

# Angels & Demons

## Part 1

I want to do something a little bit different from our usual examination of a single book and take a step back and look at a particular idea and look at how that idea shifts across time within the scriptures.

For this session, I wanted to look at the idea of supernatural beings, particularly angels and demons. These beings show up sporadically in the scriptures (angels considerably more than demons) but most of what we think we know about them comes from extra-biblical sources; i.e., texts that aren't part of the Bible.

We are going to begin with angels, partly because they are mentioned far more frequently and because I just like angels better.

So let's start with the word itself.

Our English word, angel, comes through Latin and French from the Greek word *angelos*. In ancient Greek *angelos* simple meant a messenger. It's the same word that is at the root of our word *evangelist*. When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek a century or two before Jesus was born, *angelos* was used for the Hebrew word *Mal-akh*, which means "messenger" in Hebrew. This word is the origin of the name Malachi, which was intended as a kind of pseudonym or title of the author of the prophetic book we call Malachi and means "my messenger."

So, basically, angels are messengers of God. What we see in the Scriptures though, is that the messengers of God morph into more general servants of God and take on other roles, most prominently that of guardian or warrior.

There are other supernatural beings mentioned in the scripture, Seraphim and Cherubim. Actually Seraphim are only used to describe celestial beings in one verse, in Isaiah (6:7). Cherubim are much more common, and are mentioned in 16 books of the Old Testament

Genesis	2 Kings	Ezekiel
Exodus	1 Chronicles	Daniel
Numbers	2 Chronicles	Hebrews
1 Samuel	Ezra	Sirach
2 Samuel	Psalms	
1 Kings	Isaiah	

Most famously, golden cherubim statues were part of the cover of the Ark of the Covenant as described in chapter 15 of Exodus. These Cherubim looked markedly different from the cute chubby flying babies we now associate with the word.

Though we tend to lump Seraphim, Cherubim and *Mal-akh* into one class of celestial beings – that is we classify all of them as “angels.” It isn’t explicitly clear from Scripture itself that they are. We’ll get into all that a little later though.

As we’ve discussed before, the Bible was written, edited, re-written, and amended by many hands over many centuries. Perhaps a thousand years separates the oldest texts now included in the bible from the newest.

For us, the bible begins with Genesis, which starts with the story of creation, and so we naturally tend to think of it as being the oldest part of the Bible. However, that isn’t actually the case and the order of the Bible is most definitely not the order in which its books were written. There is some semblance to the order in which the events described are in chronological order, at least in the Torah (the first five books) and in the Deuteronomic History (Joshua – 2 Samuel). Most likely though, these texts were among those written later.

What seems likely, to most scholars, is that these books (Torah and History) were written, or at least finalized in their current form during right after the period known as the Babylonian Exile. These works were created to both make sense of the Exile experience and to form a nucleus of Jewish identity that was independent of place.

It is, however, in the texts written during and right after exile, that angels make their appearances in the Hebrew Scripture.

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### Part 2

So, why did the idea of angels appear coincident with the experience of exile in Mesopotamia?

It comes both from the influence of Babylonian cosmology and beliefs as well as a shifting conception of the nature of God among the Israelites. Like most ancient peoples, the early Israelites recognized a pantheon of deities. We see echoes of this in scriptures whenever God reminds the people to not worship other gods. It doesn't say those other gods aren't real, only that they shouldn't be worshipped. We also see it in one of the oldest sections of scripture, the Song of Moses, which may have originally been composed as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC which was later stuck into Deuteronomy where it says; "When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods; the LORD's own portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share." Deut 32:8-9. Here it says that what we think of as God was given the land of Israel to divinely rule.

Technically, the Israelites were Henotheists, they recognized many gods, but *worshipped* only one god. We see a great example of this in psalm 137 which goes; "For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" However, in exile they still felt the presence of God with them and that experience caused them to question their assumptions about what they perceived as the limits of God's authority.

But as the Israelites moved towards monotheism and the insight that there is only One God, they still were faced with the tradition of the other gods and various lesser deities. What were those beings then? One way to answer that is to just assume that the lesser spiritual powers were themselves either creations and servants of God or manifestations of God.

This is one of the points where we are probably seeing the influence of Babylonian religion. Babylonian beliefs were derived from the Sumerians (the oldest civilization in Mesopotamia) and their beliefs included a vast set of divine servants, who themselves had significant powers, called the Anunnaki. The Annunaki served the "great gods," like Marduk, the patron of Babylon, including as warriors, and interestingly, lived both in the heavens and in the underworld.

This is similar to what we later see in the development of the saints, where converted peoples in Europe adapt their pre-Christian myths and practices into something more amenable to their new beliefs.

Relief of an Annunaki.



As we shall see when we go through the various appearances of angel`s in the scriptures, the way angels are described makes them seem very much like manifestations of the Holy spirit, as Christian understand it.

However, with the Hebrew Scriptures, outside of the descriptions of cherubim and seraphim, angels are not usually described as differing significantly in appearance from humans and function primarily as messengers conveying God`s word.

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## Part 3

### Angels of the Hebrew Scripture in the era of the Monarchies

Hosea

Hosea is one of the oldest books of the bible, written early in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, about 200 years after the rise of King David. In it, the prophet Hosea compares the relationship between Israel and God as like a marriage, using his own marriage as a metaphor. Hosea's wife, Gomer, has been unfaithful, he writes, just like the northern kingdom of Israel, whose leaders have worshipped gods other than YHWH. It is most famous for being the source of the phrase "reap the whirlwind."

In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, we encounter a reference to an angel when the author refers to a legendary tale of Jacob wrestling with an angel.

*The LORD has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, and **in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed**, he wept and sought his favor; he met him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him. The LORD the God of hosts, the LORD is his name! But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.*

Hosea 12:2-6

Hosea's version is a little different from the version of the story we know from Genesis, as the Genesis account doesn't say that he wrestled with an angel, but with a man. There is a strong inference that the "man" is God, but it isn't made explicitly clear one way or another.

*Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.*

Genesis 32:24-29

The Genesis story itself continues several mentions of angels, including just before this episode and a few chapters earlier where Jacob has his dream about seeing a ladder with angels ascending and descending. So, the Genesis story could have explicitly said the wrestling foe was angel but didn't. One possible takeaway from this is to see that as the oral tradition was written down and reworked, the story of Jacob wrestling a supernatural being is altered to become Jacob wrestling with God. Another possible takeaway though is that, in the ancient Hebrew imagination, angels weren't necessarily separate and independent beings, but actual manifestations of God.

We can see this duality also in a passage from Isaiah.



Isa\_37:36 Then the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies.

Most scholars believe that Isaiah was the work of three different authors, each separated by more than a century. The original author, cleverly named “First Isaiah” could well have been the historic court prophet, Isaiah ben Amoz, who served under several kings in the eight century BC (so a possible contemporary of Hosea).

In this passage, Isaiah is writing of the attack on the southern kingdom of Judah by the Assyrian empire, a campaign that eventually resulted in Assyria calling off the attack, leaving Judah intact (unlike its neighbor to the north, Israel).

What’s interesting here is that First Isaiah mentions Cherubim (who may or may not be angels) as well as the “Angel of the Lord.” The passage records an interaction between King Hezekiah and the prophet. Hezekiah had witnessed the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in the year 701BC, and then 20 years later, the Assyrians invaded his kingdom. There is actually an historical account of the invasion inscribed on a stone tablet known as the Sennacherib Prism, which is actually in a museum in Chicago. The inscription states that Hezekiah paid off the Assyrians (which the Bible also relates) but does not mention the destruction of his army. Archaeologists have shown that under Hezekiah, the city defenses were greatly strengthened, and perhaps as importantly, the springs outside the city were all directed through a large tunnel into the city culminating in the Pool of Siloam, where Jesus restored sight to a blind man. This would have made it difficult for the Assyrians to mount an effective siege.

Hezekiah, was considered a good king who did much to promote the worship of YHWH and end the worship of other Gods. He is also mentioned in the genealogies at the beginning of Matthew as one of the kings from whom Joseph was descended and thus in whose line Jesus was born.

*And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying: “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods, but the work of human hands—wood and stone—and so they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD.”*

*Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying: “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning King Sennacherib of Assyria, this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: She despises you, she scorns you—virgin daughter Zion; she tosses her head—behind your back, daughter Jerusalem. “Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and haughtily lifted your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have mocked the Lord, and you have said, ‘With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses*

*of Lebanon; I felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses; I came to its remotest height, its densest forest. I dug wells and drank waters, I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt.' "Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins, while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and confounded; they have become like plants of the field and like tender grass, like grass on the housetops, blighted before it is grown. "I know your rising up and your sitting down, your going out and coming in, and your raging against me. Because you have raged against me and your arrogance has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth; I will turn you back on the way by which you came. "And this shall be the sign for you: This year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, shoot an arrow there, come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return; he shall not come into this city, says the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David." **Then the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians;** when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. As he was worshiping in the house of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon succeeded him.*

Isaiah 37:15-38

We'll talk about cherubim another time, but here we encounter the phrase Angel of the Lord. We're going to see that many more times in other texts. Oftentimes, just like here, this being is named as *the* Angel of the Lord, as if there were only one.

One way to understand this is to think of *the* Angel of the Lord as a kind of direct manifestation of God or at least of God's power. The passage doesn't suggest something like a group or army of angels (the famous host of heaven) but a singular entity able to destroy an entire army. This is not so different from the way we use the terms Spirit of the Lord or the Word, describing something that is, as far as we can tell, truly God.

So, in these two very early texts, we encounter angel (Mal-akh in Hebrew), not as a class of created beings but as something more like the Holy Spirit, the actual presence of God on earth.



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### Part 4

### Angels of the Hebrew Scripture in the era of the Exile

The kingdom of Judah entered into a conflict with the emergent Babylonian empire at the end of the seventh century BC. In fact, this conflict was part of a wider civil war within what had been the Assyrian Empire, whose capital was at Nineveh. A brother of the Assyrian king rebelled and gathered together forces from across the southern and eastern parts of Assyrian territory and established an independent kingdom. At this time, Judah was a vassal state to Assyria and got caught up in the conflict when its king, Jehoiakim, along with several other vassals, decided to take advantage of the conflict and refused to forward the annual tribute. The Babylonians decided to expand their dominion to the west and invaded these vassal states. Eventually, the Babylonian confederation also descended into conflict, and the eastern provinces, led by Persia, took over the territory of the Babylonians and rump Assyrians.

Important for us is that when Judea was conquered, the nobility and many of their supporters were taken into exile to Babylon. Babylon was much more cosmopolitan city than Jerusalem had been and this period was actually one of the most fruitful for ancient Jewish literature and philosophy. As is recorded in Esther, many Jews chose to remain in Babylon (and Persia generally) and this period marks the beginning of the Jewish diaspora. Persian Judaism would be influential for many centuries.

It is in this period that we see the completion of what is known as the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, & Kings) which tells, from the perspective of the priests and kings, why the defeat of Judah occurred. Namely, it was blamed on insufficient fealty to God, and especially to intermarriage with non-Israelite women. (The prophets had some other ideas). It is also the time when the first collection of Psalms (which were essentially hymns) was gathered, maybe up through Psalm 89 or so. Remember, this is also the time when Judaism is becoming more explicitly monotheistic.

And it is in these texts that begin to encounter more frequent mentions of angels, or at least *the* angel of the Lord.

Among the four history books (Six for Christians who chop up Samuel and Kings), the word angels shows up in three of them – there are no angels in Joshua – and almost all of the mentions are of *the* Angel of the Lord. As we saw in the writings of Hosea, some of the *stories* in these books were previously known. They aren't necessarily being invented in exile; rather the various legend, stories, and tales of these ancient heroes (David lived more than 400 years before the exile, the age of Joshua and Moses would have been nearly 1000 years in the past) were collected, edited, and new parts written to connect the stories into a cohesive whole that supported the theological hypothesis of the authors. In other words, the presence, or not of angels, may reflect these older perspectives but the stories were so old and likely well-known, that their presence may have been difficult to alter without any questioning it.

In Judges, which tells of the tribal era between Joshua and King Saul, there are three episodes in which people interact with or speak to the Angel of the Lord. In each incidence, it is not possible to distinguish between the Angel of the Lord and the Lord himself (or herself). It is also the case, that the Angel of the Lord is not distinguishable from regular humans.

In the first, The Angel of the Lord appears as something like a prophet shortly after the (somewhat incomplete) conquest to warn the people about keeping up their part of the covenant.

*Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done! So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept.*

Judges 2:1-4

In the second, the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon,

*Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian." Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you." He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them."*

Judges 6:11-16

And in the last, The Angel of the Lord speaks with the parents of Samson

*And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring; I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, 'You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'" Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, "O LORD, I pray, let the man of God whom you sent come to us again and teach us what we are to do concerning the boy who will be born." God listened to Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "The man who came to me the other day has*

appeared to me." Manoah got up and followed his wife, and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." Then Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's rule of life; what is he to do?" **The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Let the woman give heed to all that I said to her. She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine. She is not to drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. She is to observe everything that I commanded her."** Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Allow us to detain you, and prepare a kid for you." **The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat your food; but if you want to prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD."** (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.)

Judges 13:3-16

In Samuel, which tells of the prophet Samuel's role in establishing a kingdom in order to unite the Israelites and in Kings, which tells of the descendants of David, we can see a shift. Here *the* Angel of the Lord is more often *an* Angel of the Lord.

