

GRANDMA'S NO ANGEL – THE TRUTH ABOUT ANGELS IS ACTUALLY COMFORTING.

How does a parent handle the death of a loved one, when talking with children? On more than one occasion, apparently to soften the sting of death's cruel intrusion, parents sometimes say, "your grandma has gone to heaven to be an angel with the Lord."

To make a child feel better by telling them that the dead transition from this life to a new assignment as an angel seems like a good idea. What parent does not want to comfort and reassure their offspring? But, is it true that humans who die go to heaven to be angels?

Scripture describes two types of angels, only. In Genesis we learn of cherubim (plural for cherub), armed with a flaming sword, stationed by God near the tree of life (Genesis 3). The Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6) acquaints us with another type of angel, seraphim (plural for seraph). Whereas cherubim have two wings, the seraphim are said to have six.

There is one other supposed classification of angels that has been mistakenly identified—archangels. Tradition has even provided names for three archangels: Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. Of the three, God's Word calls only Michael an archangel. The term is never applied to any other. The myth of multiple archangels is erroneous on at least two levels.

The word archangel comes from the combination of two Greek words: ark, which means first in political rank or power, a prince or ruler and "angelos" which means messenger. So rather than being a type of angel, archangel is a title given to Michael, who is not merely another angel. He is the prince or commander of the angels. Jude 9 presents Michael, the archangel, contending with the devil for the body of Moses. The only other reference to him is in the narrative of Christ's Second Coming, when the Lord descends with a shout and "the voice of the archangel."

Amazingly, not all angels serve God. Revelation 12 tells of conflict in heaven. Two-thirds of the angels remained loyal to God, while one-third united with Lucifer in rebellion. So, angels may be righteous or wicked. Angels are supernatural beings, created by God. Even Lucifer, who would later become the devil, owes his existence to God (Ezekiel 28). The word, *angel*, translates as messenger or envoy, someone sent by God to carry out His purposes. Among their many functions, angels declared God's edicts (Genesis 22), proclaimed special events (Genesis 16), protected God's people (Exodus 14), and administered Divine justice (Psalm 35).

Angels also played an important role in the earthly ministry of Jesus. It was the angel, Gabriel (never referred to as an archangel in the Bible), who informed Mary of her miraculous conception. The shepherds learned of the birth of Christ from angels. And, following His wilderness temptations, angels ministered to Jesus.

We know, too, that angels are powerful creatures, who: excel in strength (Psalm 103), are mighty (2 Thessalonians 1) and are great in power and might (2 Peter 2). So awesome in power are angels that in 2 Kings 19, during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, a single angel broke the back of the assault by killing 185,000 Assyrians in a single night. Indeed, Jesus believed in the power of the angels, telling His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at

once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:52).

Although information is limited, a key understanding of angels can be found in Psalm 8:5, "What is man that You are mindful of him... For You have made him a little lower than the angels."

The Psalmist helps us to understand that angels are not humans, promoted to angelic positions after death. Angels are created as angels. Humanity is not progressing toward angelic status. And, as reiterated in Hebrews 2, we are made lower than the angels. Nonetheless, we are special in God's sight.

God created all angels and humans. And, not once does the Bible suggest the prospects of humanity dying, only to be elevated to new positions as angels. When a loved one dies, his or her body returns to the dust of the ground and their breath returns to God. Then, depending on the nature of their relationship with the Lord, they await either the resurrection of the righteous or the resurrection of the unrighteous.

The play of life has one final act, when the Lord Himself shall descend with a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. And, the dead in Christ shall rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16). That is also when the change promised by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 shall take place, when mortality shall become immortality and corruptible shall become incorruptible.

Comfort and encouragement for children and adults can be found in God's Word. No need to create fairy tales about humans becoming angels. Solace can be found in knowing that when Jesus comes again, we shall join Him and our loved ones, who died in Him. And, we will be together forever, never having to say goodbye, again.