

# ANGELS AND ANGELOLOGY

Also: Seraphim

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## Bible

Many biblical writers assume the existence of beings superior to man in knowledge and power,, but subordinate to (and apparently creatures of) the one God. These beings serve as His attendants, like courtiers of an earthly king, and also as His agents to convey His messages to men and to carry out His will.

## TERMINOLOGY

These beings are clearly designated by the English word "angel." The terminology of biblical Hebrew is not so exact. *Mal'akh* (Kai m), the word most often used, means "messenger" (cf. Ugaritic *lak* "to send"). It is applied frequently to human agents (e.g., Gen. 32:4) and is sometimes used figuratively (e.g., Ps. 104:4). This term was rendered in the Greek Bible by *angelos* which has the same variety of meanings; only when it was borrowed by the Latin Bible and then passed into other European languages did it acquire the exclusive meaning of "angel." Post-biblical Hebrew employs *mal'akh* only for superhuman messengers, and uses other words for human agents. Apparently for greater clarity, the Bible frequently calls the angel the *mal'akh* of God; yet the same title is occasionally applied to human agents of the Deity (Hag. 1:13; Mal. 2:7). Elsewhere angels are called *elohim* (usually "god" or "gods"; Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6), more often *bene elohim* or *bene elim* (lit. "sons of gods")—in the general sense of "divine beings." They are also known as *kedoshim* (*qedoshim*; "holy beings"; Ps. 89:8; Job 5:1). Often the angel is called simply "man." The mysterious being who wrestled with Jacob is first called a man, then *elohim* (Gen. 32:24 (25), 28 (29), 30 (31)); but Hosea refers to him also as a *mal'akh* (Hos. 12:5). As a result of this diversity, there are some passages where it is uncertain whether a human or superhuman messenger is meant. The Bible also speaks of winged creatures of angelic character called *cherubim* and seraphim, who serve a variety of functions. A further ambiguity is due to the fact that the Bible does not always distinguish clearly between God and His messenger. Thus, Hagar encounters an angel, but later addresses "the Lord that spoke unto her" (Gen. 16:7, 13; similarly 21:17ff.). It is God who commands the sacrifice of Isaac; later Abraham is addressed by the angel of the Lord from heaven (Gen. 22:1ff., 11:18). The angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2), but through the rest of the story Moses converses with the Deity. So, too, in the Gideon story, Gideon speaks sometimes with God, sometimes with the angel of God (Judg. 6:11ff.). Some scholars infer from this phenomenon that the angel was not regarded as an independent being, but simply as a manifestation of the Divine power and will. Others suppose that in the earliest version of these stories a human being was confronted directly by God, and that later scribes toned down the boldness of this concept by interposing an angel.

## ANGELS AS A GROUP

Micaiah describes a vision in which the Lord is seated on His throne, with the host of heaven standing by on His right and left (I Kings 22:19; II Chron. 18:18). But frequently the phrase "host of heaven" means the heavenly bodies (Deut. 4:19; Jer. 8:2, etc.). Similarly, Isaiah (ch. 6) sees the Deity enthroned while the seraphim proclaim His holiness and majesty. One of the seraphim purifies Isaiah by a symbolic act, so that, unlike Micaiah, he becomes not a witness to but a participant in the ensuing deliberation of the council (cf. Zech. 3:7b), and when the Lord, as in Micaiah's vision, calls (like El in the council of the gods in the Ugaritic Epic of Keret) for a volunteer, Isaiah responds. In the ancient cosmic hymn Psalms 89:1–3, 6–19, the goodness of God is praised by the assembly of the holy beings because, the psalmist emphasizes, He is incomparably greater than they and they stand in awe of Him (Ps. 89:6–9). This last is similarly stressed in two other early compositions (see Ex. 15:11 and Ps. 29). Not improbably, the motif arose in an age when it was not yet a platitude that "the assembly of the holy beings" or "the company of the divine beings" (Ps. 29:7) is not a pantheon of real gods. So, no doubt, did the practice of representing those beings as standing before God, who alone is seated (I Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:2; Zech. 3:1–7, especially 3:7 end; Job 1:6; 2:1). The exception, Isaiah 14:13, only confirms the rule: the speaker there is a pagan. Despite the masoretic pointing *dina* ("the Tribunal") in Daniel 7:10, 20, the scruple may have persisted into the second century C.E., since the context favors rather the interpretation of the consonantal graph *anyd* as *dayyana* ("the Judge"). Related to the deuteronomic idea that the Lord actually assigned the heavenly bodies and the idols to the Gentiles but chose Israel to worship him (Deut. 4:15–20; 29:25), is the remarkable

passage (Deuteronomy 32:8–9): "When the Most High gave nations their homes and set the divisions of men, He fixed the borders of peoples according to the numbers of the divine beings (I a ynY; so a Qumran fragment, in agreement with the Septuagint). But the Lord's own portion is His people, Jacob His own allotment." The masoretic reading I arRy ynY "the children of Israel" for the reading of the Qumran fragment and the Septuagint cited above is a conflation of the latter and of a variant I a yrR, "the ministers of God." This variant is not attested directly, but its existence may be deduced from the fact that it would account both for the masoretic reading in Deuteronomy 32:8 and for the use of rR, "minister" in Daniel 10:20 twice, 21; 12:1. For these passages are obviously nothing but a bold development of Deuteronomy 32:8–9. Their doctrine is that the fates of nations are determined by combats among the celestial "ministers" to whom they have been assigned and that (despite Deut. 32:9) Israel also has a "minister," Michael, who is assisted by another angel, Gabriel. In Job, the divine beings appear before God as a body, perhaps to report on the performance of their tasks and to obtain fresh orders; one of them is the Satan, who carries out his functions under God's directions (Job 1:6ff.; 2:1ff.). The angels seen by Jacob ascending and descending the ladder (Gen. 28:12) seem to be messengers going forth on their several errands and coming back to heaven to report.

### **THE ANGEL OF THE LORD**

The narrative books offer many instances of an angel—rarely, two or more—delivering a message or performing an action, or both. The angel appears in human form, and sometimes is not immediately recognized as an angel. The appearance of an angel to Hagar (Gen. 16:7ff.; 21:17ff.) and to Abraham at Mount **Moriah** (Gen. 22:11ff.) was noted above. Further, three "men" visit Abraham to announce the birth of Isaac; two of them go on to Sodom to warn Lot to flee, and to destroy the city (Gen. 18:1ff.; 19:1, 13ff.). The angel of God appears to Jacob in a dream, says "I am the God of Beth-El," and bids him return to his home (31:11ff.). The angel of God plays a role, not entirely clear, in the events at the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 14:19ff). In the **Book of the Covenant**, God promises to send His angel to lead the Israelites and to overcome the obstacles to their entrance into the promised land. God's name is in the angel, who must be faithfully obeyed (23:20ff.). When Balaam accedes to Balak's plea for help, the angel of the Lord comes as an adversary to the enchanter. The angel is visible to the she-ass, but Balaam cannot see the angel until the Lord opens his eyes (Num. 22:22ff.). When the "captain of the host of the Lord" appears to Joshua, the latter does not at first realize that his visitor is an angel (Josh. 5:13). The *mal'akh* of the Lord in Judges 2:1ff., 10 and 5:23 may be a prophet; but the visitor who summons Gideon to leadership and performs wonders is clearly an angel (*ibid.*, 6:11ff.). The same is true of the emissary who foretells the birth of Samson, and whose angelic nature is made manifest only when he ascends to heaven in the altar flame (*ibid.*, 13:2ff., esp. 16, 20). An angel with a drawn sword is the agent of the pestilence in the days of David (II Sam. 24:16–17; I Chron. 21:15ff.; the drawn sword is mentioned also in the Balaam and Joshua incidents). The old prophet pretends he has received a revelation from an angel (I Kings 13:18). An angel appears once in the Elijah stories (*ibid.*, 19:5ff.). The army of Sennacherib is destroyed by the angel of the Lord (II Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36; II Chron. 32:21). The angel of the Lord appears two times in Psalms: in 34:8, he protects the righteous; and in 35:5–6, he brings doom upon the wicked.

