



Fallen Angels

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6, KJV 1900)

Angels in Scripture appear in positive roles, ministering to and protecting the Lord's children. Paul defines their divinely assigned role.

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

That said, on occasion we also find negative references to angels in Scripture, our study verse included. We should not interpret the difficult passages of the Bible with our imaginative ideas, but with a careful respect for what Scripture teaches clearly, as well as what it does not teach. We should avoid filling in what Scripture does not say with our imaginative ideas. The silence of Scripture should be as respected as its clear voice. This principle is sometimes referred to in the study of Biblical interpretation as the "Perspicuity of Scripture." The basic idea is simple. What God views as important for His people to know He reveals in Scripture plainly and repeatedly. If we find a particular idea hinted in Scripture, study it as a thing of value that God included, but avoid speculation on the idea that you can't support from Scripture. The Geneva Bible footnote to this verse serves as an excellent example of a consistent and Biblical point that avoids excessive speculation, "The fall of the angels was most severely punished, how much more then will the Lord punish wicked and faithless men?" This explanation flows smoothly with Jude's theme, as well as with Scripture in general.

Peter mentions the wicked angel question with similar points to Jude.

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment. (2 Peter 2:4)

Several years ago, I was blessed to hear a powerful sermon by Elder Tim McCool on the Book of Job, entitled, "Go with What You Know." Rather than chase the many speculations about Job's experience, Elder McCool focused on what we can discover clearly from the actual writings of the book, a truly refreshing message. We should apply the same title to our study of fallen or sinning angels.

We can learn many things about angels from Scripture, things that reject much of the thinking among Christian people about them.

1. Angels are not an extension of God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. (1 Timothy 3:16) Scripture never so much as implies that angels are God manifest in the spirit. Thus, we should avoid attributing the character of God onto angels.
2. We do not become angels when we die. I have no idea where this belief originated, but Scripture never teaches this idea—never. Angels are a unique order of beings that God created for a stated purpose, to "...minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." As created beings, they are not above the potential for sin, though their noble role in Scripture typically describes them as faithfully following the Lord's directions to minister to His children.
3. Is Satan a fallen angel? This is the most frequent idea proposed regarding the sinning or wicked angels. Is this idea possible? Yes, it is possible, but Scripture is far from clear on the point, so we should not make the point too emphatically. On an occasion many years ago, I responded to a preacher took up a battle with folks who disagreed with him over the origin of Satan. My simple point was that Scripture tells us far more clearly about the tactics of Satan than his origin. And, without question, Satan is gleeful when God's children engage each other in contentious wars over his origin instead of studying the Scriptures to understand and to overcome his "devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11) Scripture gives us an abundance of edifying and needed truths, so we should study those truths and avoid speculation over such foolish questions. How much edification might we gain from knowing—or thinking we know—the origin of Satan? Really.

If we follow the "McCool model," of following what we can know from the Scriptures, our study of angels will follow the Geneva Bible footnote over the endless speculations that typically flourish when

the question arises. What do we know from Scripture about these wicked angels?

1. They "...kept not their first estate." If we accept the Hebrews definition of their purpose, we conclude that the angels mentioned abandoned their role of ministering to the heirs of salvation, we find solid Biblical support. An "estate" may refer to a physical position or to an assigned role.
2. They "...sinned." Only God is immune from sin. Without question, angels stand in a class of their own, and Scripture ordinarily describes them as preeminently responsive and obedient to the Lord's direction to them. Understand the details or not, Scripture identifies some number of angels who abandoned their divine assignment and sinned.
3. They "...left their own habitation." Since we find Scriptures that describe angels in heaven praising God, as well as ministering to His children, we think of their "habitation" as heaven. Perhaps the more accurate view might regard their habitation as referring to their activity, not a specific location. They abandoned their "Place" of ministering to the Lord's children.
4. And most emphatically, God judged them righteously because of their sin. In both Peter's and Jude's context, the major point deals with God's faithful and righteous judgment against the wicked, as well as His equally faithful and righteous care for His children. We are incapable of righteously judging another believer, much less judging angels. Both Peter and Jude magnify God by reminding their readers that God is wholly capable of judging both men and angels, so we can safely and confidently trust Him to judge righteously. Both men emphasize this point in context, so this point should govern our study of these passages.

...he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. If we follow Jude's context in our study verse, we discover his intent with no need to speculate. Jude's purpose with the angels' example is to reassure his readers that God is wholly competent to judge any and all in righteousness. If we respectfully follow Scripture, we quickly realize how incompetent we truly are to judge rightly. Jesus cautions His followers regarding this point in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Scripture consistently warns believers against foolishly assuming the role of judge. (Romans 14:4; James 4:12) In certain specific settings, Scripture indeed requires that faithful believers judge. (1 Corinthians 5:12; 10:15; 6:3; 1 Peter 4:17; to name just a few)

Jesus' words, so often quoted out of context and misinterpreted, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," (Matthew 7:1; with the lesson continuing through Verse 5) refers to biased or unrighteous judgment. Jesus warns that, when we impose our biased and unrighteous judgment against anyone, we should expect that our God and righteous Judge shall see that the same twisted rule by which we judge them shall be applied to us. He does not teach in this lesson that we are to avoid all judgment of any kind.

If we follow their words, some Bible students make judging who is and who is not a child of God their primary objective in studying the Scriptures. In certain contexts, Scripture makes the spiritual state of individuals a point, and we should comfortably follow Scripture in those cases. However, in many passages, Scripture describes the unveiled wickedness of someone's conduct, righteously judging the behavior as the black sin that it is, but the spiritual state of the sinner, elect or not, is not indicated. We should follow those Scriptures and avoid trying to rationalize such sins, just as we should also avoid trying to decide for ourselves if the person in question is or is not one of the Lord's elect. If the person's spiritual state is important, the passage makes the point. If not, Scripture doesn't make the point; neither should we.

At times, we wonder at the severity of God's judgment against the wicked, including wicked angels, as if God is too severe in His sentencing of these wicked beings. Unless we can fully possess the heart of God, especially the sinless moral character of God, we have no basis on which to weigh the sentence imposed. We live too close to sin to defend its punishment as too severe. If we follow Scripture's consistent and clear teaching, God's sentence is no less righteous than His mercy and grace freely given to His beloved children. Whenever we read of a heinous crime being committed, we often see members of the criminal's family on the news, defending him as not being the evil person described in the crime, even when overwhelming evidence proves his guilt. His family is biased, just as we are liable to be in trying to assess God's judgment against sinners.

In haste to impose speculative interpretations onto these "angel" passages, the typical explanation of our study verse overlooks a central point that James makes. The angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, are presently "...reserved in everlasting chains..." awaiting God's final and righteous judgment. They are not wandering the earth terrorizing godly people. So these angels are not Satan or his wicked "angels."

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor