TRUTHS:

- Angels can appear in human form with feet that can be washed, bodies that can be nourished, and hands that can pull people back from danger.
- Angels represent God, but they are distinct from Him.
- Angels bring God's messages and sometimes persist in helping humans heed them.

As you consider these truths, what stands out to you about God?

How do these truths bring hope into your circumstances today?

PRAYER

Lord, You are the God who appears and intervenes in my life. Give me eyes to see You at work in my world. Help me to understand Your Word so I can know You better. Jesus, help me to see that You were more active in the Old Testament than I had imagined. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me as I study Your angels. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Guiding Angels

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Genesis 22:1-18

Genesis 23:10-13

Genesis 31:10-13

BIG IDEA

God sent angels to guide His people.

Today I feel tired and uninspired. I enjoyed hosting family from out of town for the past three nights, but now the aftermath awaits me. I need to make beds, wash towels, and answer emails I neglected during their visit. I decided to let all the tasks wait and gave myself permission to rest, but then I couldn't sleep. As I lay in bed, I asked the Lord to guide me in how to spend these few hours until my next commitment. I sensed a Holy Spirit nudge to read through the passages for today's study, particularly since I knew these passages involved His guidance.

In my life, the Lord often uses His Word, His people, and His Spirit to guide me. But Scripture reveals He also chooses to provide guidance to people through angels when it serves His purposes. As we examine a few more mentions of angels from Genesis today, we will encounter additional references to the angel of the LORD as well as a few general references to angels. Keep your thinking caps on as we examine these Bible passages together.

SACRIFICE OF A SON

READ GENESIS 22:1-18. Then put a ✓ next to the statement that best summarizes what the angel of the LORD said to Abraham.

- ☐ *I am making a covenant with you. You will have many descendants. I will give you another son to replace this one.*
- ☐ *Don't lay a hand on the boy. Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.*
- ☐ *Stop. I never told you to do this. You must have heard me wrong—maybe you need to get your ears checked, Abe.*

The angel guided Abraham not to kill Isaac. The angel distinguished himself from the Lord, speaking of Him in the third person, but in the same conversation spoke of God in the first person. While this may seem a bit confusing, we can find parallels in the Gospel of John to help us gain greater insight. One scholar noted that Jesus told His disciples “over and over that he is distinct from the Father (cf. John 5:17; 6:32; 8:16; etc.). Yet he also says that to see him is to see the Father (John 14:9) and that he and the Father are One (John 10:30). That kind of language is not new. It comes virtually every time the Angel of the LORD shows up.”¹²

The angel of the LORD speaks as God and yet is distinct from God the Father, which is why many commentators identify Him as the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, coming to earth to speak as God and for the Father. Here, the angel provided guidance to Abraham to save his son.

As you consider the possibility that the Son of God was present in this encounter, check the corresponding boxes below to compare this moment in Abraham’s life with the crucifixion, when Jesus, the Son, gave Himself up as a sacrifice. (See Matt. 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:1-43; or John 19:1-30 to help with your response.)

	ABRAHAM’S SACRIFICE	GOD THE FATHER’S SACRIFICE
Involved a son (Son)		
Was stopped by an angel		
Involved a substitute		
The son (Son) died a sacrificial death		