In a short passage in 2Samuel, David asks, upon returning to Jerusalem after the revolt of his son Absalom, why one of the nobles (who was grandson of Saul) had chosen to stay behind with Absalom instead of fleeing with David). Here the noble compares David to the Angel of the Lord, implying that the king was, in some regard, an extension of God.

*He answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for your servant said to him, 'Saddle a donkey for me, so that I may ride on it and go with the king.' For your servant is lame. He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. **But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you.** For all my father's house were doomed to death before my lord the king; but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to appeal to the king?"*

2Samuel 19:26-28

But later, in the final chapter, when God is punishing Israel because of David's insistence on instituting a census in direct contradiction of God's will. There is a clear distinction between God and the Angel of the Lord unlike what we've previously seen when God commands the angel of the Lord to not destroy Jerusalem.

*But when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, **the LORD relented concerning the evil, and said to the angel who was bringing destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand."** The angel of the LORD was then by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. When David saw the angel who was destroying the people, he said to the LORD, "I alone have sinned, and I alone have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."*

2Samuel 24:16-17

In Kings, the final book of the Deuteronomistic History, we again encounter the Angel of the Lord. As in Samuel, sometimes it seems as though the Angel of the Lord is synonymous with God and at others, they are distinct.

The first episode is between two prophets, one from Israel (the deceptive one) and one from Judah.

Here, the deceptive prophet speaks of an angel as a messenger.

*He went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak tree. He said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" He answered, "I am." Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat some food." But he said, "I cannot return with you, or go in with you; nor will I eat food or drink water with you in this place; for it was said to me by the word of the LORD: You shall not eat food or drink water there, or return by the way that you came." Then the other said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD: Bring him back with you into your house so that he may eat food and drink water." But he was deceiving him.*

1Kings 13:14-18

The next episode concerns the prophet Elijah shortly after he has caused the death of many prophets of Baal after the three year drought the Lord has punished Israel with because of the unfaithfulness of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. This passage is a little ambiguous about angels, and honestly it could be read either way; that this is the Lord present with Elijah or this a messenger of God (with some supernatural powers) come to Elijah's assistance.

*Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.*

1Kings 19:1-8

Later in Elijah's story, he again encounters the Angel of the Lord, and again it is a little ambiguous, and could be interpreted either way.

*Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury." But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' Now therefore thus says the LORD, 'You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.'" So Elijah went.*

2Kings 1:2-4

The final episode in Kings with the angel of the Lord is less ambiguous and clearly the Angel of the Lord is God himself. However, the passage here is almost word for word copied from the passage in Isaiah we've already spoken about.

Lastly, the Psalms. In all of the psalm, there are only two mentions of angels, in Psalms 34 and 35. I don't think we should be surprised about this. The psalms are less God's word to us and more our words to God. These are prayers offered in verse and sung to God, plumbing the depths of human emotion from grief to joy, and thanksgiving to lament. And as they are a little self-focused; very much rooted in the human psyche and experience, there is little space for angels. In both cases, they suggest the angel of the Lord as a kind of spirit of God or manifestation of God in human life.

Psalm 34:1-9

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth  
My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.

Psalm 35:1-9

Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!

Take hold of shield and buckler, and rise up to help me!

Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers; say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life. Let them be turned back and confounded who devise evil against me.

Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them on.

Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life.

Let ruin come on them unawares. And let the net that they hid ensnare them; let them fall in it—to their ruin.

Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his deliverance.

As we can see, the idea of an angel in the period of exile is moving from being a singular manifestation of God's power and coming to also be a distinctive servant of God, primarily involved in the conveying of messages.

## Angels & Demons

### Part 5

#### Angels of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Post Exile Period (ca 538-332BCE)

As discussed last week, about 50 years (or two generations) after the kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and its elites taken into exile, another civil/religious war erupted which resulted in the eventual victory of the rebels, the Persians under their leader Cyrus the Great. Cyrus allowed some of the exiled Judeans to return to Jerusalem where they began to rebuild the city and temple and reestablish their rule as a province of the Persian empire. It is in this period that much of the Hebrew scriptures were brought into their present day form, including the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers as well as a large chunk of Deuteronomy). Other important books created or finalized in this period are Chronicles, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, "Third" Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Joel. By far, the largest number of angel references comes from the books compiled in this period.

#### TORAH

Angels appear in three of these books, Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers (but not in Leviticus or Deuteronomy). Most of these references harken back to the formula we encountered in the age of the monarchies, "The Angel of the LORD." As we discussed earlier, this formulation would seem to refer to a manifestation of God's self on earth rather than to a kind of celestial or supernatural being. This shouldn't be too surprising since these books were most likely stitched together tales and legends that had long existed in oral form.

#### Genesis

There are four main episodes where angels are mentioned in Genesis, all of them coming from the story of Abraham. Two of these clearly follow the Angel of the Lord formula we saw previously, a third seems to clearly fit in that mold though doesn't actually use the phrase "the angel of the Lord," while the fourth is a kind of hybrid. We'll start with the angel of the Lord ones.

The first comes in the story of Hagar, Abraham's concubine who is the mother of Ishmael, Abraham's older son. In the story, Abraham's wife is jealous of Hagar and banishes her and the child presumably in hopes they would die in the wilderness, but God chooses to protect them.

*Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her. The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone,*



*and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." So she named the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El-roi"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?"*

Genesis 16:5-13

The second appearance of angels comes in the story about Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his youngest son, Isaac. God has commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice as a kind of test of Abraham's commitment and is about to bring the blade down when the Angel of the Lord intervenes. Here, the text itself implies that the Angel of the Lord is synonymous with God.

*When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son,*

Genesis 22:9-16

The third angelic episode is part of the story of Abraham's efforts to find a suitable wife for his (surely traumatized) youngest son, Isaac. In truth, there really are no angels present in the story, rather Abraham refers back to an earlier encounter he had and then later, a servant recounts Abraham's recollection to Rebekah's father. In this episode, honestly, the meaning of the angel is more ambiguous than in the previous two, but seems (to me at least) to suggest something like the "spirit of God" as above.

*Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac." The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came? Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.*

Genesis 24:2-7

*My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house.*

Genesis 24:37-40

The oddball one concerns some visitors who come to see Abraham and Sarah. In the beginning we are told that God appears to Abraham but also that what he saw were three men, who he believes is

God. What is interesting here is that the three are said to communicate as though they were one and Abraham seems to refer to all of them together as the Lord.

*The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."* Genesis 18:3-5

Shortly afterwards the men, again speaking as one, ask Abraham about his wife. But then there is a shift where only one of them is singled out as the Lord.

