

Angels in Lk/Acts

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They keep popping up all over the place in Acts. They are on mountain tops, desert roads, roofs, theaters, jails and ships. In fact, Acts mentions angels 23 times. Remember, though, that's just volume 2. In his first book, we find them another 25 times, for a grand total of 48. That represents about 27% of the 184 times angels appear in the N.T. [Considering that Revelation hogs the heavenly hosts, with no less than 77 uses, that leaves Luke/Acts as the secondary source on angels. Matthew and Hebrews come in a distant 3rd and 4th with 19 and 13 angelic citations respectively; no one else is even close.] Since it seems to be a strong theme for Luke, we might want to take a closer look at these beatific beauties.

There appears to be four main functions for angels in Lk/Acts. Most obvious is their role as **errand boys**.¹ In other words, they announce stuff. This is most pronounced in the birth and resurrection narratives. Gabriel announces John's birth to Zechariah (Luke 1:11, 13, 18-19), as well as Jesus' to Mary (Lk 1:26, 18, 30, 34, 35, 38; 2:21). And some unnamed cherub got to lead the heavenly hosts to the shepherds (Lk 2:9, 10, 13, 15). Likewise angels were sent to announce the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:23). They were first identified simply as two men dressed in white (Lk 24:4), which matches the description of the two who promised Jesus' return on the mount of Olives (Acts 1:10).

Second, they **minister to Jesus and his people**. Oddly enough, Satan was the first to introduce this function of angels. He tempted Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, reminding him of Psalms 91:11-12, that the angels would bear him up. Jesus didn't take the bait, but the angels did, in fact, fulfill their role. They comforted Jesus in Gethsemane (Lk 22:43), carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:22), released the Apostles from prison (Acts 5:19), and did a repeat performance for Peter (Acts 12:7-11, 15).² An angel led Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch with impeccable timing (Acts 8:26), another assassinated Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:23), still another predicted Paul's safe arrival in Rome (Acts 27:23). In fact, Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Third, they appear to be **legal witnesses**, particularly to validate Jesus. They will accompany him when he returns in his Father's glory (Lk 9:26). They rejoice in heaven when a sinner repents (Lk 15:10). And when Jesus wants to endorse or deny a particular disciple, the angels are the ones who hear the case (Lk 12:8-9). This function seems to be isolated to Luke. But it spills over into Acts with the fourth function of angels.

They **validate God's men** by mere association. In other words, you stand an angel next to a guy, and he suddenly wears a white hat. You can see this with Moses in Acts 7:30, 35, 38, 53. The fact that he was in cahoots with angels clearly marks him as God's man. This also explains why Luke painted Stephen with the face of an angel (Acts 6:15). Yes, all the religious leaders were against him but his angelic face showed God to be on his side. This is a critically important literary device for Luke when he writes Acts 10. Here we find the first Gentile convert. No less than five times he is associated with an angel (Acts 10:3-4, 7, 22; 11:13). For Luke, the angelic connection functions as

¹Angels are, in fact, portrayed in the Scriptures as men and not women.

²The Christians praying for Peter mistook his release for his actual death. They thought the voice Rhoda heard was Peter's guardian angel, now released from his supervision. It was a common Jewish belief that one's guardian angel looked and sounded like the person they protected. There is no definitive Scriptural proof for guardian angels but texts such as Psalms 91:11; Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14; Tobit 5:4-16, seem to suggest such an idea.

does tongues. It is God's stamp of approval on an unlikely candidate. For wherever there is an angel, there also is God's will and word.