

**ANGELS.** In modern usage the term “angels” refers to heavenly beings whose function it is to serve God and to execute God’s will.

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### OLD TESTAMENT

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#### A. General Matters

**1. Terminology.** Although no single term corresponding precisely to the English word “angels” occurs in the Hebrew Bible, there is a rich vocabulary for such beings. Some of the expressions either denote their divine status (e.g., *bēnê (hā) ʾēlōhîm*, lit., “sons of God” [such grammatical constructions identify generic categories (divine beings), not genealogical relationships], Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; *bēnê ʾēlîm*, “sons of gods, divine beings,” Ps 29:1; 89:7—Eng 89:6; *ʾēlōhîm*, “gods,” Ps 82:1) or denote their special sanctity (*qēdōšîm*, “holy ones,” Ps 89:6, 8—Eng 89:5, 7). Other terms refer to their functions (*mēšārēʾîm*, “ministers,” Ps 103:21; *šār*, “commander,” Josh 5:14; *šēbāʾôt*, “hosts, army,” Ps 89:9—Eng 89:8; 103:21). The most common of these functional terms is *malʾāk*, “messenger, envoy.” It is from the translation of *malʾāk* in the LXX (Gk *aggelos*) that the English word “angel” derives. As terms denoting functions, both *aggelos* and *malʾāk* can refer equally to human or angelic beings. Consequently, there are occasionally passages in which it remains disputed whether the reference is to a heavenly being or a human one (see Judg 2:1; Mal 3:1). It was only with the Vulgate that a systematic distinction was made between angelic emissaries (Lat *angelus*) and human ones (Lat *nuntius*). Nevertheless, there are indications that already in the LXX *aggelos* was beginning to take on the quasi-technical meaning of heavenly being. In several instances *aggelos* is used for terms such as *bēnê (hā) ʾēlōhîm* (Gen 6:2; Deut 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), *ʾēlōhîm* (Ps 8:6; 97:7; 138:1), and *šār* (Dan 10:21; 12:1), and in one case *malʾāk* is translated as *theos* (Qoh 5:5—Eng 5:6). There is even one instance in the Hebrew Bible (Judg 13:6) in which a character implies a distinction between a “man of

God” (ʾiṣ ʾēlōhîm) and a “messenger/angel of Yahweh” (*malʾāk yhw*).

Extrabiblical literature from the late Second Temple period (3d century B.C.E.–1st century C.E.) reflects many additional terms for angels. These include “watchers” (Aram *ʾirîn*, Dan 4:10, 14, 20; *Jub.* 4:15, 22; *1 En.* 1:5); “spirits” (Heb *rûḥôt*, 1QH 1:11; 1QM 12:9; *Jub.* 15:31; *1 En.* 15:4; cf. 1 Kgs 22:21); “glorious ones” (Heb *nikbēdîm*, 1QH 10:8; *2 En.* 21:1, 3; “thrones” (Gk *thronoi*, *T. Levi* 3:8; *2 En.* 20:1); “authorities” (Gk *exousiai*, *1 En.* 61:10; *T. Levi* 3:8); “powers” (Gk *dynameis*, *En.* 20:1); and many other descriptive and functional terms.

**2. Historical Development.** Any survey of the concept of angels has to take account of the growth and development of the idea over the centuries, the different literary genres in which references occur, and the different social contexts from which the ideas emerge. Although references to angels occur in the oldest strata of the OT (in pentateuchal narratives and in early poetry), there is a clear increase in speculation about the heavenly world in prophetic writings from the exilic and early postexilic periods. It is in the late Second Temple period, however, that the most developed speculations occur. Why there should have been such a development in lore about heavenly beings is not fully understood. Increasing contact with Babylonian and Persian religious traditions may be one element (Russell 1964: 257–62), though most of the features of the developed angelology have clear antecedents in preexilic Israelite tradition. Perhaps much of the speculation on the heavenly world was not really new but represents old Israelite popular religion which only finds its way into literary sources in the postexilic writings (Collins 1977: 101–4). Be that as it may, the increase in discourse about angels in the later sources indicates that those authors found the speculation on the heavenly world a useful way to explore serious religious and theological issues—the weakness of Israel in a world of empires, the difficulty of understanding cosmos and history, the existence of evil, the failure of human religious institutions, the hope and experience of transformation, and so on.

## B. Preexilic Concepts

**1. The Divine Council.** In Israel, as in the ANE in general, the underlying conception of the heavenly world was that of a royal court. Yahweh was envisioned as a king, and at his service were divine beings who served as counselors, political subordinates, warriors, and general agents. These divine beings were often referred to as a collective group (Gen 28:12; 33:1–2; Pss 29:1; 89:6–9) and were understood to constitute a council (“the council of El,” *ʿadat ʾēl*, Ps 82:1; “the conclave of Yahweh/Eloah,” *sôd yhw*, Jer 23:18; *sôd ʾēlôah*, Job 15:8), “the conclave/assembly of the holy ones” (*sôd/qāhāl qēdōšîm*, Ps 89:6, 9). Similar expressions occur in ANE sources (Phoen: *mḫrt ʾil gbl qdšm*; Ug: *ḫr ʾilm*, *ḫr bn ʾilm*, *dr ʾil*, etc.; Akk: *puḫur ilāni*; see Mullen 1980). The most extensive description of the council and its tasks in the OT is found in 1 Kgs 22:19–22. There, the prophet Micaiah ben Imlah sees the enthroned Yahweh with “all the host of heaven standing about him on his right and on his left.” When Yahweh poses a question to the council, there is general discussion (“and one said one thing and another said another”), until a specific proposal emerges (“then a spirit came forth and stood before Yahweh and said . . .”). Prophets might stand in the council of Yahweh to receive a word (Jer 23:18, 22; Isaiah 6). The council was also a place of accusation and judgment (Psalm 82). Perhaps because of their privileged place in the

divine council, angels were considered to be paragons of knowledge and discernment (2 Sam 14:17, 29; 19:28).