### **IN THE HAGIOGRAPHA**

Other references to angels in the Psalms are scattered throughout the book. In a few places, angels are called on to join with the rest of creation in praising God (Ps. 29:1; 103:20–21; 148:2; cf. 89:6ff.; in 96:7, the phrase "families of the nations" is substituted for the "sons of God" of 29:1; **Ps.** 78:49 and 104:4, most probably refer to forces of nature that perform God's will). In Psalms 91:11–12, God commands His angels to protect the faithful from harm. The other Hagiographa have little to say about angels. The only possible allusion, in Proverbs 30:3, is doubtful. In Job, aside from the references to the "sons of God," angels are mentioned only by the three friends and Elihu. The friends point out that even the angels, the holy ones, are not flawless, and that man is still further from perfection (Job 4:18; 5:1; 15:15). Elihu speaks of an angelic intercessor for man (*ibid.*, 33:23–24), but the passage is obscure. The subject matter of the Five Scrolls is such that no special significance need be attached to their silence on the subject of angels (Eccles. 5:5 is hardly relevant).

### **SILENCE OF THE PROPHETS**

The prophets, except Ezekiel and Zechariah, say almost nothing about angels. In all pre-exilic prophecy, there are just two passages in which angels are mentioned. One is the rather obscure reference to the Jacob story in Hosea (12:5–6; contrast v. 14). It has been explained as a satirical attack on the cult of the angel (or divinity) Beth-El (see Ginsberg, in: **JBL**, 80 (1961), 343–7; cf. Gen. 31:11–12). The other is Isaiah's initial vision (6:1ff.), in which the winged seraphim have a prominent part. Thereafter, Isaiah makes no mention of angels (33:7 is obscure and probably not Isaianic).

Jeremiah is completely silent on the subject; so is (according to the critical theory) the roughly contemporaneous Book of Deuteronomy. In the Exilic period, Deutero-Isaiah does not mention angels (Isa. 63:9 does mention the "angel of His presence," but the Greek reads—probably correctly: "No messenger or angel; it was His presence that saved them.") Special significance is attached to the fact that Haggai calls himself (1:13) "the messenger of the Lord with the message of the Lord (*malʾakh ʾElohim be-malʾakhut ʾElohim*)—apparently to stress the thought that God's emissary to man is a prophet, not a supernatural being. Malachi's attitude is not entirely certain. His name (meaning "My messenger") may be a pseudonym, and he asserts that the priest is the *malʾakh* of the Lord of Hosts (Mal. 2:7). The *malʾakh* of the Covenant (*ibid.*, 3:1–2) may, however, be an angel, though the phrase might also refer to the returning Elijah (*ibid.*, 3:23–24). Finally, it should be noted that the priestly code (regarded by many scholars as post-Exilic, though others consider it very ancient) does not allude to angels, except for the provision that cherubim are to be depicted on the Ark cover. This array of facts cannot be dismissed as mere accident, especially since angels appear so often in the narrative portions of the Pentateuch, in the historical books, and in the prophetic writings of Ezekiel and Zechariah. Perhaps David Neumark overstressed this disagreement as a major issue of biblical thought (see: e.g., his *Essays in Jewish Philosophy* (1929), 104ff.). But the issue was certainly not unimportant.

### **EZEKIEL AND ZECHARIAH**

In the theophanies described by Ezekiel, the Divine Presence is seated on a throne supported by four fantastic creatures, called in chapter 1 *hayyot* ("living beasts" or "beasts"), but identified in chapters 8–11 as cherubim. In the latter section, moreover, the destruction of Jerusalem is a task assigned to six armed "men," while a "man clothed in linen with a scribe's inkhorn on his side" is to mark the foreheads of such righteous individuals as are to be saved (9:1ff.). Later, this same man in linen takes live coals from the fire between the cherubim, to be used in setting the city afire (10:1ff.). Chapters 11–39 of Ezekiel do not mention angels. But in the visions of the rebuilt temple (ch. 40–48), the prophet is guided by a man "who shone like copper" (40:3) and who goes about measuring the various courts and buildings and explaining their functions. During the vision Ezekiel also receives instruction directly from God; and after chapter 47:12 the "man" is not mentioned again.

In Zechariah, angels are almost constantly present. The book consists largely of symbolic visions, explained to the prophet by "the angel that spoke with me" (1:9, 14; 2:1–7; 4:1–5; 5:5–10; 6:4–5). The "angel of the Lord" appears several times; he intercedes with God on behalf of Israel (1:12–13); he presides over the rehabilitation of Joshua and rebukes the Satan for accusing the latter (3:1ff.). A number of other angels are reported to be standing by Zechariah also applies the term "man" to angelic beings (1:8ff.; 2:5ff.; the two women with stork-like wings, 5:9, seem to be symbolic figures rather than angels). For the first time in the Bible the angels in Zechariah appear to be acquiring an independent life on their own.

### **DANIEL**

The Book of Daniel repeats much about angels which is found in earlier parts of the Bible. It tells of innumerable attendants around the Divine throne (7:10), and reports that an angel saved the three men in the furnace (3:25, 28) and Daniel from the lions (6:23). It sometimes calls an angel "man"; one angel is described as a man clad in linen (10:5, 12:7; cf. above on Ezekiel). But Daniel has strong affinities with the extra-biblical apocalypses, and so presents many new features in regard to angels. The revelations received by Daniel are either symbolic visions, which an angel interprets (ch. 7, 8), or they are revealed in their entirety by an angel (ch. 10–12). Zechariah, too, had visions which an angel explained. But he also delivered prophecies received directly from God; such a thing never occurs in Daniel. In the latter book, too, angels do not merely carry out orders, but have some powers of initiative: "The matter has been decreed by the ever-wakeful ones, the sentence is by the word of the holy ones" (4:14). Moreover, the angels now have proper names: **Gabriel** (8:16; 9:21) and **Michael** (10:13; 12:1). This is the only biblical book in which angels have distinct personalities. Finally, the idea that each nation has an angelic patron, whose actions and destinies are bound up with those of his nation, is encountered for the first time. Mention is made of the patrons of Persia and Greece (10:13, 20); and Michael is the champion of Israel (12:1. On this concept cf. Isa. 24:2).

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## **Apocrypha**

In post-biblical literature angels frequently manifest themselves as independent beings, distinguishable by their own name and individual traits. Contrary to the general impression gained from the Bible, certain allusions contained in it lead to the assumption that in the earlier periods of

Jewish history angels played a more independent role in popular mythology than in the post-biblical period. It was not, however, until the Hellenistic period of Jewish history that the conditions existed for a special doctrine of angels.

During the Second Temple period it was assumed that only the great prophets of earlier times had had the privilege of direct communication with God while in later generations mysteries of the end of days and of man's future could be discovered only through the intermediary of angels. This led to attempts to explore the nature and individual character of the angels. Furthermore, Jewish literature of this period sought to teach the mysteries of nature, of heaven, of the end of days, etc.; revelation no longer served as the point of departure for the acquisition of knowledge, but as corroboration of the validity of existing doctrines—on medicine (Jub. 10:10ff.), botany (I En. 3:1), astronomy, cosmology, etc. This type of apocalyptic wisdom literature assumed that the secrets of the universe could be found only beyond the range of earthly surroundings—by means of angels. The development of the concept of angels was also deeply influenced by the syncretism which characterized the Hellenistic Age. By means of the wisdom of the Chaldeans (which enjoyed great prestige among the [Diaspora](#) Jewry, see Dan. 1:4), the Jews had become familiar with many of the old Babylonian myths—the creation, the deluge, the early generations of man, etc.—and they sought to harmonize the myths with the biblical reports of these events. Old Babylonian tales of intercourse between gods and legendary heroes, and of books containing heavenly wisdom, were thus made to concur with Jewish legends; however, in order to avoid contradiction with the monotheistic character of Judaism, they were ascribed to the world of angels. One such example was Enoch, a figure created under the influence of Babylonian concepts, who appears as the bearer and creator of human culture, and as the transmitter of heavenly wisdom to the early generations of man; his authority is derived exclusively from his constant communication with angels. Various sources treat Noah and Abraham in the same manner, ascribing their wisdom to their intimate knowledge of the world of angels. In addition, various religious concepts accepted by the Jewish people under the influence of pagan magic and demonology—insofar as they were not in direct contradiction to monotheism—were eventually incorporated into the doctrine of angels.