*They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son."* Genesis 18:9-14

But then the three visitors split up with one (God) going one way and the other two travel on to see Lot in Sodom. It is at this point that the two are identified as angels.

*And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the square." But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.* Genesis 18:33-19:3

When later after the men of the city seek to harm the visitors, the angels use supernatural powers to blind the crowd and tell Lot that God has sent them to destroy the city. So here we see angels as both messengers and warriors.

*But they replied, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and he would lay the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door. Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place. For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it."* Genesis 19:9-13

Before we move on to Exodus, there are two other brief mentions of angels in the Jacob story cycle, famously when he dreams of them climbing up and down a ladder and then later just before his reunion with Esau it is said that he is met by “angels of God.” So, while in the Abraham cycle, most of the mentions are of the Angel of the Lord, in the Jacob cycle there is the implication that there are angels and that serve God.

## **Exodus**

Angels appear only briefly in the Exodus saga, and in most cases, it is either explicitly “the angel of the Lord” or implicitly some direct manifestation of God’s power.

The first mention is when the burning bush appeared to Moses

*Exo\_3:2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.*

All of the other mentions refer to the presence of God that accompanies the Israelites through the desert as the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, though some seem to suggest the direct presence of God’s self, while others suggest merely the presence of and God’s representative or servant.

*Exo\_14:19 The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them.*

*Exo\_23:20 I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.*

*Exo\_23:23 When my angel goes in front of you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out,*

*Exo\_32:34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you. Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin.”*

*Exo\_33:2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*

## **Numbers**

The final reference in the Torah comes in Numbers, which tells of the continuing journey of the Israelites towards the promised land, picking up where Exodus leaves off. An angel, or maybe *the* angel appears in the story of Balaam. As a reminder, Balaam is a prophet in the far east who is summoned by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites who have turned up on his doorstep. When Balaam does get up to go the king of Moab (with God’s ok just FYI) the angel of the Lord stands in the roadway with a sword and prevents Balaam’s donkey from continuing. The old formula, “the angel of the Lord” and does seem to be used as a manifestation of God’s self.

*God’s anger was kindled because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. The donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey turned off the road, and*

went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back onto the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again. Then the angel of the LORD went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. **Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road,** with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face. The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me. Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will return home." The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but speak only what I tell you to speak." So Balaam went on with the officials of Balak.

Numbers 22:22-35

## CHRONICLES

The Book of Chronicles, like the Books of Samuel and Kings tells the story of the Israelite monarchy, in fact there is much of Chronicles that seems lifted directly from those books. However, there are some important distinctions. First, there is a greater focus on David and Solomon, with nearly half the book devoted to them (like Kings, Christians have split this book into two). Second, Chronicles is focused on the kings of Judah (the southern kingdom) where Kings spends more time telling of the kings of Israel (the northern, and larger kingdom), and third, Chronicles has a more hopeful perspective; focusing more on what the Israelite kings got right and how they were faithful than on their failings. One way to think of it is that Chronicles is a retelling of Israelites story, drawing on the same sources as Kings but told from a different perspective about the meaning of the Exile.

Anyway, There is a single episode in Chronicles concerning angels, which tells the story of God's reaction to David's census. This is a very similar but more expansive story than the one in from 2Samuel mentioned earlier. Like that earlier version, this one also implies that it is *an* angel of God and not *the* angel of God; in other words, the angel here is a servant sent by God

*David said to God, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant; for I have done very foolishly." The LORD spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the LORD: Three things I offer you; choose one of them, so that I may do it to you.'"* So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Take your choice: either three years of famine; or three months of devastation by your foes, while the sword of your enemies overtakes you; or three days of the sword of the LORD, pestilence on the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress; let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is very great; but let me not fall into human hands." So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel; and seventy thousand persons fell in Israel. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but when he was about to destroy it, the LORD took note and relented concerning the calamity; he said to the destroying angel, "Enough! Stay your hand." The angel of the LORD was then standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the

*Jebusite. David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. And David said to God, "Was it not I who gave the command to count the people? It is I who have sinned and done very wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand, I pray, O LORD my God, be against me and against my father's house; but do not let your people be plagued!" Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to tell David that he should go up and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So David went up following Gad's instructions, which he had spoken in the name of the LORD. Ornan turned and saw the angel; and while his four sons who were with him hid themselves, Ornan continued to thresh wheat.*

1Chronicles 21:8-21

## **ZECHARIAH**

Zechariah is a prophetic book (one of the twelve minor prophets in the Hebrew version) who apparently lived during the reign of Darius I of Persia about a generation after the end of the exile. The book of Zechariah, at least large portions of it, are apocalyptic – that is they tell of vision pertaining to the end of the world. At the very beginning of the book, the author tells of how an angel came to him as a kind of guide/interpreter and gave him a vision. This is the very same formula that John of Patmos used in the beginning of his apocalyptic Revelation more than five hundred years later.

This vision angel appears throughout the book, but here is how it is introduced in the first chapter. It is very clear in this passage that angel here is a messenger of God.

*On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo; and Zechariah said, In the night I saw a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are." So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, "They are those whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth. "Then they spoke to the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace." Then the angel of the LORD said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years?" Then the LORD replied with gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim this message: Thus says the LORD of hosts; I am very jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse. Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Proclaim further: Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.*

Zechariah 1:7-17

## PSALMS

And finally, there are several mentions of angels in some of the later psalms which most likely were composed in this period. In each of these, like the passage in Zechariah, angels are clearly distinct from God and are servants of God.

Psa\_78:25 Mortals ate of the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance.

Psa\_78:49 He let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.

Psa\_91:11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Psa\_103:20 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.

Psa\_148:2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

So, in conclusion, what we see is that in the period following the exile, as the Israelites re-examined their history and reimagined their legends, they were clearly imagining and incorporating changing notions about how God acted in the world in their texts, including through servant beings like angels. As I mentioned at the very beginning of this study, this shift is likely the result of numerous factors such as the influence of Babylonian mythology and a growing tendency towards strict monotheism among the Israelites which saw the other gods reimagined as subject beings under God's authority. As the Israelites came to understand the extent of God's authority beyond their homeland, they also imagined an expanded cosmology to help explain that understanding.



## Angels & Demons

### Part 6

#### Angels of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Hellenic Period (332BC – Christ)

For the most part, by the time Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire in the fourth century BC, the greater part of the Hebrew Scriptures had been written, compiled, and edited into something like the forms we have today. The only significant instance of an angel from scripture in this period comes in the book of Tobit. Tobit, of course, is not actually canonical but can be found in the Apocrypha. You may remember that the books of the Apocrypha were books found in the original Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures (known as the Septuagint) but which were not part of the Hebrew versions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tobit is set during the time of the Assyrian empire and tells of Tobit, who had been an Israelite taken when the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and who had become a servant of the Assyrian king but who in his old age had fallen on hard times. In the story, Tobit sends his son, Tobias, to a faraway city to retrieve some silver he had left there in safekeeping. Because the way is dangerous, Tobit implores Tobias to find a reliable guide. The guide he finds is, unknown to either, an angel. In fact this is the first instance of an angel with a name, Raphael which in Hebrew means, "God has healed."