According to Deut 32:8 (LXX and 4QDeut), when God organized the political structure of the world, each of the nations was assigned to one of the angels/minor deities, with Israel reserved for Yahweh's own possession. Psalm 82 assumes a similar setup but describes the revocation of the arrangement. In that text God brings accusation before the divine council concerning the failure of these minor deities to ensure justice, for which they are to be ousted and killed. See DIVINE ASSEMBLY.

**2. The Heavenly Army.** In Deut 33:2, Yahweh is said to be accompanied by ten thousand holy ones as he advances from the southland (cf. the reference in Ps 68:18 to the many thousands of chariots with Yahweh at Sinai). These are undoubtedly the angelic armies that are referred to in the common divine title Yahweh of Hosts. In one of the rare instances in which an individual angelic being with a clearly defined office is mentioned, Joshua encounters a mysterious figure with a drawn sword who identifies himself as "the commander of the army of Yahweh" (*šār šāba' yhw*, Josh 5:14). When the prophet Elisha was besieged, he was given protection by "horses and chariotry of fire," invisible to all whose eyes were not opened by Yahweh (2 Kgs 6:17).

**3. Agents and Messengers. a. Role and Significance.** In addition to the various roles that the angelic beings play as a group, there are many texts which describe the actions of a single angelic figure. Almost always in these instances the term *mal'āk* ("messenger") or *mal'āk yhw/(hā) 'ēlōhīm* ("messenger of Yahweh/God") is used. The term "messenger" should not be construed too narrowly, however, for these divine beings carry out a variety of tasks. They do announce births (of Ishmael, Gen 16:11–12; Isaac, Gen 18:9–15; Samson, Judg 13:3–5), give reassurances (to Jacob, Gen 31:11–13), commission persons to tasks (Moses, Exod 3:2; Gideon, Judg 6:11–24), and communicate God's word to prophets (Elijah, 2 Kgs 1:3, 15; a man of God, 1 Kgs 13:18; cf. 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Isaiah 6; Jer 23:18, 23). But the angel may also intervene at crucial moments to change or guide a person's actions (Hagar, Gen 16:9; Abraham, Gen 22:11–12; Balaam, Num 22:31–35; the people of Israel, Judg 2:1–5) and may communicate divine promises or reveal the future in the course of such intervention. In addition angels may be the agents of protection for individuals or for Israel as a whole (Gen 24:7, 40; 48:16; Exod 14:19–20; 23:20, 23; 32:34; Num 20:16; 1 Kgs 19:5–8; 2 Kgs 19:35=Isa 37:36; Pss 34:8—Eng 34:7; 91:11). But they may also be Yahweh's agents for punishment (Genesis 19; Num 22:33; 2 Samuel 24=1 Chronicles 21; Pss 35:5–6; 78:49).

In contrast to later writings, these texts exhibit almost no interest in the heavenly messengers themselves. They are not individuated in any way. They do not have personal names or definite offices (though see Josh 5:14). It is generally argued that the term *mal'āk yhw* should not be translated "the messenger of Yahweh," as though referring to a particular divine being, but simply "a messenger of Yahweh" (Hirth 1975: 25–31). Either translation is grammatically possible. The messengers are not described (see Judg 13:6 for a partial exception) and are often not even recognized. When human beings do realize the identity of the one who speaks with them, the reaction varies. In some narratives no reaction at all is described (e.g., Genesis 19), while in others the reaction is reverence (Josh 5:14–15) or fear (Judg 13:21). In short, these texts show no speculative interest in the divine messenger whatever. The messenger is of significance solely for the sake of the message (Westermann 1985: 244).