### **AMONG THE JEWISH SECTS**

The doctrine of angels was not evenly spread among the various parts of the Jewish people. The apocalyptic wisdom teachers imparted the knowledge that they had secretly acquired through their contact with angels, only to a narrow circle of the specially initiated. Consequently, the doctrine of angels found its widest distribution among the secret societies of the Essenes. The latter (Jos., Wars, 2:142) carefully guarded the secret list of angels' names. The Qumran scrolls testify to an organized system of angelology, in which the "Prince of Light" and other heavenly princes were expected to fight alongside the Sons of Light on the "last day," and they thought them present at meetings of the Qumran sect. A certain dualism is seen in the struggle for power between the forces of evil (Belial) and those of goodness over the sons of man (IQM 13:11). The Pharisees, on the other hand, showed little interest in these problems. The Sadducees, who were opposed to any kind of mysticism, are described by the Acts of the Apostles (23:8) as denying the very existence of angels; this however, was undoubtedly a false assumption, derived from the Sadducees' rejection of apocalyptic teachings. Among Jewish magicians and sorcerers, the concept of angels was particularly confused, influenced as they were by the pagan literature on the subject, where the angels usually appear in the company of pagan gods, to combat disease. In some literary sources biblical figures, such as Solomon, are mentioned as having been in possession of secret formulas or means whereby they were able to induce angels to come to man's aid. The Greek "[Testament of Solomon](#)" cites a number of angels with whose activities Solomon became acquainted only with the help of demons. A similar manipulation of angels through the use of magic is found in the [Sefer ha-Razim](#). Angels appearing in post-biblical literature may be divided into several classes. The angel appearing in one of the visions of Zechariah (1:9) is not mentioned by name, but his active advocacy of the cause of Israel indicates that he was not a "messenger" in the strict sense of the term. In the Book of Daniel (8:16; 9:21) the angel Gabriel appears as an interpreter of Daniel's vision. In later apocalyptic writings various angels appear as interpreters of symbolic visions, such as Uriel (1 En. 19:1; 27:2), Raguel (23:4), Raphael (32:6), and Michael (60:4ff.; *Testament of Abraham*, ed. James, passim). A group of seven angels is frequently described as heading the world of angels; also designated as "archangels," they have "entry to the presence of the glory of the Lord" (Tob. 12:15). They are: Uriel, whose function is to lead the angelic host and guard the underworld (Sheol); Raphael, who is in charge of the spirits of humans; Raguel, who takes revenge upon the world of lights; Michael, who watches over Israel; Sariel, whose duties are not defined: Gabriel who rules Paradise; Jeremiel (IV Ezra 4:38), who according to a later apocalyptic composition (*Apocalypse of Elijah*; Ger., ed. by Steindorff, p. 10) guards the souls of the underworld (I En. 20). These seven angels are always in the proximity of God

and are the ones that are always called upon to carry out tasks of special significance for world history, such as the punishment of the fallen angels, or of the seventy angels who act as princes of the peoples of the earth (1 En. 90:21ff.), the elevation of Levi to the priesthood (Test. Patr., Levi 8), the transmission of heavenly wisdom to Enoch (1 En. 81:5ff.), etc. A similar list is preserved in the *Serekh Shirot Olot le-Shabbat* (Angelic Liturgy) from Qumran (in VT Suppl. 7, pp. 318–45), in which the heavenly tasks of each of seven angels is recorded. Their names, however, were omitted. The War Scroll describes two angels of prime importance: "The Prince of Light" and "The Angel of Darkness," with whom were associated "the sons of righteousness" and "the sons of darkness" respectively (1 QM 13:10–12). These angels were in perpetual conflict and thought to fight on the sides of the two armies at the "last battle," when the Angel of Darkness and his army would be destroyed. This is likewise expressed in the Manual of Discipline (IQS 3:20–22), "In the hand of the Prince of Light is the dominion of all the sons of righteousness... and in the hand of the angel of darkness is the dominion of the sons of evil." Some have supposed that the Prince of Light was Uriel but others think he was Michael, for he is described in the War Scroll (IQM 17:6) as being sent by God in "eternal light" (cf. Dan. 10:13, "Behold Michael, one of the leading princes has come"). The Angel of Darkness seems to have been Belial: "But for corruption you have made Belial, an angel of hatred and his dominion is in darkness." (IQM 13:11).

Related to the group of seven is a group of four angels, most of whose names appear also among the seven; designated as "the angels of the Presence" (*Malakhei ha-Panim*) they are in Enoch: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel (sometimes Raphael and Gabriel are interchanged). They have an important role in the punishment of the fallen angels (1 En. 9:1; 10:1ff.; 54:6). Their place is on each of the four sides of God's throne (40:2ff). Contrary to all other angels, they move freely in and out of the Palace of God—the "Heaven of Heavens"—to serve "the Ancient of Days" (i.e., God: 1 En. 71:5ff.). In the Book of Adam and Eve, however, and in rabbinic literature the four are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. The names of a similar group of angels (Michael, Gabriel, Suriel, and Raphael) were to be inscribed on the battle-towers at the "last battle" (IQM 9:15). Another special group of angels are the seventy "princes of the peoples," appointed over each of the seventy peoples of the earth. They are first mentioned in the Septuagint to Deuteronomy 32:8—without their number being given—from which it may be gathered that at this time the number of all angels was thought not to exceed the number of peoples. Ben Sira (Ecclus. 17:17) quotes the figure seventy; the Hebrew Testament of Naphtali (Test. Patr., Naph. 8–9) regards them as the seventy ministering angels (*Malakhei ha-Sharet*). The latter source relates that at the time of Peleg (cf. Gen. 10:25) God descended from Heaven with the seventy angels in order to teach the peoples of the earth their respective language. Later, Michael, at the behest of God, asked each people to choose its patron angel, and each people chose the angel who had taught it its language, with the exception of Israel, which chose God Himself as its patron. According to a concept found in the Book of 1 Enoch (89:59ff; 90:22, 25), at the time of the destruction of the First Temple, these seventy angels were appointed to rule over Israel (whom God had rejected) until the Day of Judgment.

Another category of angels are the "guardians." Like the general concept of angels (cf. the Ba'almalakh in CIS, vol. I, part 1, no. 182, verse 2; part 2, no. 1373, verse 4), "guardian angels" seems to have been a religious concept common to the entire Semitic world, a fact which supports the identification of guardians with Ζωφασημιν (equivalent to the Hebrew *zofei shamayim*) by Philo Byblos (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 1:10, 3). At times the title of guardian, similar to the title "he who never sleeps," is employed to designate all angels (1 En. 61:12; 39:12) for it is their function to be on guard before God at all times; the same was later also said of angels whose function it is to supervise the actions of man (see 1 En. 100:5). The guardians are also regarded as a superior category of angels, although not equal to the "angels of the Countenance." They are at all times in the proximity of God and must not leave Him by day or by night. Due to their special importance, they are also designated as "the holiest of the holy" (1 En. 14:23). Many scholars see a connection between the guardian angels and the "Irin" (IlyryA, Aram. "watchers") mentioned in the Book of Daniel (4:10, 14, 20). A reference to the "Irin" has been found in the *Genesis Apocryphon* in which Lamech expresses concern over the conception of Noah, who, he fears, was a child "of the watchers (*Irin*)...the holy ones or the fallen angels" (IQApoc. 2:1). In the *Genesis Apocryphon* (IQA poc. 2) the term refers to "the sons of God" in Genesis 6:2ff. (cf. 1 En. 6:8). Perhaps the divine cherubim described by Ezekiel (10:12) are also to be regarded as "guardians" in the sense that the term is used in apocalyptic literature. According to the Book of Jubilees, they descended from Heaven at the time of Jared (cf. Gen. 5:15–20) to teach mankind the practice of law and justice (4:15ff.); they were seduced by the daughters of men and thus the fallen angels came into being. As a result, the guardian angels are sometimes identified with the fallen angels (see 1 En. 10:9; 12:4; 13:10; 14:1ff.; and passim); other sources, however, make a clear distinction between the two (Slavic Book of II

