

JOURNAL ARTICLE CRITIQUE [2]

of

Chafer, Lewis Sperry “Angelology: Part 1”
Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 98 no. 392 (October 1941): 390-420.

THEO 510 LUO (Summer 2012)

Survey of Theology

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

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June 15, 2012

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I. Introduction

The study of the doctrine of Angels, or Angelology, is a topic not overly discussed in 21st century theology, but it is as important a theological discussion today as it was at any time in Christian history past. The term angel, in Old Testament Hebrew מַלְאָךְ (*malak*), and in the New Testament Greek ἄγγελος (*angelos*), refers to a “messenger, who speaks and acts in the place of the one who has sent him.”¹ As such, we would then declare that the “holy angels are the messengers of their Creator, while the fallen angels are the messengers of Satan,” and they have interacted with God’s created beings far longer than man has been in existence.² The two combined Greek and Hebrew terms are found 278 times in Scripture, appearing in 34 of the 66 canonical books of the Bible.³ Scripture clearly confirms the existence of Angels, gives them classifications, and they minister to both God and man.⁴ This paper will briefly summarize and critique the article entitled “Angelology, Part 1” by Lewis Sperry Chafer.

II. Brief Summary

Lewis Sperry Chafer, ordained at his first church in 1900, was an American theologian who in 1924 served as the first president to Dallas Theological Seminary⁵. In this article, Chafer begins a multiple part series on Angelology that extends far into the following publication year of 1942. In Part 1 of this series, the author examines the basics of Angelology and its theological

¹ H. Bietenhard, *Angel*, Vol. 1, in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1975), 101.

² Chafer, Lewis Sperry, vol. 98, *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 98*, 392 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1941), 388.

³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 299.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 299-304.

⁵ Dallas Theological Seminary, *A History of Dallas Theological Seminary*, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010, <http://www.dts.edu/about/history/> (accessed June 15, 2012).

divisions. According to Chafer's thesis, "the doctrine of the angels lends itself to twelve general divisions," each of which are individually overviewed in his article.⁶

Chafer starts off "Angelology" with a section on the general facts about Angels. This serves as an introduction into the entire multipart theological study of Angels, which he then transitions into a systematic walk through each of his twelve divisions. The twelve divisions are each very unique, and for the most part, are not broken up into different subsections, but rather serve as individual essays on each division. Chafer first takes a long look at creation, consisting of all of created matter in the universe, not just "heaven and earth." A discussion to premise his understanding of the place where Angels reside, explaining that "Angelic existence antedates that of humanity by countless ages," and therefore has an existence in all created realms.⁷ Next the author goes through several shorter sections on their reality, importance, and personality, before returning to the "creation and mode of existence of the Angels."⁸

Chafer then moves through several smaller sections on the abode, the number, and the power of Angels, before spending the bulk of the remaining article on the classification of Angels by looking at the Angels of governmental rulers, the election of Angels, and the individually named Angels in Scripture. He then concludes the divisions with a lengthy look into the ministry of Angels, the progressive discipline of Angels, and those who are spectators. Chafer ends "Angelology" by raising the question of the importance of the study by answering whether it belongs "to the province of speculative [rather] than to that of practical theology."⁹

III. Critical Interaction with Author's Work

Chafer, in his article "Angelology," has begun a series that takes a unique and extended

⁶ Chafer, 392.

⁷ Ibid., 394.

⁸ Ibid., 398.

⁹ Ibid., 420.

look into the doctrine of Angels, a doctrine that perhaps gets very little serious attention in modern day discussions. Although Chafer began this series of articles in 1941, it is still quite relevant to the sound theological study of Angels today. A cursory glance into the overall genre of Angelology in the 21st century will reveal a view more metaphysical, and on the level with UFO hunting and fantasy fiction, than serious doctrine, making Chafer's work that much more important. This was something Chafer was very aware of in the early-to-middle of the 20th century, and he spent the last several pages explaining why the understanding of Angels is essential to sound doctrinal studies in Christianity.

Chafer, an author of an eight-volume set on systematic theology, takes a very systematic approach to his twelve divisions of Angelology. He walks through each of the twelve, one at a time, in a way even a young believer new to the Christian faith would find interesting and easy to understand. In this manner, he achieves his goal stated in the thesis to overview the twelve divisions of Angelology, and creates an opening for future conversations on the doctrine in upcoming articles.

The strength of the author's article comes from his systematic approach, and the heavy exegetical use of Scripture to back up his findings. Each section contains excellent references to Scripture, most of which contain multiple scripture reference points for his one heading. Even the smallest section, discussing the election of Angels, uses the explanation and understanding of 1 Timothy 5:21 to come to the conclusion of election. One would be hard to find a grave weakness in this article unless, as previously stated, the reader is of the mindset that Angelology resides among the province of speculation. If this is the case, the article is flawed in total; otherwise, Chafer presents an extremely sound theological look at the doctrine of Angels. If a weakness must be pointed out, it might be in the balance of the article itself where some of his

divisions were very short, and others very long. Some of the twelve divisions could possibly have been placed together, as subheadings, to then present the article in a more compact and balance approach aesthetically. This is a minor issue, and takes away nothing from the overall quality of the arguments presented by the author.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has critiqued the article “Angelology, Part 1” by Lewis Sperry Chafer, and the author’s twelve divisions of the doctrine of Angels. Overall, the author’s introduction into the doctrine presents an excellent approach to explaining an important topic not discussed frequently among 21st century theologians. Although he wrote this article in 1941, he left his readers anticipating the additional research, which was published in 1942, and concluded with several reasons why this study was important then, and remains important in 2012. On the whole, this article does an excellent job at developing a thesis that goes beyond expectations to develop a deep understanding of Angelology.

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