**b. Relationship to Yahweh.** Many of these narratives about the *mal'āk yhwh* pose a long-standing problem of interpretation: what is the relationship between the messenger/angel of Yahweh and Yahweh? In many of the narratives the *mal'āk* initially appears to be a distinct figure. But at some point in the account it appears as though Yahweh were personally present instead of the *mal'āk yhwh*. In Gen 16:7, for example, when Hagar has run away from Sarai's cruel treatment, the text says that "a *mal'āk yhwh* found her by a well in the wilderness." The two converse and the narrator again identifies the one who speaks with Hagar as a "*mal'āk yhwh*" in vv 9, 10, and 11. But the words which the *mal'āk yhwh* speaks in v 10 ("I will multiply your descendants . . .") appear rather to be the first-person speech of Yahweh himself. In the following verse, however, the *mal'āk yhwh* again speaks of Yahweh in the third person. Yet v 13 begins, "Hagar called the name of Yahweh who spoke with her, 'You are a God of seeing.' . . ." The end of the verse is textually corrupt but is probably to be translated "I have indeed seen God after He saw me." The apparent interchangeability of the *mal'āk yhwh* and Yahweh cannot be resolved by assuming a clumsy merging of two traditional stories. The same ambiguity occurs in many narratives (e.g., Gen 21:15–21; 22:11–12; 31:11–13; Exod 3:2–6; Judg 6:11–24). Numerous suggestions have been put forward to account for this peculiar feature (e.g., that the *mal'āk yhwh* is a sort of hypostasis of the deity; that a functional identity exists between messenger and sender; that the phrase *mal'āk yhwh* is a late, pious interpolation; that the alternation between Yahweh and *mal'āk yhwh* has to do with point of view; etc. See the review in Hirth 1975: 13–23). But the explanation that seems most likely is that the interchange between Yahweh and *mal'āk yhwh* in various texts is the expression of a tension or paradox: Yahweh's authority and presence in these encounters is to be affirmed, but yet it is not possible for human beings to have an unmediated encounter with God (cf. *TWAT* 4: 901; Hirth 1975: 83–84). Hagar is correct—she has seen God. But the narrator is also correct that the one who appeared to her was a *mal'āk yhwh*. The unresolved ambiguity in the narrative allows the reader to experience the paradox. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that this perspective was a dogmatic belief of ancient Israelite religion. There are other narratives in which God appears and converses with human beings, with no reference to a *mal'āk yhwh* (e.g., Genesis 15), and yet others in which the *mal'āk yhwh* is consistently distinguished from Yahweh (e.g., 1 Kings 19). Religious beliefs and forms of expression were probably no more uniform in ancient Israel than in any other age.

The quality of ambiguity which attaches to the *mal'āk yhwh* allows it to be used to stress either God's presence or distance, as in the various traditions that a *mal'āk* accompanied the Israelites on the exodus from Egypt (Exod 14:9; 20:20–23; 32:34; Num 20:16). In Exod 14:9 the *mal'āk* is associated with the pillar of cloud and, like it, functions as a manifestation of the presence of Yahweh with the people. There is a degree of theological speculation in Exod 23:20–23 in the subtle way in which the presence of Yahweh is understood to be manifest. Yahweh speaks of sending the *mal'āk* before the people to protect and guide them and warns the people to obey the *mal'āk*, "because my name is in him." Deuteronomistic theology uses the same concept of the name of God to describe the way in which Yahweh is present in the Jerusalem temple (1 Kgs 8:16, 29; 9:3; cf. Jer 7:12). By contrast, Exod 33:2–3 uses the image of the *mal'āk* to describe Yahweh's absence. The passage follows the account of the apostasy with the golden calf. "I will send a *mal'āk* before you . . . for I will not go up in your midst, because you are

such an obstinate people that I might consume you on the way.”

**c. Relations between Angels and Humans.** Although speculation about the angelic world or the relation between divine and human beings does not seem to have attracted much attention in preexilic writings, there is one brief text which raises such questions, Gen 6:1–4. There the interbreeding between divine beings (*bēnê hā ’ēlōhîm*) and human women is described. Although the passage is obscure in many respects, the offspring of the union become the ancient warriors of renown (LXX, *gigantes*, “giants”). Although not presented as a rebellion in heaven or as a “fall” of divine beings, the results of the mating are troubling to Yahweh, who decrees a limit to the human life span as a consequence. It has recently been argued that this passage preserves an old alternate introduction to the flood story, in which the flood was sent to eliminate these half-human/half-divine beings who threatened the order of creation (Hendel 1987: 13–26). Whatever role the tradition may have played in ancient Israel, it became the source of intense speculative development in later centuries.

### C. Exilic and Early Postexilic Developments

It is probably not accidental that the 6th century saw a considerable increase in speculation about the heavenly world and its angelic inhabitants, especially in the prophetic literature. The problem of the destruction and the reconstitution of Judah’s national institutions required a mode of thinking that could encompass the disaster in some coherent and meaningful structure and provide confidence in the possibility of reconstruction.

**1. Ezekiel.** Ezekiel’s vision of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8–11) begins with the appearance of an angelic being who is described in terms derived from the account of the glory of Yahweh (*kābôd yhw*) in 1:27. The destruction of Jerusalem is carried out at Yahweh’s command by other angelic figures described only as six armed men (9:2). An angelic scribe (“a man clothed in linen who had a writing case at his side,” 9:3) marks those who are to be spared. Ezekiel’s vision of the angelic destroyers provides a graphic reassurance that the destruction, terrible as it is, remains under the direct control of the God of Israel and does not simply represent the triumph of the Babylonians (cf. 2 *Baruch* 6–8, written after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans). Corresponding to Ezekiel’s vision of the destruction of Jerusalem is his vision of the temple as it is to be rebuilt (Ezekiel 40–48). Ezekiel is guided through the structure by an angel (“a man whose appearance was like that of bronze,” 40:3) who measures the various structures for Ezekiel and explains the purposes of some of them (e.g., 42:13–14).

The cherubim or living creatures (*kěrûbîm; hayyôt*) described in Ezekiel 1 and 10 are not, properly speaking, angels. The description in Ezekiel and the graphic depictions of similar figures from the ANE indicate that they were winged creatures combining human and animal features. Indeed, they may be described as the animals of the heavenly world. Unlike the “messengers” or the “sons of God,” cherubim have only limited functions. They serve as watchdog-like guardians (Gen 3:24; Ezek 28:14), as winged mounts (2 Sam 22:1; Ps 18:11—Eng 18:10), and as bearers of the throne chariot (Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16; Ezekiel 1; 10). Perhaps because of their protective role, they were frequently used as decorative motifs in temples and on cultic furnishings (Exod 25:18–20; 26:31; 1 Sam 4:4; 1 Kgs 6:23–36). Similarly, the seraphim of Isaiah 6 are not angels but winged serpentine figures associated with the iconography of the Yahwistic cult (Isa 14:29; 30:6;

cf. Num 21:6–9; 2 Kgs 18:4). Isaiah has partially assimilated them to the role of members of the divine council. Later tradition interpreted both seraphim and cherubim as classes of angels.