Enoch 7:8; 35:2). Apart from these angels, who were thought to resemble man, the stars were also assumed to be living entities and regarded as angels (Isa. 34:4; 40:26; 45:12; Jer. 33:22; [Ps.](#) 33:6; I En. 18:13ff.; 21:3ff.). However, the more widely accepted version was that certain angels rule the stars (Jub. 19). Connected with this was the concept of the spirits of elements (a concept which came into being under pagan influence), e.g., the angels of the spirit of fire, of the spirit of the wind, the clouds, darkness, snow and hail, thunder, and lightning (Jub. 2:2ff.; I En. 60:11ff.; 65:8; Or. Sybill. 7:33ff., etc.). This category also includes the angels of the seasons of the year, all of which—with hardly any exception—bear Semitic names (I En. 82:10ff.). A foreign influence may also be discerned in the concept of angels functioning as the originators and inventors of human civilization. Thus in "The Life of Adam and Eve," Michael appears as Triptolemus (in the mythology, the hero who taught man grain cultivation) teaching Adam how to work the soil. In addition to the angelic hosts mentioned in the Bible and Apocrypha under generic names, such as cherubim, seraphim and *ofannim*, there are also angels of power, and angels of dominion; angels who serve as patrons of individual human beings (already alluded to in Ps. 91:11); angels of peace (I En. 52:5; 53:4; 54:4; 56:2; [Test. Patr.](#), Ben. 6), and angels serving as intercessors (*malakh meliz*, Test. Patr., Levi 5). Beside the Angels of Light, Darkness and Destruction (see above) there also occur in the Dead Sea Literature Angels of Holiness (IQM 7:6).

### **FUNCTIONS OF ANGELS**

Offering praise to God is regarded as the major function of angels (I En. 40; [Test. Patr.](#), Levi 4). Their functions as intermediaries between God and man were, however, also of special importance. As early as the Book of Tobit (3:16; 12:12, 15) Raphael is depicted as one of the seven angels charged with bringing the prayers of man before God's throne (compare Test. Patr., Dan 6). At times, an angel is ordered by God to accompany a man on his travels in order to ward off dangers that may beset him, or, as in the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, to guide Baruch through the seven heavens and explain the sights. More frequent is the angels' role as intercessors, pleading for man before God (I En. 9:4ff.; 15:2; etc.); sometimes man pleads with the angels to transmit his prayers to God (*ibid.*, 9:2). Angels also appear in opposition to evil angels who wish to act as prosecutors before the throne of God. It is significant, that in spite of Exodus 33:11 ("God would speak to Moses face to face"), the prevailing opinion of later traditions is that at the giving of the Law the angels acted as intermediaries between God and Moses (Jos., Ant., 15:136; Jub. 1:27ff.; [Gal.](#) 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Specific mention of the presence of angels at the right hand of God, during the Revelation on Sinai, is made in the Septuagint, Deuteronomy 33:2.

Although no traces of a cult of angels were retained in normative Judaism, in the *Sefer ha-Razim* angels seem to be used for purposes of magic. Formulas for influencing the angels, stars, and the moon by means of incantations over flasks of wine and blood, by burning incense, sacrifices, and other methods all appear in *Sefer ha-Razim*. Likewise the names of the angels, when coupled with those of Greek gods and magic phrases, were efficacious for incantations (*Sefer ha-Razim*, ed. Margaliot, 1:123–6; 2:99; introduction, 8–9). Testament of Levi 5 makes mention of an appeal to an angel; the passage, however, does not imply that an angel can be venerated as an independent being, for the context makes it clear that the angel acts only as an intermediary between God and Israel. The imperfect nature of angels is frequently stressed. Although they are regarded as immortal (I En. 15:6), their existence did not precede the Creation; they were created on the First Day (Jub. 2:1ff.), or, according to another version (Slavic Book of II En. 29) on the Second Day. Nor are they omniscient; sometimes they are incapable of answering questions put to them and have to confess their ignorance (IV Ezra 4:51). It follows from this that communication between God and man by means of angels is regarded only as a temporary situation. Before the First Temple was built, communication between God and Israel was by means of an angel, but afterward God and Israel communicated directly, without an intermediary (Job. 1:27ff.). This concept of the nature of angels permitted the view that no unbridgeable gulf existed between the material world and the world of angels, and some righteous men could be transformed into angels (I En. 51:4). Similarly, in the fragments of the pseudepigraphal "Prayer of Joseph," Israel, known to mankind as Jacob, declared that in reality he was "the archangel of the power of the Lord" and no mere mortal (Origen, Commentary to John, 11, 84, 15). Even the people of Israel as a whole, by virtue of its covenant with God, was in some ways regarded as being equal to angels; in consequence, while other peoples are in the custody of angels, Israel is under the protection of God Himself and is independent of angels (Jub. 15:27ff.). A further development of this view gives Israel the privilege of participating in the heavenly choir of the angels; at the time that the angels praise the glory of God—as they do at certain hours of the day—the praise by the people of Israel is also heard before the heavenly throne (Hul. 91b; *Constitutiones Apostolicae*, 8:35). This idea may be similar to the concept found in Coptic texts and the Prayer of Joseph of an angel "Israel" who serves God in heaven.

**FALLEN ANGELS**

A special category are the so-called Fallen Angels, frequently mentioned in post-biblical literature. This concept is also common to all Semitic Peoples; the idea of vanquished gods or demons, who then appear as accursed and damned, is one that prevailed among all the peoples of antiquity. It is found in a special form in earlier versions of the story of the creation, in which Rahab appears in the role of the vanquished god. Although for a variety of reasons little trace has remained of the ideas upon which the Rahab legends are based, the dualistic concepts of paganism have nevertheless exerted a profound influence upon Judaism, and the concept of the existence of good and evil powers, contradicting as they did the idea of Monotheism, found their way into Judaism through the story of the Fallen Angels. It must be pointed out, however, that the passage Genesis 6:1ff., although usually quoted as the basis of all subsequent legends of Fallen Angels, has in fact little to do with this concept, as it later developed. Not only is the interpretation of "Nephilim" as Fallen Angels of a doubtful nature (see Num. 13:33); but the text contains no denouncement of the "*Benei Elohim*" who had married the daughters of men; on the contrary, it stresses that the children of these connections were "the heroes of days gone by, the famous men." It was only at a later stage, when the dualistic belief in the existence of evil demons had become a firm component of popular religion, that attempts were made to find biblical authority for this concept, contradictory as it was to Monotheism.

The earliest report of Fallen Angels is found in the Book of Enoch (6ff.): The sons of heaven, who belonged to the "guardian" angels, had lusted for the beauty of the daughters of men and in the time of Jared decided to descend upon Mt. Hermon to carry out their plans from there. There were two hundred of them and their leader was Shemhazai; he made them swear an oath (*herem*) to adhere to their purpose and it was this oath that gave the mountain its name—Hermon. They consorted with the daughters of men, who gave birth to a generation of giants who set about mercilessly destroying human beings. The Fallen Angels also taught man the use of weapons and other tools promoting immorality and crime. In this manner a demonic wisdom came into being, in addition to Divine wisdom, and this led to the corruption of mankind. Moved by man's outcry, the four archangels appealed to God and were given the order to punish the Fallen Angels. Later there is a resumption of this episode in chapter 69, where the Fallen Angel JeqZn was blamed for the downfall of all the angels. Each of the Fallen Angels taught mankind a particular evil or perversion, thus destroying mankind's innocence (69:1ff). The story of Fallen Angels, in the same spirit, appears in the Book of Jubilees (4:15; 5:1ff.), with the difference that here the angels are said to have descended to earth to instruct mankind how to order society, and when they arrived on earth they were seduced by the daughters of men. A hint at this latter idea is preserved in the additional chapter at the end of the Book of Enoch (106), called the Fragment of the Book of Noah. Here the angels are feared for having taken to themselves the daughters of man. In the Qumran *Genesis Apocryphon* (the Birth of Noah), Noah is suspected of being the offspring of an evil angel and a daughter of Man (IQApoc. 2:1–26).