Tob 5:4 So Tobias went out to look for a man to go with him to Media, someone who was acquainted with the way. He went out and found the angel Raphael standing in front of him; but he did not perceive that he was an angel of God.

Tob 5:5 Tobias said to him, "Where do you come from, young man?" "From your kindred, the Israelites," he replied, "and I have come here to work." Then Tobias said to him, "Do you know the way to go to Media?"

Tob 5:6 "Yes," he replied, "I have been there many times; I am acquainted with it and know all the roads. I have often traveled to Media, and would stay with our kinsman Gabael who lives in Rages of Media. It is a journey of two days from Ecbatana to Rages; for it lies in a mountainous area, while Ecbatana is in the middle of the plain."

Raphael then accompanies Tobias on his journey and even manages to find him a wife along the way. Of the bible stories that mention angels this is the only one that might be something like a guardian angel or like an episode of Touched by an Angel.

At the end of the story, Raphael fesses up about who he really is and everyone lives happily ever after.

*"I will now declare the whole truth to you and will conceal nothing from you. Already I have declared it to you when I said, 'It is good to conceal the secret of a king, but to reveal with due honor the works of God.' So now when you and Sarah prayed, it was I who brought and read the record of your prayer before the glory of the Lord, and likewise whenever you would bury the dead. And that time when you did not hesitate to get up and leave your dinner to go and bury the dead, I was sent to you to test you. And at the*

*same time God sent me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord." The two of them were shaken; they fell face down, for they were afraid. But he said to them, "Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God forevermore. As for me, when I was with you, I was not acting on my own will, but by the will of God. Bless him each and every day; sing his praises. Although you were watching me, I really did not eat or drink anything—but what you saw was a vision.*

Tobit 12:11-19

So, on the cusp of the birth of Jesus, we have evidence of an emerging understanding about angels that begins to match more closely our own ideas perhaps. An angel who is helpful, who has miraculous powers, who brings messages from God and who, when his identity is revealed says "Do not be afraid!"

Next week we'll look at the evolution of angelology within Judaism outside of the Bible (the people who wrote the Dead Sea scroll, for instance, were really into angels). We'll also begin to look at the depiction of what we might consider heavenly beings that have become synonymous with angels but who appear very differently from the human-like beings we have talked about so far.

Uriel, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael

# Angels & Demons

## Part 7

### Other Heavenly Beings in the Scriptures

Aside from angels (*Malakh* in Hebrew, *angelos* in Greek) there are other beings mentioned in scriptures that many think of as angels. These are the Cherubim, the Seraphim, the Host of Heaven, and the Nephilim. There are other beings mentioned as residing in heaven, such as the four creatures of Revelation, but they are not usually thought of as angels.

Let's start with the most iffy, the Nephilim. The Nephilim are only mentioned twice in the Hebrew Scriptures, in one verse each in Genesis and Numbers. Rather than angels, they are sometimes referred to as giants. They were "sons of God" who came to earth and had children with female humans and their descendants were famous warriors and heroes. There are a lot of parallels here with the demi-gods of Greek myth, such as Heracles and in Sumerian mythology as well, such as Gilgamesh.

Gen 6:4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

Num\_13:33 There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

This legend about fallen heavenly beings was clearly well known in ancient Israel, and it confounded the later sages and rabbis once Israel transitioned to strict monotheism, since the accepted wisdom was that divine beings did not possess free will and could only do what God commanded/allowed. We'll talk about this more in the next section, but it is important to remember that the ancient Israelite conception of God as the One God did not allow for divine rebellion or even acknowledge evil as an independent force in opposition to God. To them, everything, good or bad, was due to the will of God.

Next are the Seraphim. These are mentioned in one episode in the book of Isaiah as part of his apocalyptic vision of God's coming to re-create the world. It is the famous story of the hot coal of God's truth being placed on his tongue. Unlike many other instances we've seen so far, the Seraphim are actually described!

Isa 6:2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

Isa 6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.



Isa 6:7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."



Seraph, Byzantine Icon



Seraph with Isaiah  
Catalonia, 14<sup>th</sup> century



Seraph Mosaic, Mornreale, Sicily, 12<sup>th</sup> century



Seraph, Russian Icon, 14<sup>th</sup> century



The one thing I would point out in these paintings is that all of them have at least a human-like face, but that comes from our imagination (and anthropomorphic bias) as Isaiah does not describe their bodies at all.

Isaiah's description is interesting though because 1) the Bible is sadly lacking in descriptions and 2) Seraphs don't otherwise occur in the Hebrew Scriptures. The four living creatures described by John of Patmos in Revelation, as I mentioned earlier aren't normally considered angels as such but they do have six wings but as we discussed in our study of Revelation, John seems to have been deeply and directly inspired by the visions and descriptions in Isaiah and Ezekiel.

Six-winged beings are not common in other mythic cosmologies either, though here is an unnamed goddess or being with six wings found in an ancient Assyrian city (just north of Israel) from about the 9-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE – so around the same time as David and Solomon.



## CHERUBIM

Cherubim appear in the Bible many times, primarily in the Hebrew scriptures and almost always in reference to the ark of the covenant whose lid had two cherubim statues on top.



**What the Ark of the Covenant, as described in Exodus, may have looked like**

However, there are several episodes concerning cherubim. The first is in Genesis, and it's only one verse; telling us that God placed cherubs (cherubim is plural in Hebrew) with a flaming sword to guard the Garden once Adam and Eve were expelled.

Gen\_3:24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Next, In Samuel (2Samuel 22:11), David sings a song about God delivering him from enemies, and in it David imagines God riding on a cherub as a kind of avenging warrior.

Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. **He rode on a cherub, and flew**; he was seen upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness around him a canopy, thick clouds, a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before him coals of fire flamed forth. The LORD thundered from heaven; the Most High uttered his voice. He sent out arrows, and scattered them—lightning, and routed them.

2 Samuel 22:9-15



In truth, I think this sounds more like Zeus than God, but this study isn't about how David imagines God but about how ancient Israelites imagined the heavenly beings. In this case, the cherub is presented as more like a beast of burden, something like Pegasus perhaps. We can surmise that it had wings, because it is flying, and they are described elsewhere as having wings, but that is not explicit to the text. And, fun fact, this song of David is also Psalm 18.

The next book which includes living cherubs is Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, the cherubim also seem to be involved in moving God around, those here they are more like litter bearers or escorts than flying horses.