**2. Zechariah.** Faced with serious issues of social restructuring and institutional restoration, Zechariah, one of the early postexilic prophets, articulated his message largely in terms of angelic visions. According to Petersen (*Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* OTL, 115–16), “rather than proposing, as had Haggai, that the temple needed to be rebuilt, or that Zerubbabel was to be anointed as king, Zechariah experienced Yahweh’s angelic agents and discerned how the new religious and social order was to be initiated. What Zechariah reports in these visions is initial restoration within the cosmic order. . . . Yahweh’s steeds and angelic host are busy with the work of creating a new social and religious structure that will affect the entire world, not just Judah.” Zechariah’s message is made particularly authoritative through his claim that he is not only announcing what should be done on earth but what is already being done in heaven and will soon become evident on earth.

Zechariah concretizes the ancient notion of the army of Yahweh by describing the horses, riders, and chariots which roam the earth, returning to report to the angel of Yahweh and to present themselves before Yahweh (Zech 1:7–17; 6:1–8). The chariots are identified with the four winds (Zech 6:5; cf. Ps 104:4). It appears that in Zechariah’s visions the figure identified as the *mal’āk yhwh* has become a distinct and powerful figure in the heavenly world. He has several functions in the visions: guide and interpreter for Zechariah (Zechariah 1–6 *passim*); intercessor for Israel, who receives words of consolation that he commands Zechariah to proclaim (1:12–17; cf. Isa 40:1–9); presider and judge in the divine council (Zechariah 3); and commander of the angelic patrols (Zech 1:11; 6:7).

**3. The Šātān.** The angelic figure of the *šātān* in Zech 3:1–2 is not to be understood as the cosmic enemy of God of later angelology. The word is a common noun (“opponent, accuser”) and is related to the verb *šātan*, “to accuse.” Both noun and verb can be used of human beings as well as of angelic ones (Num 22:22; 1 Sam 29:4; Zech 3:1; Ps 109:4). Here one should translate, “He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the *mal’āk yhwh*, and the accuser was standing at his right hand to accuse him.” The accuser is simply a member of the divine council who has brought to judgment a high priest who is cultically impure. The picture is very close to that of Job 1–2. “At the time when the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh, the *šātān* also came among them” (1:6; see also 2:1). There, too, the *šātān* raises questions about a person whom he suspects of self-interested piety. The only other contemporary text which mentions this figure is 1 Chr 21:1. A comparison with the parallel text, 2 Sam 24:1, shows that “the anger of Yahweh” in 2 Samuel has been concretized by the Chronicler as the action of a member of the divine council. While the *šātān* is not depicted as an enemy of God in any of these texts, the fact that in Zechariah and Job his view is repudiated by God and *mal’āk yhwh* indicates the beginning of the development of the *šātān* as a sinister figure (see Petersen (*Hagai and Zechariah 1–8* OTL, 189–90). The notion of an angel who has particular responsibility for an individual, guiding and interceding on behalf of that person, is developed in Job 33:23–26 (cf. 5:1; 16:19). A close parallel to this conception is the “personal god” of Mesopotamian religion (Jacobsen 1976: 147–64).

**4. Other.** In general, 1–2 Chronicles tends to be somewhat more vivid in its description of angelic figures than parallel texts in Samuel-Kings (compare 2 Sam 24:16–17 with 1 Chr 21:15–30). The idea of heavenly beings as a chorus of praise, reflected already in Psalm 29, is associated with God’s act of creation in Job 38:7 (see also *11QPs<sup>a</sup> Creat* 26:13; Neh 9:6). In Ps. 148:2 the angelic chorus (*mal’ākīm/šēbā’ôt*) is the first in a chain of praise embracing all creation (cf. Ps 103:20–22).

#### **D. Second Temple Period**

It is in the late Second Temple period that speculation about the heavenly world and its inhabitants becomes fully developed. There are some new developments in angelology, the most significant being the dualistic notion of evil angels opposed to God, but most of the beliefs about angels are essentially expansions and concretizings of older notions. Numerous references to angels can be found in many genres of literature produced in different social settings, suggesting that a general body of lore concerning angels was common to the popular religion of the era. But the concentration of extensive angelological speculation in certain genres of literature (esp. apocalypses) and in the literature of certain communities (e.g., Qumran) reminds one that the religious and intellectual significance of angelology differed among various Jewish groups.