Apart from the punishment meted out to them before the Deluge, final sentence on them would be passed on the day of the Last Judgment (I. En. 16:1ff.; see also [Azazel](#)). Talmudic sources contain a different version of the legend of the Fallen Angels. According to *Midrash Avkir* (see [Smaller Midrashim](#)), the leaders of the Fallen Angels, named Shemhazai and Asael (as in the Book of Enoch), heaped scorn upon the sinfulness of the generation of man after the Deluge. God submitted that if they were on earth, they would also commit sins, and in response to this challenge they offered to descend to earth. They did so and were at once seduced by the beauty of the daughters of men; they revealed the secret Name of God to a girl named Istehar, who by virtue of this knowledge was able to escape from the hands of Shemhazai and ascend to heaven. This experience did not have any effect upon Shemhazai and his associates. They took wives unto themselves who gave birth to two sons, Hiva and Hiya, whose names (the syllables Hi-va and Hi-ya) henceforth became the cries of pain uttered by suffering men. Thus, this version is closer to the story told in the Book of Jubilees, for in it the Fallen Angels commit their sin only after their descent to earth. Other versions in talmudic literature contain even more far-reaching variations from the story as told in the Book of Enoch: in these versions, it was only after the angels had assumed the nature of man that they committed sin (PdRE 22, et al.). Some talmudic circles attacked the interpretation of Genesis 6:1 in the sense that it is found in the Book of Jubilees. On one occasion, R. [Simeon b. Yohai](#) interpreted the term "*Benei Elohim*" as "sons of the judges" and condemned those who gave it the meaning of "sons of God" (Gen. R. 26:5). Similarly, *Midrash ha-Ne'lam* (on this passage) interprets the term "Nephilim" as referring, not to the Fallen Angels, but to Adam and Eve who had come into being on earth without having had a father and a mother. Maimonides also states that the term "*Elohim*" as used in this

instance should be taken in its profane sense (*hol*), the reference being to "the sons of rulers and judges" (M. Gaster, in: *Devir*, no. 1 (1923), 196). This opinion was also shared by other Jewish scholars in the Middle Ages. Related to the concept of Fallen Angels is another concept found in apocryphal literature, that of the seventy angels whom God had charged with the power over Israel after the destruction of the First Temple and who abused this power by persecuting Israel (I En. 53:3; 62:11; 63:1; 89:59; 90:22, 25). By these deeds the angels violated God's will and came to be regarded as rebellious angels to whom punishment would be meted out. It was under the influence of this concept that Satan—who in the Bible appears either as a punishing angel of God or as an angel testing the sincerity of the Righteous—came to be regarded as an independent evil demon. According to an apocryphal source, his fall followed immediately upon the creation of Adam: the angels were ordered to bow before Adam, but Satan refused and was deposed (Adam and Eve, 12ff.). Other concepts of Satan appear to have come about under the influence of Parsiism (see [Satan](#)). Satan was also known by two other titles, [Belial](#) and [Samael](#). The former was frequently identified as the spirit of evil, and in the Dead Sea Scrolls he stood at the head of the forces of darkness. The latter appears as a prime foe of Michael.

## Angels in the Talmud and Midrash

In the talmudic age, belief in angels was general, among both scholars and laymen. There were, however, differences of opinion among the sages as to the nature of angels. Some maintained that a new group of angels was created every day, who praised God on that day and then sank in the river of fire (*nehar di-nur*). Others accepted this opinion and added that only two angels, Michael and Gabriel, permanently serve God while all other angels sing their hymn of praise on the day of their creation and then disappear (Hag. 14a; Gen. R. 78:1). The distinction between eternal angels and those created for a specific purpose only seems to have been widely accepted among talmudic sages engaged with problems of religious philosophy; Ben Azzai mentions the two categories of angels as though their existence was a generally acknowledged fact (Sifra 1:1). The Mishnah makes no mention at all of angels and this may be due to the tendency to minimize their significance. Other tannaitic sources, while containing references to angels, rarely mention those angels who bear proper names. It is also significant that even eternal angels are said to be incapable of viewing the glory of God.

### ORIGIN OF ANGELS

The [Talmud](#) and Midrash contain a variety of opinions on the origin and nature of angels. The angels were created on the second or the fifth day of creation (R. Johanan and R. Hanina, Gen. R. 1:3 and parall.; S. A. Wertheimer, *Battei Midrashot*, 1 (1950), 25; cf. also R. Kirchheim in *Ozar Nehmad*, 3 (1860), 59, ed. J. Blumenfeld). Creation of angels is continuous since every pronouncement by God results in the creation of angels. Angels walk upright, speak Hebrew, and are endowed with understanding; they can fly in the air, move from one end of the world to another, and foretell the future (Hag. 16a). Thus angels have something in common with both men and demons. They have the shape of man, but consist half of fire and half of water (TJ, RH 2; [PdRK](#), ed. Mandelbaum, 6; Song R. 3:11, 15). The angels enjoy the splendor of the [Shekhinah](#) and are free of the *yezer ha-ra* ("evil inclination,"; Gen. R. 48:11); they have no needs (Yoma 4b; [Mid. Ps.](#) to 78:25; cf. also [LXX](#) and [Targum, Ps.](#) 78:25; [MGWJ](#), 22 (1873), 113); they are classified according to countries and as a result there are angels who must not leave [Erez Israel](#) (Tanh. B., Gen. 178); no angel may carry out more than one mission at a time (BM 86b; Gen. R. 50:2; Justin Martyr *Dialog.* 56c); and they are capable of error (Eccles. R. 6:10, no. 1: cf. Adam and Eve 13–05). According to one concept the size of an angel is equal to a third of the world (R. Berechiah, PR 83:12; Gen. R. 68:12).

### CLASSIFICATION OF ANGELS

Angels are divided into angels of peace and evil angels; the former dwell near God, while the latter are remote from Him (R. Johanan, Tanh. B., Lev. 39). There are also angels of life and angels of death (R. Samuel b. Isaac, Gen. R. 9:10). The number of angels is countless; they are classified into groups of higher and lower angels. Like apocryphal literature, the [aggadah](#) regards Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and Uriel as the archangels and refers to them as the ministering angels (*malakhei ha-sharet*); the angels Sandalfon, Zagzagael, and Suriel appear only rarely. The angel [Metatron](#) assumes great importance in the Midrash. There are angels who control such matters as prayers, hail, rain, anger, Gehinnom, birth and pregnancy, and other matters. The names of angels, according to talmudic sources, became known to Israel only after the return from the Babylonian exile. The [aggadah](#) elaborates upon the concept already developed in the apocryphal literature of the guardian angels of the nations of the earth and of individual kings. The former are regarded as hostile to Israel