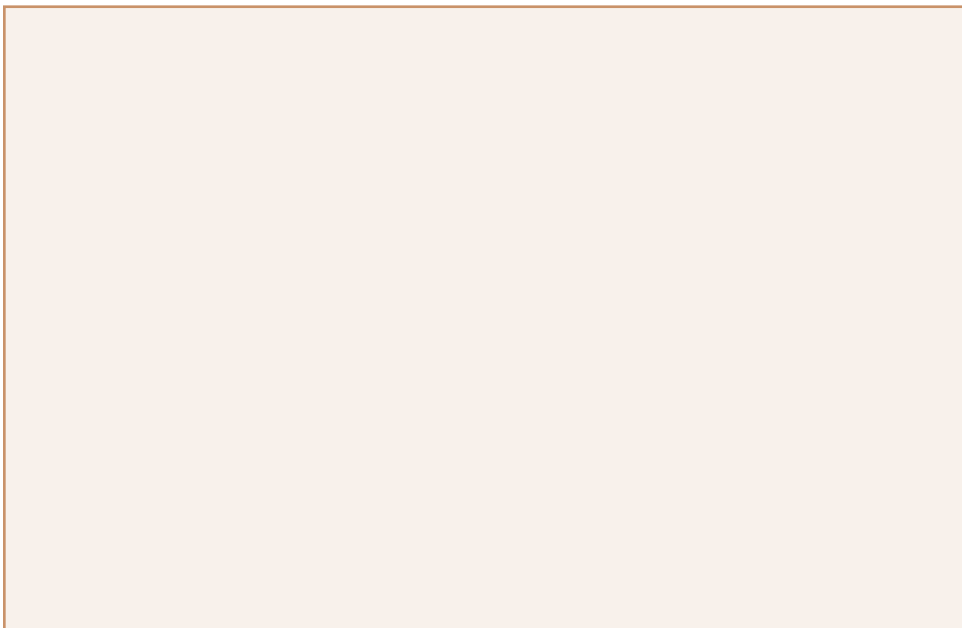
The angel of the LORD stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son. This was a test for Abraham that ended in Isaac’s rescue and the sacrifice of a ram instead (v. 13). However, Jesus would become the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world through His sacrificial death and resurrection (John 1:29). Christ’s sacrifice provided us with forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with the Father.

As we continue to study angels, we can't help but find hope that the God of angels is also the God who sent His Son as our Savior. I've come to envision the angels' role like the theme music in a movie series like *Star Wars*. When we hear the music, we know the feature is about to start. When we read about angel activity in Scripture, it means God is about to take center stage in revealing Himself to His creation.

DREAMS

Abraham's descendants continued to receive guidance from angels. Later in Genesis, we learn that Abraham's grandson Jacob fooled his twin brother Esau out of his birthright (Gen. 25:27-34) and Isaac's blessing (Gen. 27:1-40). As you can imagine, this didn't foster fond feelings between the brothers. Jacob fled in fear of retaliation and lived with his uncle Laban in Haran, his mother's hometown (Gen. 28:1-9).

READ GENESIS 28:10-13 and either draw or describe what Jacob saw in a dream.



Jacob dreamed of angels going up and down a stairway between heaven and earth. At the top of the stairway stood the Lord. In this dream, the Lord revealed that angels move between heaven and earth.

Early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus confirmed this reality from Jacob's dream and identified Himself as the stairway. In a conversation with one of His disciples named Nathanael, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth" (John 1:51).

When I think about all that is happening in the unseen realm, I find hope in remembering that God is always working, even when I can't see Him or feel Him. His Son is the bridge between heaven and earth. Jesus left heaven and came to earth in order to sacrifice His life for my sin and yours. He is our hope for salvation and for guidance.

"Scholars generally agree that the 'ladder' is probably some sort of stair step structure that (in Jacob's dream) connected heaven and earth, perhaps a ziggurat [a stepped temple tower shaped like a pyramid]."¹³

READ GENESIS 31:10-13. What was Jacob doing when the angel appeared to him?

How is the angel described?

What did the angel say to him?

While the terminology is a little different, this angel of God is often connected to the angel of the LORD. In verse 13, the angel identified Himself as the God who had appeared to Jacob at Bethel in his previous dream. Once again, we find an angel who speaks with divine authority rather than simply as a messenger.

The angel's encounter with Jacob reminds us that God cares deeply about the things of earth. He sees injustice and works in our lives in His perfect timing. Knowing that angels move between heaven and earth at God's command reassures us that God is still sending supernatural support to His people.

How is God guiding you into a deeper walk with Him today? What is one small step of obedience you can take to follow His leading?

Whether God uses an angel or guides through His Word or Spirit, we hold onto hope and trust His ability to guide us.

PRAYER

Lord, studying angels has turned out differently than I anticipated. Help me to see how understanding Your messengers will guide me into a deeper relationship with You. You sent good directions to Abraham and Jacob—show me how to live today in a way that honors You. If I get off track, stop me as surely as You stopped Abraham's sacrifice. I trust You, and I love You. In Jesus's name. Amen.

RECAP

TODAY WE DISCOVERED THESE TRUTHS:

- The angel of the LORD spoke to Abraham just as he was about to sacrifice his son.
- The angel spoke as distinct from the Lord yet also spoke as the Lord.
- Jacob saw angels in a dream traveling between heaven and earth with the Lord at the top of the stairway.