**1. Functions and Appearance of Angels.** The general function of the angel as the agent of God’s will is widely attested. Retellings of OT narratives (especially *Jubilees* and *Pseudo-Philo*) tend to introduce angels where they did not occur in the OT, oftentimes as performing some act which the OT attributes directly to God (e.g., *Jub.* 38:10; 10:22–23; 14:20; 19:3; 32:21; 41:24; 48:2; *Ps-Philo* 11:5; 15:5; 19:12, 16; 61:5). In the book of Tobit the belief in a protecting angel (cf. Gen 24:7) is dramatized with all the ironic and humorous potential of the situation richly realized (*HBD*, 791–803). Angels help and protect the pious and bring their prayers before God (Dan 3:25, 28; *1 En.* 100:5; *IQM* 13:10; *T. Jud.* 3:10; *T. Dan.* 6:5; *T. Naph.* 8:4; *T. Jos.* 6:7; *T. Benj.* 6:1; *Ps-Philo* 38:3; 59:4; *3 Macc.* 6:18–19; *Vita* 21). Angels also decree and execute punishment in accordance with God’s will (Dan 4:13–26; *T. Naph.* 8:6; *1 Enoch* 56). An angelic scribe keeps records which are opened at the time of judgment (Dan 7:10; *1 En.* 89:61–77; 90:14–20; *2 En.* 19:5; *Ap. Zeph.* 3; 7).

The angel as teacher and mediator of revelation is a well-attested motif, even in nonapocalyptic texts (*Joseph and Asenath* 14–15; *Jub.* 1:27–29; 10:10–14 [cf. *1 Enoch* 8]; *T. Reu.* 5:3; *T. Levi* 9:6; *T. Iss.* 2:1; *T. Jos.* 6:6). In apocalyptic writings, the angelic revealer, heavenly guide, and interpreter of mysteries and visions becomes a standard feature (e.g., Daniel 7–12; *1 Enoch* 17–36; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10–18; *4 Ezra* 3–14). The appearance of the angel often evokes an acute emotional reaction from the person who sees it (Dan 10:7–9; *2 En.* 1:3–8; *Ap. Ab.* 11:2–6).

Certain angels are identified by personal names, the most frequently named being Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel (Dan 9:21; 10:13; Tob 12:15; *1 En.* 9:1; 21:10; *4 Ezra* 4:1; *Sib. Or.* 2:215; *IQM* 9:15–16). For various lists of other angels, see *1 En.* 8; 20; 82:13–20. Frequently, the angel’s appearance is described in terms of light, fire, shining metals, or precious stones, a tradition based on Ezekiel’s description of the glory of God (Dan 10:5–6; *2 Macc* 3:25–26; *Jos. As.* 14:9; *2 En.* 1:3–5; *Ap. Ab.* 11:1–3; *Ap. Zeph.* 6:11–15). Their garments are white linen or white with golden sashes (Dan 10:5; 12:6; *2 Macc* 3:26; 11:8; *T. Levi* 8:2; but see *Ap. Ab.* 11:2). Angels are assumed to be spiritual

creatures whose physical manifestations and apparent eating and drinking are shams (Tob 12:19; *Ap. Ab.* 13:4; *T. Ab.* 4:9–10; Philo, *Quest. Gen.* 4:9; *Jos. Ant.* 1.11.2 §197). There was even speculation on special angelic food and its qualities (*Jos. As.* 16:12–16; *Wis* 16:20; *Vita* 4:2; cf. *Ps* 78:23–25). Although angels are spirits and may be called “gods” (*ʿēlīm*, *ʿēlōhīm*), they are created beings (*Jub.* 2:2). There is some evidence that certain Jewish groups believed the angels to have assisted God in the creation of the world (Fossum 1985: 192–213). Rabbinic Judaism found the notion theologically dangerous and vigorously rebutted it (Segal 1977). In *Jubilees*, even though angels are created on the first day, they have no role in the creation of the world except to praise the work of God (*Jub.* 2:3; cf. *11QPs<sup>a</sup> Creat* 26:13; *Job* 38:7).

**2. The Heavenly Court/Temple.** The old notion of the divine council continued to be central for the image of the angelic world. In QL in particular the language of council (*ʿēdāh*), assembly (*qāhāl*), and conclave (*sôd*) is prominent (esp. in *Hodayot*; *ŠirŠabb*). Graphic depictions of the heavenly court are frequent in apocalypses, though the emphases differ from those of OT sources. The splendor and magnitude of the scene are stressed, but the deliberative role of the council is all but eliminated (*Dan* 7:9–10; *1 En.* 14:19–23; 40:1–7; *2 Enoch* 20; *4 Ezra* 8:21–22). Rather, it is a place of judgment (*Dan* 7:10–14; *1 En.* 60:2–6), of revelatory pronouncements (*Dan* 7:13–14; *1 Enoch* 15–16), and of praise (*1 En.* 61:9–13; *2 En.* 20:4–21:1; *Ap. Ab.* 10:9; 18:11–14; *Ps.-Philo* 18:6). According to some sources, the praise is sung in a special angelic dialect (*T. Job* 48–50; cf. *Ap. Zeph.* 8:4).

Not only royal court but also temple imagery informs the picture of the heavenly world (*1 Enoch* 14). Consequently, the angels may be described as priests who serve in the heavenly temple (*Jub.* 30:18; 31:14; *T. Levi* 3:5–6; *IQSb* 4:24–26; *ŠirŠabb*, *passim*). In *Jubilees* the angels of the presence and the angels of holiness observe the Sabbath and the Feast of Weeks and are said to have been created circumcised (*Jub.* 2:17–18; 6:18; 15:27). Later rabbinic tradition rejected the notion that the Torah is observed by the angels (see Schäfer 1975: 111–59, 229).