and have to be put in chains in order to prevent their doing harm to Israel (Ex. R. 42:1; Gen. R. 56:11). When their nations fall, the guardian angels fall with them, and when they are punished the angels also suffer punishment (Mekh. SbY to 15:1; Deut. R. 1:22). A similar concept of guardian angels is, incidentally, also found with Christian Neoplatonists (see A. F. Daehne, *Geschichtliche Darstellung der juedisch-alexandrinischen Religions-Philosophie...* 2 (1834), 62ff.; C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 1913). Dubiel, the guardian angel of the Persians, was known by name to the rabbis (Yoma 77a); the guardian angel of Edom is also mentioned (Mak. 12a; A. Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, part 3 (1855), 70); in some instances, the guardian angel of a people pleads on its behalf in order to avert Divine punishment. At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, the guardian angels of all the nations were summoned by God to discuss His quarrel with Egypt. During the discussions, the angel Gabriel, acting upon orders from Michael, produced a portion of the wall which the Israelites had been forced to build for the Egyptians. When it was found to contain the body of an Israelite child, punishment was meted out—first to the guardian angel of Egypt and then to the Egyptians themselves (Yal., Ex. 243). Other *aggadot* tell of the guardian angels of all the nations accusing Israel of being no better than all others (PdRK ed. Mandelbaum, 221). Kings are also said to have guardian angels; Nebuchadnezzar's angel bore the name of Kal (Ex. R. 21:5). The sea has its own guardian angel (BB 74b; Ex. R. 15:22; 24:2). Frequent mention is made of the angel or "Prince" (rR) of the world (Ex. R. 17:4; Hul. 60a). The angels' relationship to God is described as dependence upon Him. They must take no step without His command (Tanh. B. Ex. 115). Their main purpose is to sing hymns in praise of God and to proclaim His sanctity (*ibid.*, 120; *Sif. Deut.* 306). They are incapable of viewing the glory of God and do not know their own dwelling place (Yal., Deut. 825; Mekh. SbY to 15:2). God may forbid them to sing, as He did when the Egyptians were cast into the sea (Meg. 10b.; Ex. R. 23:7). God consults the angels on occasion, as He did before the creation of man (Gen. R. 8:5). Angels are quoted as posing questions regarding contradictions found in the Bible. From the third century, the expression of God's "familia" (*Pamalya*) or the heavenly court of justice, is found in the sources. God takes no action without prior consultation with the "familia"; such consultation should be assumed in all instances where the expression "and God" appears in the biblical text. The [angel of death](#) (*malakh ha-mavet*) plays a special role among the guardian angels, and is regarded as the most evil among the wicked angels (*malakhei habbalah*).

The above data leads to the conclusion that angels were generally regarded as being superior to mortal man. On this point, however, the *aggadah* contains divergent views. Thus it is asserted that the righteous are superior to the ministering angels. Other sages, for whom this claim was too excessive, granted the righteous a status equal to that of the ministering angels; every man has the capability of becoming equal to angels and of resembling them. A third version restricts this capability to Israel as the people of God. Yet another view is that equality to angels can be achieved only after death. There is also the opinion that at the end of days the righteous will rank above the angels and that the angels will learn the mysteries of heaven from the righteous (TJ, Shab. 6:10, 8d). These varied views found in the *aggadah* were apparently influenced by contemporary trends. Heretical influences can also be discerned in the view of the archangels' participation in the creation of man and in the giving of the law; the *aggadah* combats such theories by various means and on all these occasions makes angels appear as opposing the Divine will. Nevertheless, by its extensive use of angelology as a means of interpreting the story of the Bible, the *aggadah* may well have contributed more to the intensification of the belief in angels than all the heretics and angel worshipers combined.

The *aggadah* contains numerous examples of actions carried out by angels in the biblical and post-biblical periods. As mentioned above, God consulted the angels before creating man (Sanh. 38a; Gen. R. 8:5; Justin Martyr, *Dialog.* 62c); at Adam's wedding to Eve, Michael and Gabriel acted as sponsors (*shoshevinin*, R. Abbahu, Gen. R. 8:15; [PdRE](#) 12, 16). Angels attended Adam in the Garden of Eden (Sanh. 59b; ARN 151), but they later became his accusers ([PdRE](#) 13). The angel Samael made Eve pregnant (Targ. Jon., Gen. 4:1; [PdRE](#) 21). Enoch is removed from earth and ascends to heaven, where he is given the name of Metatron (Gen. R. 25:1 and parall. [Targ. Jon.](#), Gen. 5:24); an angel leads the animals into Noah's Ark (Zev. 116; Gen. R. 32:8; [PdRE](#) 23; Targ. Jon., Gen. 6:20). God converses with the ministering seventy angels who correspond to the seventy tongues and seventy nations (see [ZDMG](#), 57 (1903), 474; [ZAW](#), 19 (1899), 1–14; 20 (1900), 38ff.; 24 (1904), 311; [REJ](#), 54 (1907), 54). Angels are subject to punishment and are expelled from heaven (Gen. R. 50:13; 68:18; 78:3) for betraying its secrets (Targ. Jon., Gen. 28:12). On special occasions, angels assume the shape of men or animals (Targ. Jon., Gen. 32:25; 37:15; see also the miraculous story of R. Hanina b. Dosa (Eccles. R. 1:1; Song R. 1:1, 4, et al.) of R. Yose b. Hanina and the two brothers of Ashkelon (Song R. 7:3, 8; Deut. R. 2:20; Ex. R. 1:36, et al.)). The angel who wrestled with Jacob seeks to return to heaven in time for the morning hymns of praise (Gen. R. 78:2). God spoke

to Sarah through an angel (Gen. R. 53:5); angels argue with God over Isaac's sacrifice (Gen. R. 56:7; Targ. Jon., Gen. 22:10) and rescue Abraham from Nimrod's fiery furnace (Pes. 118a); angels bear Isaac to Shem and Eber's house of learning (Targ. Jon., Gen. 22:19). An angel with a drawn sword appears before Laban in his dream (Targ. Jon., Gen. 31:24). Gabriel approaches Joseph in the shape of a man (Targ. Jon., Gen. 37:15). The angel Zagzagael reveals himself to Moses in the Burning Bush; angels make their appearance at the Sea of Reeds and at the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Michael or Metatron call on Moses to ascend to God; in heaven, the angels attempt to take Moses' life. The angels join God in wailing over the death of Moses, and over the destruction of the Temple. Angels try to shut the windows of heaven, to prevent Manasseh's prayer from being heard (TJ, San. 10:2, 28c). Gabriel saves the three youths in the furnace (PdRE 33). Michael smites Sennacherib's army (Ex. R. 18:5). Ministering angels also gather in the post-biblical period, to listen to the discussions between R. Johanan b. Zakkai and R. Eleazar b. Arakh (TJ, Meg. 2:1, 77a); or to engage scholars in conversation (MK 28a; Men. 41a); they accompany and protect the Righteous (Shab. 119b, et al.; see Reitzenstein, Poimandres 13). God ordains that angels be ready at all times to help man (Gen. R. 65. 15).

In the talmudic age, like in earlier periods, no traces of angel worship are to be found, in spite of the Church Fathers' assertion to the contrary. One talmudic passage (Sanh. 38b) may imply that angel worship was practiced by certain sects who were close to Christianity, but the talmudic sages took strong exception to this practice (see TJ, Ber. 9:1, 13a); the claims of Christian writers regarding angel worship among Jews may well refer to these sects.

**[Arthur Marmorstein/Editorial Staff Encyclopaedia Judaica]**

## In the Liturgy

The concepts concerning angels, as developed in the *aggadah*, have also been incorporated into the liturgy. This is especially true of the idea of angels singing hymns in praise of God; different groups of such angels appear in the *kedushot* hymns of the *tefillah* and the *yozer*, each in a role of its own. Thus, in the *tefillah*, it is the seraphim (*Sarfei Kodesh*) which are given prominence, while in the *yozer* it is the *ofanim*, *Hayyot ha-Kodesh*, and the cherubim (the mention of the latter being based on Isa. 6:3; Ezek. 3:12). It was presumably in the early geonic period that the doctrine of angels was given increasing prominence in the daily prayers, under the influence of mystical movements, especially the "*Yoredei Merkavah*." Prime examples are the introductory and connecting passages of the *Kedushah* and the hyperbolic descriptions of the *yozer*. Both these portions of the prayers afterward inspired numerous *piyyutim*, which reveal a growing speculation about angels and introduce new designations and functions for them. The very name of the *piyyutim* of the *yozer*—"ofan"—points to their preoccupation with angels; in the course of the centuries the *piyyutim* became more and more extravagant and detailed in their descriptions. The hymns inserted between the various passages of the *kedushah* describe the adoration of the angels with an infinite variety of images and terms. Of a similar nature are certain portions of the Siddur of Amram b. Sheshna Gaon, in which several angels appear in apocalyptic visions, the prayer *mi-ymini El u-mi-semoli Uzzi'el*, and others (see *Seder R. Amram*, 13b, 54a and passim). In several of the *Selihot* angels appear in yet another role, that of independent beings whose task it is to transport the prayer of man to God, so that He may have mercy upon the petitioner (*malakhei rahamim makhnisei rahamim*). This idea also has its origin in apocryphal literature, the *Talmud* and the Midrash. Special concepts of the role of certain angels were held by the group of mystics who lived in Safed in the 16th century and were first led by Isaac Luria and later by Hayyim Vital. This group ascribed to the daily prayer a special redemptive significance, for it was the prayer that achieved the perfection of world order; it regarded the angels as the leaders of the heavenly spheres who would accept only those prayers which are consecrated to a certain name of God, by means of prescribed preparations and concentrations. This implies a special appeal to the angels. According to this concept, the angel Sandalfon weaves a crown for the infinite God out of the prayers that have been accepted, and the angel Metatron rewards the petitioner for his prayer by granting him the heavenly blessing. By virtue of its doctrine and its strict way of life, the Safed group gained great influence among the Jewish people. Its continued efforts to introduce new prayers into the liturgy expressing its doctrine gained wide acceptance.