Then I looked, and above the dome that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in form resembling a throne. He said to the man clothed in linen, "Go within the wheelwork underneath the cherubim; fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." He went in as I looked on. Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house when the man went in; and a cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the LORD rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of the LORD. The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

Ezekiel 10:1-5

Here Ezekiel then gives us a few glimpses of their appearance to him in his vision. Including the incredible sight of having four different faces.

And a cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that was among the cherubim, took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took it and went out. The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings. I looked, and there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like gleaming beryl. Each one had four faces: the first face was that of the cherub the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle. The cherubim rose up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the river Chebar. When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise up from the earth, the wheels at their side did not veer.

Ezekiel 10:7-16

And then Ezekiel closes out the passage with this, which includes the note that they had *four* wings; Four, *even* four faces *are* to each, and four wings to each. And the form of a man's hands *was* under their wings. And the form of their faces, they *are* the faces that I saw by the river Chebar, their appearances, even theirs. They each went straight forward.

Ezekiel 10:21-22

This contradicts, somewhat the description from Exodus to be used for the Ark statues, where it doesn't specify the number of ones but it definitely implies they have only one face.

The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings. They shall **face one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned toward the mercy seat.**

Exodus 25:20

But later, Ezekiel contradicts himself when describing the image of Cherubim in the heavenly temple

And on all the walls all around in the inner room and the nave there was a pattern. It was formed of cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Each cherub had two faces: a human face turned toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion turned toward the palm tree on the other side. They were carved on the whole temple all around;

Ezekiel 41:18-19



Orthodox icon of Ezekiel's Cherub



Woodcut depicting Ezekiel's vision

As we see, Cherubs are often depicted as guards or sentries. It is possible that the appearance of cherubs in the Bible was influenced by depictions in Assyrian/Babylonian mythology of Lamassu (aka Shedū). These were hybrid creatures with a human head, the body of either a bull or a lion, and the wings of a bird and statues of them were placed at the entrances to temples, throne rooms, and cities—the very roles that cherubim play in the Bible.





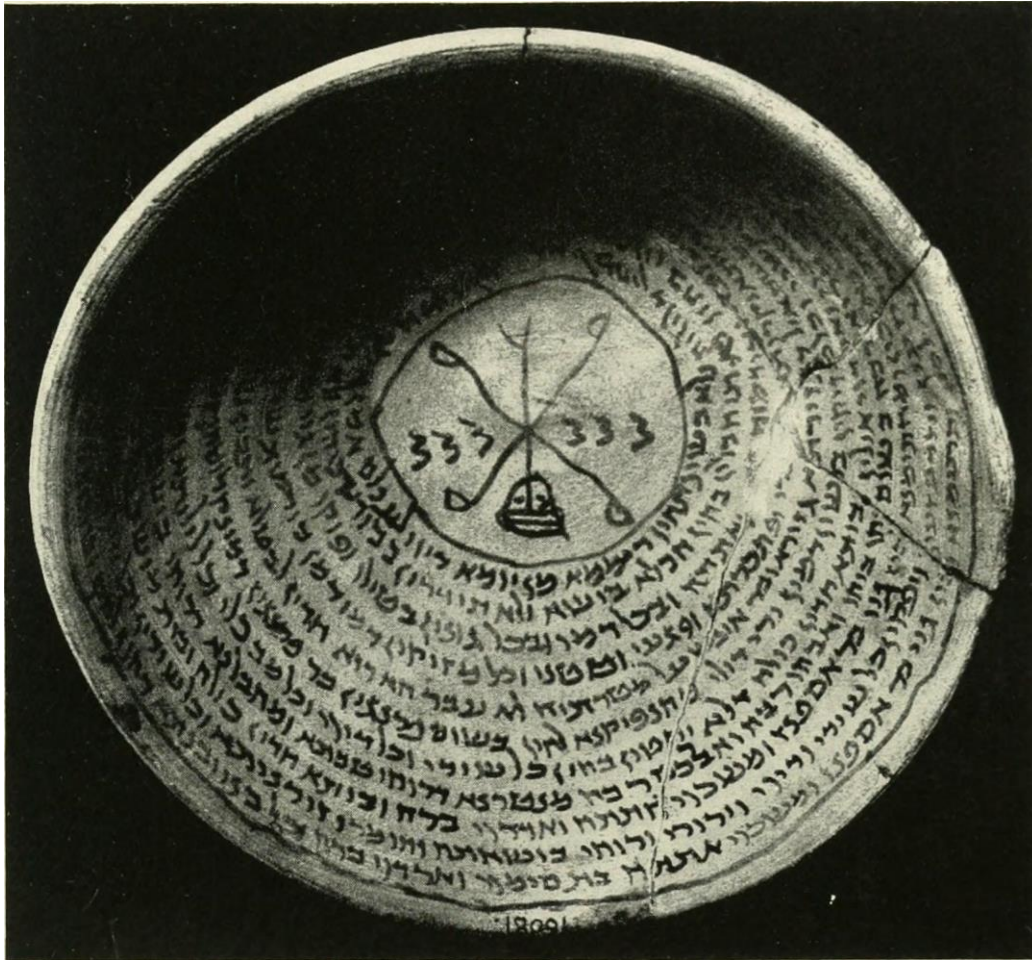
**Lamassu from the city of Dur Sharrukin from about 721–705 B.C.E.**

So, given all that, how did cherubs come to be imagined as chubby flying babies? It's important to remember most people in the ancient world were not literate and that the number of people who were deeply familiar with the scriptural texts was very small. However, in ancient Judaism, certainly by the time of Jesus, angels were very important figures in the folk religion of the people. There are many examples of prayers used by regular people invoking angels to act on their behalf. There are lots of parallels with how saints figure in the lives of many people.

Ancient Jews of Jesus' day believed that the spiritual world was very present in their lives and populated with many different kinds of beings, but especially angels, and that these angels followed them around and protected them. There were also believed to be angels that tempted them and reported on their behavior to God, but who weren't malevolent, more like an Elf-on-the Shelf than a demon.

Archeologists have found many examples, including prayer bowls where prayer requests were written and then the bowls were used in some sort of ritual with practitioners outside of the formal religious hierarchy. A significant number of these include pleas to angels (and often to God as well). Most of these prayers are concerned with everyday, mundane problems (a large number include prayers for dealing with in-laws). The kind of thing that you could use some extra help with but that

maybe don't rise to the level of bothering the creator of the universe. As I mentioned before this is not so different that burying St Joseph upside down in your yard to help with selling your house or praying to St Anthony to find your lost keys



Ancient Jewish Incantation bowl

In the popular imagination, these guardian angels were always described and depicted as young men or boys, so it's not too much of a stretch to imagine how that morphed over time into very young boys especially as Judaism and Christianity spread and interacted with Roman culture.