**3. The Angelic Hierarchy.** The angels are organized in a hierarchical manner. There may be a single superior angel and/or a small group of archangels (usually four or seven), sometimes designated as the angel(s) of the presence (*Tob* 12:15; *T. Levi* 8:2; *Jub.* 1:27, 29; 2:1–2, 18; 15:27; *1 En.* 9:1; 20:1–7; 40:1–10; 71:9–13; 90:21; *IQM* 9:15–16; *IQSb* 4:25; *IQH* 6:13; cf. *Isa* 63:9). Where a single angel heads the hierarchy, he is sometimes identified as Michael, the angel who has particular responsibility for the people of Israel (*Dan* 12:1; *Vita* 13–15). The figure known as the Angel of Truth (*IQS* 3:24) or the Prince of Light (*CD* 5:18; *IQS* 3:20; *IQM* 13:10) in Qumran literature is in all probability to be identified with Michael (compare *IQM* 13:10 with 17:6–8), as is Melchizedek in *11QMelch*. Many sources also identify various groups and classes of angels (*Jub.* 2:2, the angels of the presence and the angels of holiness; *ŠirŠabb<sup>d</sup>* [4Q403 1 i 1–29] and *ŠirŠabb<sup>f</sup>* [4Q405 13 4–7], seven chief and deputy princes; *1 En.* 61:10, cherubim, seraphim, ophanim, angels of power, angels of the principalities; *2 Enoch* 20, ten classes of angels in the seventh heaven; *T. Levi* 3:5–8, archangels, messengers, thrones, authorities; etc.). In some texts the classes of angels are assigned to different heavens (e.g., *T. Levi* 3; *2 Enoch* 3–20). There also developed the notion that all the physical processes of the cosmos (e.g., the movement of sun, moon, and stars; the phenomena of fire, wind, rain; the growth of plants and animals; etc.) are all under the



control of particular angels or groups of angels (*Jub.* 2:2; *1 En.* 60:16–22; 82:9–20; *2 Enoch* 19; *IQH* 1:10–11).

For apocalyptic literature, the detailed speculation about the heavenly world, its angelic beings, and their functions is not mere window dressing for the historical and eschatological message which the seer often receives. Rather, such knowledge in itself serves the purpose of theodicy, inasmuch as it provides insight into a system of order and purposive power.

**4. War in Heaven.** The angels are also closely related to the historical process and its outcome. Just as there are angels over the natural workings of the cosmos, so there are angelic leaders of the nations. Their actions are sometimes directed by God, but on occasion they exceed their orders (*1 En.* 89:59–64) or act to oppose the angels God has assigned to help Israel (*Dan* 10:13, 20; 12:1). The notion that Israel was aided in times of crisis by angelic warriors was widely shared (*2 Macc* 3:25–26; 11:8; 15:22–23; cf. *Jos. JW* 6.5.3 §298), but received a distinctive development in apocalyptic and related literature. While older Israelite tradition had described the conflict between Yahweh and the kings of nations opposed to Israel, apocalypses imagine a two-tiered, mirror-image conflict. The conflict on earth between Israel and its enemies is the counterpart of the conflict in heaven between angelic armies. Victory will mean the establishment of the kingdom of Michael among the angels and of Israel among the nations (*IQM* 17:6–8; *As. Mos.* 10:1–10; cf. *Dan* 7:13–14, 26–27). Although references to angelic armies are very frequent in the apocalypses, the most detailed account of the eschatological battle and the role of the angels is to be found in the Qumran War Scroll (*IQM*).

**5. Angelic Dualism.** The development of the old notions of the angels of the nations and of God's angelic army is probably one source of the dualistic thinking characteristic of much of the angelology of this period. The influence of Iranian religion is also usually assumed, though it is difficult to demonstrate in detail. In some texts the opposition between an angelic ruler of the forces of light and an angelic ruler of the forces of darkness is made explicit (*4QAmram*; *IQS* 3:13–4:14). Various names attach to the leader of the evil angels: Melchiresha (*4QAmram*<sup>b</sup> 2 3'; *4QTeharot*<sup>d</sup> [4Q280] 2 2); Belial (*IQM* 1:1; 13:11; *IQS* 2:4–5; *CD* 5:17–19); Beliar (*Jub.* 1:20; *T. Reu.* 2:2; *T. Jud.* 25:3); Mastema (*Jub.* 10:8; *IQM* 13:11); Satan (*IQH* fr. 4, line 6; *Vita* 9–16). In retellings of biblical narrative he is depicted as the enemy of Israel's ancestors (*CD* 5:17–19; *Jub.* 17:15–18; 48:2, 9, 17).

The speculative reinterpretation of *Gen* 6:1–4 was another important aspect of dualistic theology. In the Enoch literature the angels who mate with women corrupt the earth and its inhabitants, prompting the intercession of the archangels. Although the immediate consequences of the breach are resolved, the mating produces a race of evil spirits subject to Mastema (*1 Enoch* 6–16; *Jub.* 10:1–14; cf. *Genesis Apocryphon* 2). Only in the eschatological victory and final judgment would the rebellious angels, the evil spirits, and their human allies be completely destroyed (*1 En.* 90:17–27; *As. Mos.* 10:1–10; *T. Sim.* 6:3–6).