### MOVEMENTS OPPOSING THE VENERATION OF ANGELS

To counteract this movement, an opposing trend developed whose aim it was to entirely exclude angels from the liturgy. One of the most outspoken opponents of appealing to angels was Maimonides (see his commentary of Sanh. 10). Joseph Kimhi (12th cent.) made the following

observation on the practice of appealing to angels: "True penitence does not stand in need of intervention by the saints; feigned penitence will not be helped by either the dead or the saints, by man or angel (*Sefer ha-Berit* in *Milhemet Hovah*, p. 33a)." [Isaac Abrabanel](#) agrees with Maimonides' view decrying appeals to angels (*Rosh Amanah*, ch. 12). [Yom Tov Lipmann Muelhausen](#) (14–15th century) opposed the practice in the following terms: "Our sages rejected any intermediation between man and the Creator; appeals to intermediaries lead to devilry and idolatry" (*Sefer ha-Nizzahon*, no. 132). Among the opponents of appealing to angels there were such who did not reject outright the terms *malakhei rahamim makhnisei rahamim* (angels of mercy, introducers of mercy), but rather made amendments to the text that avoided any implication of pleading with angels for their intervention (see "[Netivot Olam](#)," *Netiv ha-Avodah*, ch. 12 by [Judah Loew b. Bezalel](#) of Prague; *Hatam Sofer*. OH, no. 166). Those authorities who did not introduce any amendments to the text of the prayers, felt themselves obliged to justify why they did not regard these passages as contradicting pure Monotheism (*Shibbolei ha-Leket*, no. 282 and others). Yet in spite of the rejection of the practice of appealing to angels, popular belief has clung to this doctrine and the prayerbook has retained traces of it. It was only when the *siddur* by [Benjamin Ze'ev Wolf Heidenheim](#) was published (c. 1800) and a new era of prayer book literature was inaugurated, that a regression of the doctrine of angels took place, accompanied by a general rejection of mystical ideas. Although passages of mystical contents may even be found in *siddurim* of the Reform movement, the present tendency calls for a total exclusion of such prayers from the prayer book.

**[\[Dov Shmuel Flattau \(Plato\)/Editorial Staff Encyclopaedia Judaica\]](#)**

## Mysticism

Mysticism distinguishes several categories of angels: ministering and corrupting angels, angels of mercy and angels of severe judgment. Furthermore, angels with masculine characteristics are distinguished from those with feminine qualities (*Zohar* 1:119b; 2:4b). The angels stemming from the highest light came into being on the first Day of Creation and enjoy eternal life; the others, having rebelled against God and consequently having been consumed by fire, were formed on the second Day of Creation (*ibid.*, 1:17b, 46a). The angels consist of fire and water or, according to another account, of four heavenly elements: mercy, strength, beauty, and dominion, corresponding to the four earthly elements: water, fire, earth, and air (*Sefer Yezirah* ("Book of Creation"), ch. 1, 7; *Pardes Rimmonim*, sect. 24, ch. 10f.). The angels represent spiritual powers of the finest, ethereal substance. When fulfilling their functions on earth, they manifest themselves sometimes in human form and sometimes as spirits (*Zohar*, 1:34a, 8 la, 101a; *Pardes Rimmonim*, sect. 24, ch. 11). The strength of the angels lies in the emanation of the Divine light which becomes manifest in them and because of which they are described as elements of the heavenly throne (*Pardes Rimmonim*, *ibid.*). The notion, already found in apocalyptic literature, that the ministering angels daily sing hymns before God and praise His wisdom, was enlarged upon in later Jewish mysticism. The *Zohar* (1:11 to 45) says that the angels live in the seven heavenly halls (*heikhalot*). A special hall is set aside for a certain type of angel that mourns the destruction of the Temple (the so-called *Avelei Ziyon*; "Mourners of Zion"; *ibid.*, 2:8b). The ministering angels may only begin to sing in heaven when Israel commences to praise God on earth. The angel Shemiel carries the prayers of the Jews from their synagogues up to the Temple, whereupon the hosts of ministering angels, suffused in streams of light, descend to earth only to return to the Divine throne to intone their hymns to God (*Pirkei Heikhalot*, in Eisenstein's *Ozar ha-Midrashim* 1 (1915), 123). Of the ministering angels, those serving God Himself are called youths (*bahurim*), and those serving the [Shekhinah](#) are called virgins (*betulot*; J. Israel, *Yalkut Hadash* (1648), nos. 63, 93). The angels led by archangels are arranged in four groups before the throne of God. [Uriel](#)'s group stands in front of the throne, [Raphael](#)'s group behind it; [Michael](#)'s group is to the right, and to the left is [Gabriel](#)'s (*Massekhet Heikhalot*, Eisenstein, op. cit., p. 109). The first encounter between the angels and man is supposed to have taken place when at God's behest the mysterious Book of the Heaven was handed to Adam through [Raziel](#), [Hadarniel](#), and [Raphael](#) (*Zohar* 1:55b). The angels know all men's futures; their fate is made known in heaven by a herald. Every day angels in raiments of light are dispatched to the lower world with special assignments: some serve the human body, others the soul (*Zohar* 2:10a, 11a,h, 94a, 118b). In each human being there lives a good angel and a wicked one (1:144b); man's every step is accompanied by good and bad spirits (3:48b). Even in the hereafter the angels accompany man where, depending upon his life on earth, he is received either by the angels of peace or by the angels of destruction (*Zohar Hadash* to *Ruth* (1902), 89a). In the service of the unclean of the *sitra di-semola* ("left side") stand the angels of destruction (*Malakhei Habbalah*), corresponding to the ministering angels of the

holy *sitra di-ymina* ("right side"). In accordance with God's command, the latter bring man either good or evil, but with the angels of destruction malice is a natural characteristic. These angels, too, live in seven halls and are subject to certain "superiors." They swarm through the air, mingle with humans in order to seduce them, and later report their sinful acts to their leaders so that the latter can present the indictments before God (*Pardes Rimmonim*, sect. 26, chs. 1–7). The huge army of the angels of destruction, the counterpart to God's entourage, constitutes the family of the unclean "other side," the so-called *kelippah*.

[[Samuel Abba Horodezky](#)/[Editorial Staff Encyclopaedia Judaica](#)]

## In Jewish Philosophy

### PHILO

Philo identified the angels of Scripture with the demons of the Greek philosophers (Gig. 2:6; I Sonn. 142). They were, according to him, incorporeal and immortal souls hovering in the air and ascending to heaven, which having "never felt any craving after the things of the earth," never descended into bodies. They were intermediaries between God and men, hence they are represented as "ascending and descending" in Jacob's dream. Unlike the Stoic philosopher Posidonius (b. c. 135 B.C.E.), who saw in the demons the necessary link between the upper and lower stages of being, Philo considered the angels merely as instruments of Divine Providence, whose services could on occasion be dispensed with when God chose to address men directly. There were, however, "evil angels" also, who were not messengers of God and hence "unworthy of their title." Evidently, Philo was thinking of the "fallen angels" of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

### MAGHARRIYA AND KARAITES

Philonic and gnostic influences were combined in the angelology of al-Magharriya, a Jewish sect that flourished in Egypt during the first centuries of the common era. As attested by [al-Kirkisani](#), [Karaites](#) dogmatist and exegete, and al-Shahrastani (1076 or 1086–1153), Muslim historian of religion and philosopher, the Magharriya interpreted all anthropomorphic passages in the Bible as referring to an angel, rather than God Himself, and claimed that it was the angel who created the world and addressed the prophets. According to al-Kirkisani the writings used by this sect included a work by "the Alexandrian," a reference, no doubt, to Philo. The angel-demiurge of the Magharriya, therefore, represents a distorted and gnostically inspired version of Philo's *logos*. This doctrine has no parallels in either the sectarian Qumran writings or in the Greek literature describing the Essenes. However, it is closely akin to the view held by the Karaite theologian [Benjamin Nahawendi](#) in the first half of the tenth century, as was already noted by al-Kirkisani. [Judah Hadassi](#), the 12th-century Karaite teacher, followed Nahawendi in predicating the appearance of angels in all instances of prophecy, including that of Moses, to whom the highest angel is said to have appeared.