As you consider these truths, what stands out to you about God?

How do these truths bring hope into your circumstances today?

Guardian Angels

Dr. David Jeremiah was asked about guardian angels as a young pastor preparing for ordination. His mother sat at the back of the room and raised her hand in the middle of his oral examination saying she believed in them. He figured she was thinking of his many close encounters with death and relayed a story from his childhood about an experience when angels guarded him. As a city boy, he didn't know much about farms when he visited his uncle one summer in the country. Two silos sat next to the barn—one was full and the other empty. He got the idea to climb up the outside and slip into the full silo thinking he could be in his own world for a while.

The silo was higher than he imagined, and he crept slowly and then eased through the metal door at the top. He swung his foot into the darkness and realized he had climbed into the wrong silo. The one he was about to fall into was empty. He hung on with both hands and slowly climbed down the ladder while shaking like a leaf. He said, "I've always believed that an angel saved me up there."¹⁴

As I've talked with friends about angels, one question that has surfaced repeatedly concerns the existence of guardian angels. The question of guardian angels requires clarity around what we mean by *guardian*. Do angels protect God's people? Yes, based on what we see in Scripture. Does each person have a particular angel assigned to guard him or her? Here the theological waters become cloudier, and that's something we can't know for certain. Hang onto this tension as we will return to this idea of personal guardian angels after we have studied today's Scriptures in Exodus and Numbers.

GUARDING AGAINST ENEMIES

As we progress through the biblical narrative, we're jumping over some key events at the close of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus. Abraham's great-grandson Joseph helped the family relocate to Egypt during a famine. However, the Egyptians eventually enslaved the Hebrew people, whose numbers grew into the millions. God raised up

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Exodus 14:13-20
Exodus 23:20-23
Numbers 22:21-35

BIG IDEA

God sent angels to guard His people.

The early Israelites molded golden cherubim to guard the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:18-20; 37:9). This is the first mention of angels having wings in Scripture.

During the last plague in Egypt, an angel of death was charged with carrying out God's judgment. The Israelites put blood on their doorposts so that the angel of death would "pass over" their homes (Ex. 12:23).

a leader—Moses—to lead His people out of Egypt. After the Lord sent ten plagues, Pharaoh finally relented and allowed Moses and the Israelite slaves to leave Egypt (Ex. 12:32). Not long after their journey began, though, Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army to pursue them.

READ EXODUS 14:13-20 and describe in your own words how the angel of God provided protection for the people of Israel.

The angel had been guiding the people (Ex. 13:21-22), then he moved to become a rear guard to protect them from their enemies. The pillar that was light for the Israelites became darkness for the Egyptians. God protected His people from their adversaries and revealed His presence in the symbols—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night—and in His messenger, the angel of God.

You may not have a physical army chasing you down, but I bet there are some enemies pursuing you. They may or may not take a physical shape, but fear, addiction, stress, insecurity, and many other foes can feel like they are right at our doorstep. Today we can remember that we are not without protection. Our God is present with us and has angels that can put a wall between us and whatever seeks to destroy us.

I'm asking the God of Angel Armies to put a wall between me and insecurity, worry, and laziness today. What enemies would you currently like to wall out in your life?

A DIVINE GUARDIAN

After God delivered His people from Egypt, they spent time in the wilderness. God gave them commandments and guidance for community living to prepare them to enter His promised land. He also assured them of His presence along the way. Not only did God use angels to guard His people against the enemies that were chasing them, but He also revealed a divine guardian who protected His people as they followed Him in obedience.

READ EXODUS 23:20-23 and fill in the chart. (I did the first one for you.)

PASSAGE	ANGEL'S WORK	PEOPLE'S WORK	GOD'S WORK
Verse 20	Protect you; lead you safely	n/a	Sending an angel; preparing a place
Verse 21			n/a
Verse 22	n/a		
Verse 23			

As you consider the angel's work in this passage, do you notice anything that seems like something only God could do? If so, describe it below.

The New Living Translation (NLT) says in verse 21 that the angel was God's "representative" while most other translations stick closer to the original Hebrew, which says God's *shem* (name) was in him. In Scripture, God's name is an expression of His person. One scholar said, "[God] is telling Moses that his very presence is within this angel. The angel is the visible form of Yahweh himself."¹⁵ Not only does he have God's name, but he also possesses an authority that usually belongs to God alone—the power over forgiveness (Mark 2:7).¹⁶ Here we find an opportunity to ask the question, *Could the*

Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him."