**6. Communion with the Angels.** While the angelic armies figure prominently in eschatological visions of salvation, access to the heavenly world and the company of angels during one's lifetime or at death was also desired as a form of deliverance. Enoch's sojourn with the angels was a special case (*Jub.* 4:21–26; *2 En.* 1:8–10). But the tradition that Enoch and other seers were clothed with heavenly garments and became

like the angels may describe a kind of transformation which was sought by apocalyptic communities (2 *Enoch* 22; *Ap. Zeph.* 8:3; cf. *IQS* 4:6–8). According to some sources, the righteous dead will dwell with the angels (1 *En.* 39:4–8; cf. *Rev* 6:9–11). The literature of the Qumran community, however, speaks of enjoying present communion with the angels as part of the blessedness of membership in the community of the new covenant (*IQS* 11:7–8; *IQSa* 3:3–11; *IQH* 3:21–22; 6:12–13; 11:10–14).

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### **NEW TESTAMENT**

The NT conception of angels (Gk *aggeloi*) is derived from that of the OT and Judaism and does not make any important modifications or innovations of its own (see above). The NT does not provide a systematic discussion of angels. Rather, angels are incidental characters in the story of redemption. Consequently references to them are concentrated in the accounts of Jesus' birth and resurrection in the Synoptic Gospels, the account of the founding of the Church in Acts, and the account of the final consummation in Revelation.

#### **A. Their Nature**

Angels are supernatural heavenly beings created by God (Col 1:16). They are described as spirits (Heb 1:7, 14) and as holy (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Acts 10:22; Rev 14:10). They are presented as robed in white garments (Matt 28:3=Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev 19:14) and radiating great light (Matt 28:3; Luke 24:4; Acts 10:30; Rev 10:1; 15:6; 18:1). By their very nature they also radiate the glory of God (Luke 2:9; 9:26; Acts 12:7; 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 8; cf. Acts 6:15) and praise him (Luke 2:13–14; Rev 5:8–14; 7:11–12; 19:1–8).

In form they are akin to humankind and are often referred to as men (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; Acts 12:15; Heb 13:2), but are different enough to evoke fear in (Matt 28:1–8; Mark 16:5–8; Luke 1:11–12; 2:9–10; 24:5; Acts 10:4) and worship from (Rev 19:10; 22:8–9) human beings. Angels are asexual (Matt 22:30 par.) and transcend time (Luke 20:34–36). Their knowledge is more comprehensive than humankind, but not unlimited (Matt 24:36=Mark 13:32; Eph 3:10; 1 Pet 1:12). Their strength is also a notable feature (2 Thess 1:7; 2 Pet 2:11; Rev 5:2; 10:1; 18:21). They possess their own languages (1 Cor 13:1) and are intently concerned with the salvation of humankind (Luke 15:10; Eph 3:10;

1 Tim 5:21; Pet 1:12; cf. 1 Cor 4:9), offering the prayers of the saints on the golden altar (Rev 5:8; 8:3–4), observing worship (1 Cor 11:10), and ministering to the Christian (Heb 1:14).

There are myriads and legions of angels (Matt 26:53; Luke 2:13; Heb 12:22; Jude 14; Rev 5:11; 9:16), but only two are named, the archangels Gabriel (Luke 1:19) and Michael (Jude 9; Rev 12:7). Gabriel is a messenger and Michael a warrior. An archangel is referred to in 1 Thess 4:16 and possibly others in 1 Tim 5:21. In Revelation there appear to be vestiges of the Jewish notion of four or seven archangels in the references to seven spirits (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) or angels (8:2) before the throne, four living creatures waiting on the throne (4:6; 5:6), and four angels who preside over the four corners of the earth (7:1). The latter indicates a job differentiation among angels as well, for there are angels over the elements, including water (Rev 16:5; cf. John 5:4 var), fire (Rev 14:18; cf. Heb 1:7), and wind (Rev 7:1; cf. Heb 1:7). The elemental spirits (*stoicheia tou kosmou*) of Gal 4:3 and Col 2:8, 20 may be a reference to demonic angels ruling the world. See ELEMENT, ELEMENTAL SPIRIT.

The category of archangels is indicative of a hierarchy among angels, a hierarchy which is also found among evil angels with Satan as their head (Matt 25:41). Unlike other Jewish works, in the NT these hierarchies remain unelaborated, but are implied in the designation “principalities and powers” (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15; 1 Pet 3:22).

Angels have free will, and those in heaven chose to obey (Matt 6:10) while others chose to rebel (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4). The latter are led by Satan (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7–9) and he seeks to imitate the angels of light (2 Cor 11:14). In the final conflagration, Michael and his angelic host will fight and defeat Satan and his angelic hosts (Rev 12:7–9). Their fate is to be cast into the lake of fire (Matt 25:41).

In the early christological debates, the superiority of Christ over the angels was stressed (Eph 1:21; Col 2:15; Heb 1–2; 1 Pet 3:22) and worship of angels strictly prohibited (Col 2:18; Rev 19:10; 22:8–9). In fact, angels are said to worship Christ (Heb 1:6). Evil angels are to be judged by the saints (1 Cor. 6:3).

## **B. Their Function**

Angels also serve as guardians of individuals and churches. The angels of children in Matt 18:10 are apparently guardian angels. The seven angels of the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 have been identified by some as guardian angels. Belief in a guardian angel underlies Acts 12:15 where Peter is mistaken for his angel. In a guardian capacity, an angel releases the apostles (Acts 5:19–20) and Peter (Acts 12:6–11) from prison.