### SAADIAH GAON

[Saadiah Gaon](#) rejected the [Karaite](#) view that the anthropomorphic terms in the Bible refer to angels. He explained the passages describing Divine revelations to Moses and the other prophets by his theory of the "created glory" (*kavod nivra*) and "created speech" (*dibbur nivra*). The "created glory," identified by him with the rabbinic concept of *Shekhinah* ("Divine Presence"), is a manifestation of light accompanying the "created speech" and proof that the voice heard is of Divine origin. The angels, too, are created and luminous, but rank below the *kavod*. Nevertheless, Saadiah does admit that prophetic revelation may also take place through the mediacy of angels.

### ABRAHAM IBN EZRA

[Abraham ibn Ezra](#) understood Saadiah's views as asserting the superiority of men over angels and attacked his notion. Man, according to him, is far below the angels, since all his knowledge is imperfect; only under certain conditions may his soul be admitted to the rank of the angels in the afterlife. This disagreement stemmed from different conceptions of the angelic nature. For Saadiah, the angels, although more refined in substance than man, are still corporeal beings, while in Ibn Ezra's view, they are identical with the immaterial or simple substances of Neoplatonic ontology. They represent the "supernal world," which is "all glory" and consists of the "supernal forms" of all things below (cf. Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis 1:1, which is more explicit in the first recension, J. Blumenfeld (ed.), *Ozar Nehmad*, 2 (1857), 210ff.; cf. also M. Friedlaender, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham ibn Ezra* (1877), 115). This Neoplatonic view of the world of angels is poetically described in Ibn Ezra's Hebrew paraphrase of *Hai ibn Yaqzan* by the Muslim philosopher Avicenna, which he called *Hai ben Mekiz* (in D. Rosin's *Reime und Gedichte des Abraham ibn Ezra* (1885–94), 196). Avicenna identified the angels of the Koran with the "separate intelligences," which, following

Aristotle, he assumed to be the external movers of the spheres.

### **MAIMONIDES**

The equation of the "separate intelligences" (Ar., *'uqul Mufaraka*; Heb., *sekhelim nifradim* or *sekhelim nivdalim*) with angels became the accepted doctrine in Jewish Aristotelianism. Declaring that the angels are incorporeal, [Maimonides](#) writes, "This agrees with the opinion of Aristotle; there is only this difference—he used the term 'intelligences' and we say 'angels' instead" (Guide, 2:6). This view marks a radical departure from the traditional view of angels as corporeal beings. The assertion of their incorporeality raised the questions of how they could be visibly perceived and what could be meant by the biblical descriptions of them as flying, winged, and so on. Maimonides answered that all such attributes should be understood as figurative expressions (Guide, 1:49). At the same time he considered the word "angel" a homonymous term denoting not only the separate intelligences, but all natural and psychic forces, both generic and individual. Thus, the formative power which produces and shapes the limbs of an embryo may be called an angel; the libidinous disposition aroused by the sight of a beautiful woman may be spoken of as "an angel of lust" (as in Gen. R. 85:8); the spheres and elements, too, may be referred to as "angels" (Guide, 2:6–7). The rabbinic statement "Every day God creates a legion of angels; they sing before Him and disappear" (Gen. R. 78:1) was taken by him to describe the natural and psychic forces in transient individuals.

### **AVICENNA AND AVERROES**

Jewish Aristotelians were greatly influenced by the divergent views of the Muslim philosophers [Avicenna](#) and [Averroes](#), who identified angels with the moving principles of the celestial spheres. According to Avicenna (c. 980–1037), the motions of the spheres were due to two kinds of movers, the intelligences and the celestial souls. The intelligences moved the souls by virtue of being their objects of contemplation, and the souls, in turn, moved their respective celestial spheres. Avicenna identified the hierarchy of the intelligences with the cherubim and that of the celestial souls with the ministering angels. This doctrine and the complicated theory of emanation supporting it were criticized by Averroes, who eliminated the angelic hierarchy of celestial souls and preserved only the angelic hierarchy of intelligences. He interpreted the "soul of the sphere" in the sense of "nature of the sphere."

[Abraham ibn Daud](#) and Maimonides followed Avicenna, while Jewish Averroists like [Isaac Albalag](#) adopted Averroes' angelology. Ibn Daud (*Emunah Ramah*, ed. by S. Weil (1919), 58–62) demonstrated the existence of angels from the motions of the heavens, which were caused by the celestial souls' desire to imitate the intelligences. This is a clear restatement of Avicenna's dual hierarchy with the important difference, however, that the celestial souls are not specifically designated as angels. Maimonides also accepted Avicenna's dual hierarchy but reserved the term "angel" for the intelligences, the rank of an angelic order being in proportion to its capacity to conceive of God (Yad, Yesodei ha-Torah, 2:5–8). Isaac Albalag, on the other hand, followed Averroes in opposing Avicenna's position and even exceeded Averroes' critique by denying the need for an internal principle of motion in the spheres. He proposed instead a dual hierarchy of intelligible and natural forces, or angels. Philosophers who rejected the doctrine of separate intelligences in its entirety and the angelology based on it were [Judah ha-Levi](#) (Kuzari, 5:21; cf., however, 4:3, where he refuses to pronounce either for or against this view), [Hasdai Crescas](#) (*Or Adonai*, 1:2, 15; 4:3), and [Isaac Arama](#), (*Akedat Yizhak*. 2). Both Avicennians and Averroists agreed that the separate intelligences (i.e., angels) were simple substances or pure forms without matter. A different view was held by Jewish Neoplatonists, such as [Isaac Israeli](#) who described the hypostasis of intellect as composed of spiritual matter and form, and [Solomon ibn Gabirol](#), who held that the intelligible substances or angels are composed of matter and form. Abraham ibn Daud (and Thomas Aquinas in his *De ente et essentia*) attacked Gabirol's view. [Isaac Abrabanel](#), in his commentary on the Book of Kings (ch. 3) quotes Gabirol's doctrine and offers an elaborate survey of the views advanced on the subject. For the role of angels in prophecy according to the Jewish Aristotelians see [Prophecy](#).

### **[Alexander Altmann]**

## **Modern Period**

The modern Jewish attitude to angels tends to regard the traditional references and descriptions as symbolic, poetic, or representing an earlier world-concept. Contemporary movements such as [Reform Judaism](#) and certain sections of the Conservative Movement have either completely expunged from the liturgy all references to angels or where they remain have understood them in poetic or mythological terms. They feel that a belief in their existence is out of keeping with a modern approach to the world and God and cannot be reconciled with modern rationalism.

The attitude prevailing among many of the Orthodox is ambiguous. They have retained the relevant liturgical passages and accept the appropriate biblical and rabbinic references, but nevertheless modern Orthodoxy tends to demythologize them and reinterpret them without compromising the belief in their ontological status. Angels are interpreted symbolically and belief in their existence is not denied altogether. The degree of literalness of this belief varies from sub-group to sub-group. It is only among the small fundamentalistic sections, such as some of the Hasidim as well as the oriental Jewish communities, that the literal belief in angels, which for so long characterized Jewish thought, is still upheld.

**[Editorial Staff Encyclopaedia Judaica]**