LUKE 9:35

Son of God have been more personally and intimately involved in the Old Testament than we ever imagined?

To help us consider this question, we can pay attention to the similar language of Exodus 23:21 in Luke 9:35. READ LUKE 9:35 IN THE MARGIN and write down the command used in both verses.

God admonished His people in the wilderness who were following a cloud to listen to His angel just as He commanded the crowd to listen to His Son. Whether we connect this angel with the Son of God or not, there is a unity between the words of the angel and the words of God.¹⁷

Angels continued to be utilized by God during the exodus. After the golden calf incident, God sent an angel to direct the path of the people (Ex. 32:34). He sent angels to drive out the inhabitants of the land (Ex. 33:1-2) and lead the people (Num. 20:14-16).

Let's consider how we are doing at listening to God. As you look at the column in your chart under "people's work" on the previous page, how is the Lord calling you to grow in obedience to these commands as they apply in your life?

GUARDING THE PATH

We can't leave our study of angels in the beginning without a quick look at how the angel of the LORD revealed Himself to a man named Balaam.

READ NUMBERS 22:21-35 and complete the sentences below using your own words.

Verse 22: God was angry so He sent the angel of the LORD to . . .

Verse 23: The donkey saw the angel of the LORD holding . . .

Verse 31: The Lord opened Balaam's eyes so that . . .

Verse 35: The angel told Balaam to go with the men but only say . . .

What stands out to you regarding Balaam's angelic encounter?

Talking donkeys and a person seeing an angel remind me that nothing is impossible for God. He sent the angel of the LORD to guard the path to stop Balaam and prevent him from saying anything other than His messages. It's good to know that our sovereign, all-powerful God can guard the path when we are headed down the wrong one with the wrong message.

PERSONAL GUARDIAN ANGELS

As we finish today's study, I know you didn't gain any more insight into the question of personal guardian angels. Earlier I mentioned that when a Bible passage seems unclear, the best thing we can do is look to other portions of Scripture that provide more clarity. When it comes to the question of personal guardian angels, we have little textual support.

Some scholars mention Matthew 18:10, where Jesus said of the little ones that "their angels continually view the face of my Father in heaven" (CSB). Also, in the book of Acts when Peter was miraculously released from prison by an angel, a girl named Rhoda ran and told the others that Peter was at the door. The group didn't believe her but said, "It's his angel!" (Acts 12:15, CSB).

It's possible that the early church believed people had a specific angel assigned to them (and that the angel resembled the person it guarded) based on this account. However, much has been built on little when it comes to a scriptural basis for personal guardian angels. We can conclude that angels serve as guardians, we just don't know exactly how their assignments work when it comes to corporate or individual guardianship.¹⁸ Most importantly, we can know for sure that God sent angels to guard His people during the exodus, and He sent His Son to save us from our sins. We can find hope knowing He continues to guard His people today.

PRAYER

Lord, please protect me today. Put a wall between me and the enemies of doubt, fear, and all the other things that seem to chase me down. Guard me from following a sinful path. Put an angel in my way if that will keep me on the road back to You. I love You and want to know You more. In Jesus's name. Amen.