In Roman culture and religion, there were analogous supernatural beings who interacted with humanity and were often helpers in solving small-bore problems. These beings were known as *putto*. The most famous of these was Cupid, and these *putto*, were also closely associated with ideas of love and purity which are characteristics often associated with Christ. In the middle ages, these ideas came together in the popular Christian imagination (this is the same period in which images of Jesus as a baby became really prominent) and became associated with cherubs.



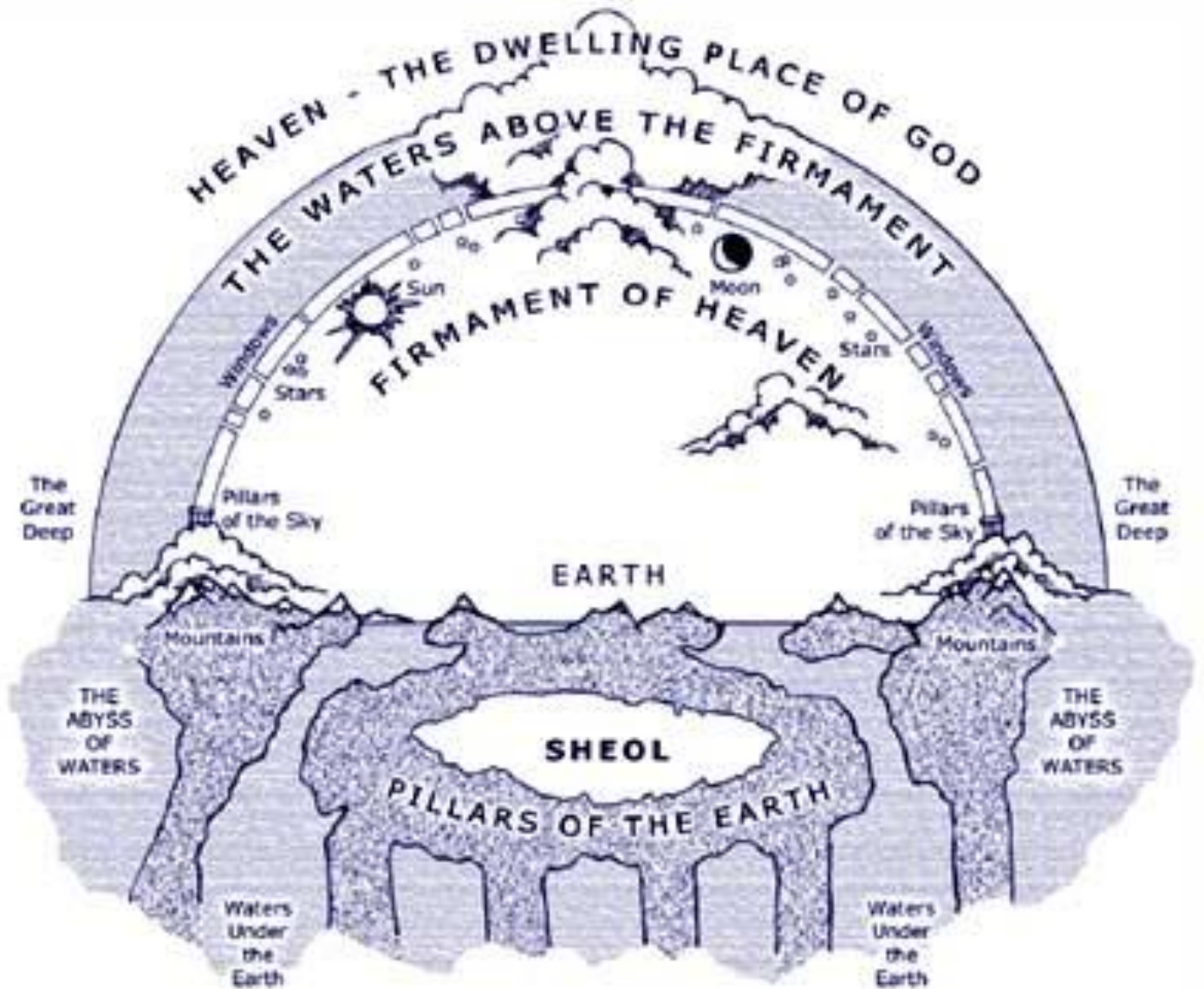
So, Despite its current popularity, this earliest image of baby-like cherubs dates only from the 15<sup>th</sup> century; in the Italian Renaissance. We can see one of its earliest representations in Michelangelo's painting, "The Fall and Expulsion from Garden of Eden," from 1509 where he shows the Cherubim from the garden as a somewhat diminutive, even child-like, being.



But it really emerged in Raphael's painting, "Sistine Madonna," from 1513.



The last of the heavenly beings associated with angels are the Host of Heaven. We find in ancient Jewish writings a great deal of thinking about the nature of angels and other heavenly beings, with a consensus being that these creatures were created of light, or more literally, fire. There's a connection here to that ancient understanding of creation that we've encountered before.



A popular idea was that the lights in the night sky were, in fact, the lights emanating from the heavenly beings. So that when scripture speaks of the host of heaven what they are describing are the stars in the night sky.

We can see this in Deuteronomy.

*And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven.*

Deuteronomy 4:19



This may be a little clearer in the original Hebrew, but the phrase, “all the host of heaven” is meant as a kind of poetic restatement of the word “stars.”

As for Cherubim and Seraphim, it isn't explicitly obvious that the host of heaven are the same as the Malakh, the messengers of God as we see in Luke's story of the birth of Jesus,

*And suddenly there was with **the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,** praising God and saying,*

Luke\_2:13

But we will leave that question for next time.

**Angels & Demons**  
**Part 8**  
**Angels in the New Testament**

As I mentioned earlier, angels became an increasing part of the folk religion of ancient Judaism, and their roles expanded as people imagined that multitudes of angels oversaw, and regularly intervened, in their daily life. By the time of Jesus' birth, that angels were numerous and deeply involved in human life was an integral part of most people's understanding of creation and an accepted part of their religious belief.

Compared to their relative scarcity in the Hebrew scriptures, angels are wonderfully abundant in the New Testament. They are mentioned in all four gospels and in Acts. They appear in 11 of the Epistles (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, & Jude), and of course, they are especially abundant in Revelation.

Outside of Revelation, these angels are primarily anonymous heavenly messengers (other than Gabriel) and beings who provide aid to Jesus.

The oldest of the gospels is Mark, and here there are only a couple of angels, plus one episode that is surely an angel, though the text doesn't say that.

We see angels tending to Jesus in the wilderness...

Mar\_1:13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

...and we hear Jesus tell us that angels are to be heavily involved when Jesus returns.