In part functioning as guardians and in their role as servants which they share with humankind (Rev 19:10; 22:8–9), angels minister to Jesus while he was accomplishing his mission. During the temptation, Satan points to the extremes to which the angels will go to keep Jesus from harm (Matt 4:6=Luke 4:10–11), and angels come and minister to Jesus after the temptation (Matt 4:11; Mark 1:13). They also minister to Jesus in Gethsemane once he has accepted his fate (Luke 22:43 var). Twelve legions of angels are readied for Jesus’ defense at his arrest (Matt 26:53), and angels roll the stone from the entrance of the tomb at the resurrection (Matt 28:2). In short, Jesus spoke of them as “ascending and descending upon him” (John 1:51).

A major function of angels is as messengers and instructors. The thought of angels

speaking to someone was not foreign to the audience of the NT (John 12:29). As well as by a direct presence, angels often deliver their message in a dream (Matt 1:20–21; 2:13, 19–20, 22) or a vision (Acts 10:3–6; Rev 1:10).

Moses received the Law from an angel (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). Angels were witnesses to the incarnation (1 Tim 3:16). Paul assumes that angels can preach a gospel (Gal 1:8) and the Pharisees assume that an angel could have spoken with Paul (Acts 23:9). Angels are harbingers of the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11–20) and Jesus (Luke 1:26–38). They advise Joseph about the nature of Mary’s child (Matt 1:20–21). They proclaim the birth of Jesus to the shepherds (Luke 2:8–14). They warn Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus (Matt 2:13) as well as when to return (Matt 2:20). They give instructions to the women at the tomb (Matt 28:5–7=Mark 16:6–7=Luke 24:4–7). Two angels speak to the disciples at Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:10). An angel speaks to Moses in the burning bush (Acts 7:30, 35, 38), advises Philip where to travel (Acts 8:26) and Cornelius to send for Peter (Acts 10:3–6, 22, 30–32; 11:13–14), and reassures Paul that he would stand before Caesar (Acts 27:23–24). As typical of apocalyptic writings, an angel escorts John through his visions (e.g., Rev 17:7).

Angels are integrally involved in judgment, both ongoing and at the final consummation. In an ongoing capacity, angels killed Herod because he accepted the worship of the crowd (Acts 12:20–23). In the final consummation an archangel announces Christ’s descent at the parousia (1 Thess 4:16) and other angels announce phases of the final judgment (Rev 10:1–7; 14:6–7), begin its initial processes (Rev 5:1–2; 14:14–16), and are active in it (Rev 8–9; 15–16; 20:1–3). They will accompany Christ at his parousia (Matt 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38=Luke 9:26; 2 Thess 1:7; Jude 14–15), will gather the elect (Matt 24:31=Mark 13:27), and will separate the evildoers for destruction in the fire (Matt 13:39–42, 49–50; 25:31–46; Jude 14–15). Possibly as a council, they will witness Christ’s denial of those who denied him (Mark 8:38=Luke 9:26; 12:8–9; Rev 3:5; cf. Rev 14:10). The role of angels is often portrayed in military fashion (Rev 19:14, 19), as warriors at Christ’s bidding (Matt 26:53).

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**ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES** (Gk *aggeloi tōn hepta ekklesiōn* (*ajgeloi twn epta ekkh siwn*)). This expression is found only in Rev 1:20 in the preparatory vision of the risen Lord (1:9–20). Here the angels of the seven churches are equated with the seven stars in the Lord’s right hand (cf. 1:16). The identity of the seven angels is uncertain, with both human and superhuman identifications being possible (see Hemer 1986: 32–34; McNamara 1966: 192–98).

### **A. Human Identifications**

It has been proposed that the angels are messengers from the seven churches sent to John and/or the messengers from John entrusted to deliver the letters. Although virtually always being a reference to a heavenly messenger, *aggelos* is used occasionally in both

the OT (Mal 2:7; 3:1) and the NT (Matt 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; Jas 2:25) to refer to a human messenger. The leaders of the church, perhaps their bishops, is also a possible identification. However, elsewhere in the NT *aggelos* is never used to designate a church leader.

Against both of these identifications is the fact that the content of the letters of chaps. 2–3 pertain to the churches themselves, not to a third party, whoever the angels may be. Against any identification of the angels with any human being is the fact that all of the other 66 occurrences of *aggelos* in Revelation and virtually all other known occurrences refer to supernatural beings. Also, the use of angels to represent human beings or churches is virtually unknown in apocalyptic literature.

However, it should be noted that *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 39:37; 40:4 identifies the seven lamps of the lampstand of the tabernacle as the seven stars or planets, and the latter in turn as “the just that shine unto eternity in their righteousness.” This equation supports a human identification for angels and corresponds to the symbolism of Revelation in which the lampstands represent churches.

## **B. Superhuman Identifications**

The seven angels have been identified as the guardian angels of the seven churches. Nations (Deut 32:8 LXX; Dan 10:13, 20; 12:1; Sir 17:17) and individuals (*Jub.* 35:17; Matt 18:10; Acts 12:15) are portrayed as having guardian angels. However, this identification is not satisfactory because of the difficulty of the resulting scenario in which Christ directs John to write a letter to the churches, but John in turn addresses it to their guardian angels instead (1:11).

Widely accepted is the position that the angels are personifications of the prevailing spirit of the churches, the spiritual counterpart of the earthly reality. This would make the angels akin to the Persian *fravashis*, heavenly counterparts of earthly individuals and communities. The difficulty that the letters are addressed to the angels but pertain to the churches is thus eliminated, for both can be addressed simultaneously. However, although the stars and the lampstands are distinguished in Revelation as angels and churches respectively, in this solution they are now virtually equated. Ultimately no identification has as yet been totally satisfactory.

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