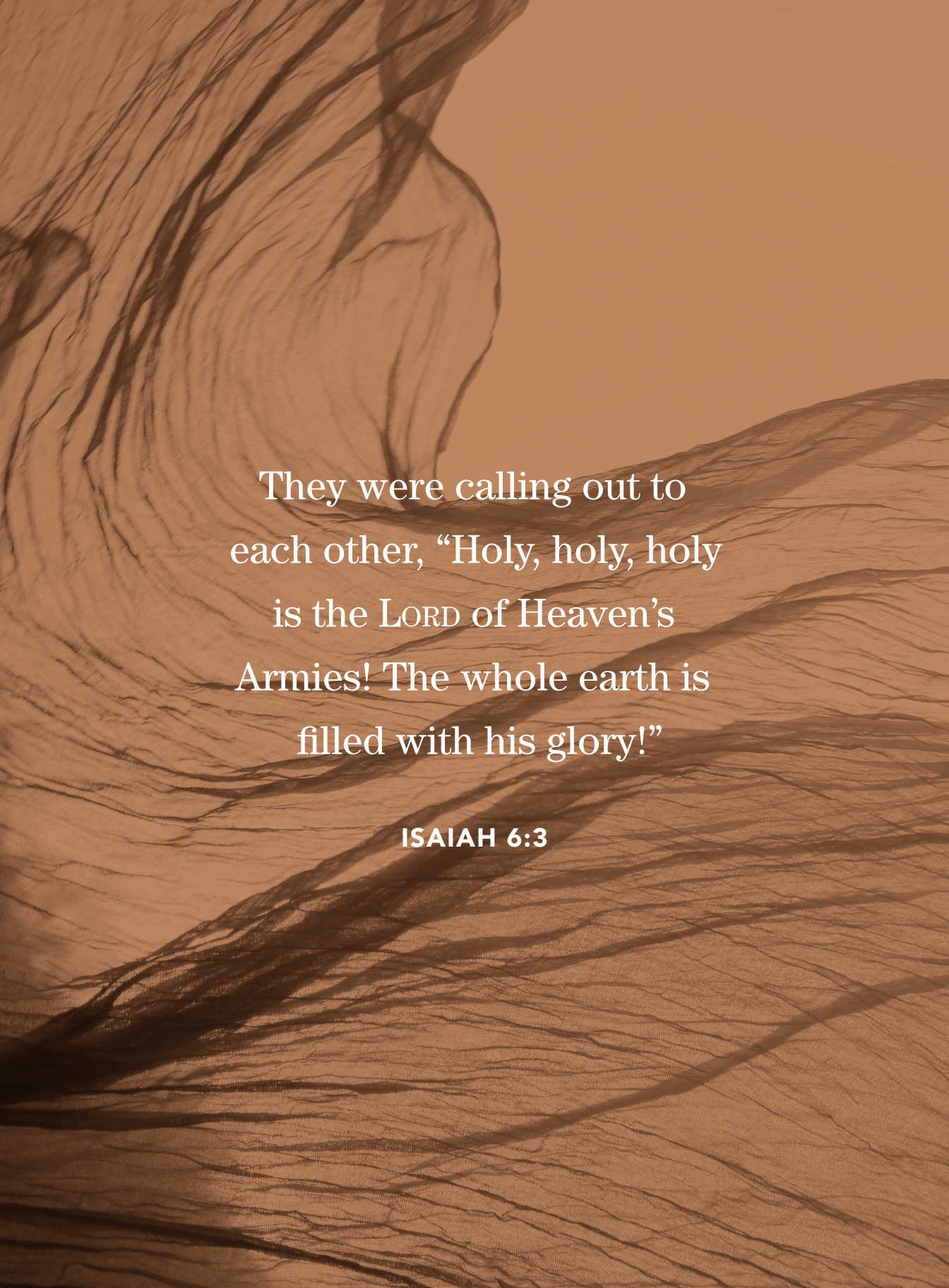
RECAP

TODAY WE DISCOVERED THESE TRUTHS:

- Angels guard against enemies that pursue us.
- God compels His people to listen to His messengers and obey His instructions.
- God occasionally gives people a glimpse into the spiritual realm to see how He is at work.

As you consider these truths, what stands out to you about God?

How do these truths bring hope into your circumstances today?



They were calling out to
each other, “Holy, holy, holy
is the LORD of Heaven’s
Armies! The whole earth is
filled with his glory!”

ISAIAH 6:3

VIDEO VIEWER GUIDE

KEY TRUTH

We find hope in a _____ who restores our
_____ with _____.

HOPEFUL STATEMENTS

1. God _____ me.

2. God _____ me.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1

What stood out to you from your study and the video teaching for Session Two?

2

You may have been surprised that the study began with a fallen angel. Why is it important, or even essential, for us to understand the way Satan is at work in our world and the reality of spiritual warfare?

3

Read Psalm 139:1-16. What does it mean to you to know God sees you? Discuss this psalm and your responses to the questions in Day 2.

4

From the Old Testament passages we've studied this week in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, we are reminded that God sees us and God leads us. Which of these hopeful statements do you need to cling to today? Share your thoughts with your group.

5

Review your responses to the Recap questions from each day, and choose one truth you learned about God to share with your group.