Mar\_13:27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Jesus does also mention that angels are asexual;

Mar\_12:25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

And at the end of Mark's gospel, as the women enter the tomb, they find Jesus gone and a young man dressed in white waiting for them. I think this clearly meant to be an angel, even though the text doesn't say so explicitly.

Mar\_16:5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

Mar 16:6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.

Mar 16:7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

Matthew's gospel expands on Mark's story, filling in many missing details. It also includes more information about angels.

Our first encounter is where an angel comes to reassure Joseph that Mary hadn't cheated on him;

Mat 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Mat 1:19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

Mat 1:20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

As in Mark, the next episode where angels are present comes after Jesus has been tempted in the wilderness and we are told that angels came and tended to him.

Mat\_4:11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

In Matthew, Jesus mentions angels a great deal and from his sayings we can take away a few important things about angels:

1. Angels protect the righteous and punish the wicked (especially in the coming end of the age)

Mat\_24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Mat\_13:41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers,

Mat\_13:49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

2. Angels are asexual

Mat\_22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

3. Angels are capable of sin

Mat\_25:41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;

4. Angles are warriors

Mat\_26:53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

And the last time we encounter an angel in Matthew, is at the resurrection where Matthew, unlike Mark, clearly tells us the man in white is an angel

Mat 28:1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Mat 28:2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Mat 28:3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

Mat 28:4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

Mat 28:5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

Mat 28:6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Luke, like Matthew, builds on and expands Mark's story adding other new details, especially in the birth narrative.

Angles come to Zechariah to foretell the birth of John the Baptist

Luk 1:10 Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.

Luk 1:11 Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Luk 1:12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.

Luk 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

And an angel, Gabriel, also comes to Mary to invite her into being the God bearer.

Luk 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

Luk 1:27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Luk 1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

Luk 1:29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Luk 1:30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Luk 1:31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

And then shortly after Jesus is born, an angel drops in on some shepherds nearby to share the good news.

Luk 2:8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luk 2:9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Luk 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

Luk 2:11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

We also glean one more important nugget of information, Like Mark and Matthew, Jesus tells us angels aren't sexual beings, but here he also says that they are immortal beings!

Luk 20:35 but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Luk 20:36 Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.

John's gospel has very few mentions of angels – three, there are three mentions of angels and only one of those concerns actual angels being present and active. As in the Synoptic gospels, there are angels at the resurrection.

Joh 20:11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;

Joh 20:12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

Joh 20:13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

In the Acts of the Apostles, we encounter several angels who are busy guiding the early church.

First, angels come to free the disciples from jail so that they can preach about Jesus

Act 5:17 Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy,

Act 5:18 arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

Act 5:19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said,

Act 5:20 "Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life."



Next, an angel tells Phillip to go and evangelize to an Ethiopian eunuch.

Act 8:26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.)

Act 8:27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship

Act 8:28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Act 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."

Act 8:30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

In the next episode, an angel appears to a devout, but unconverted Gentile

Act 10:1 In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called.

Act 10:2 He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.

Act 10:3 One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius."

Act 10:4 He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

Act 10:5 Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter;

Next, the angels are involved in a second jail break, this time for Peter,

Act\_12:7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists.

Act\_12:8 The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

Act\_12:9 Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.

Act\_12:10 After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him.

Act\_12:11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Judean people were expecting."

A little later, we also see angles aiding the church in a roundabout way by punishing a ruler who had opposed it.

Act 12:20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they came to him in a body; and after winning over Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for a reconciliation, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

Act 12:21 On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on the platform, and

delivered a public address to them.

Act 12:22 The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a mortal!"

Act 12:23 And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

Act 12:24 But the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents.

The last episode with an angel intervening to protect and grow the church comes from Paul's adventures when his ship is stuck in a terrible storm at sea and is adrift. Paul tells of a message from an angel that offers hope, if only they will believe.

Act 27:22 I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

Act 27:23 For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,

Act 27:24 and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you.'

Act 27:25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

Though angels are mentioned in many of the Epistles and by many different authors, mostly these mentions are references to angels and tell us little that's new. The epistles, aren't narratives, that is they don't tell stories, rather they are apologetics, arguments in favor of certain religious principles or beliefs as well as pastoral instructions meant to give guidance to this new movement. However, there are some important things we can draw from them.

A reiteration that some angels have sinned and that their sin is punished (suggesting ours will be too)

2Pe\_2:4 For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment;

Jud\_1:6 And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Jesus is superior to the angels – this will be an important point as the church worked out the nature of Jesus and his relationship to the Father

Heb 1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,

Heb 1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

Heb 1:3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Heb 1:4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Heb 1:5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten

you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

Heb 1:6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

Heb 1:7 Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire."

Heb 1:8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom."

1Pe\_3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

I'm not going to go through Revelation here since we just did that study. Suffice it to say that angels are portrayed there as both heralds of God's word and warriors who bring punishment to those who have actively opposed God.

So, we can see that through the first two thousand years of ancient Judaic thought from the age of the Patriarchs to the dawn of the Christian era, the idea and perception of angels had moved from the perception of the singular presence of God on earth to a numerous class of beings deeply involved in the mundane everyday life of humans.

We have also seen that there are other heavenly beings, not described in the scriptures as angels, but who later theologians thought of as angels. Rather than going into detail on that, I will probably send you something via email describing that process.

For us, this is where we'll stop on angels in the Bible. Next week, we'll pick up on demons.

## Angels & Demons

### Part 9 – Demons

As I've mentioned before ancient Judaism didn't really have a concept of evil as a force in opposition to God. In their understanding there was only God, and so God was responsible for the good and bad things. When we do see the word evil used, it is usually referencing some form of injustice and so can be thought of as things that humans do that complicate the world and cause suffering.

The Hebrew scriptures, however, do occasionally mention beings that are, if not malevolently evil, are, at least, malicious.

The first of these are the Shedim (singular Shedah). The Shedim were believed to be behind things like illnesses and bad luck. Foreign gods were also often considered Shedim. When the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek, Shedim was translated as *daimonia*, (the root of our word demon) which were spiritual being in Greek mythology that generally personified abstract concepts, like wisdom or liberty. There also existed an idea that every person had their own daimon which was kind of a cross between their fate and a guardian angel. The Latin equivalent was *genius*

In legend, the Shedim were shaper-shifters though often characterized as serpent like or even descended from snakes, which may be behind the story of the snake in the Garden in Genesis. At the same time they were also believed to have the feet of birds, but that was one part of their form they couldn't hide, so one test for detecting them was to throw flour on the floor to see their bird-like prints.

The Shedim are mentioned twice, in Deuteronomy and in Psalm 106.

Deu 32:16 They made him jealous with strange gods, with abhorrent things they provoked him.

Deu 32:17 They sacrificed to demons, not God, to deities they had never known, to new ones recently arrived, whom your ancestors had not feared.

Psa 106:35 but they mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did.

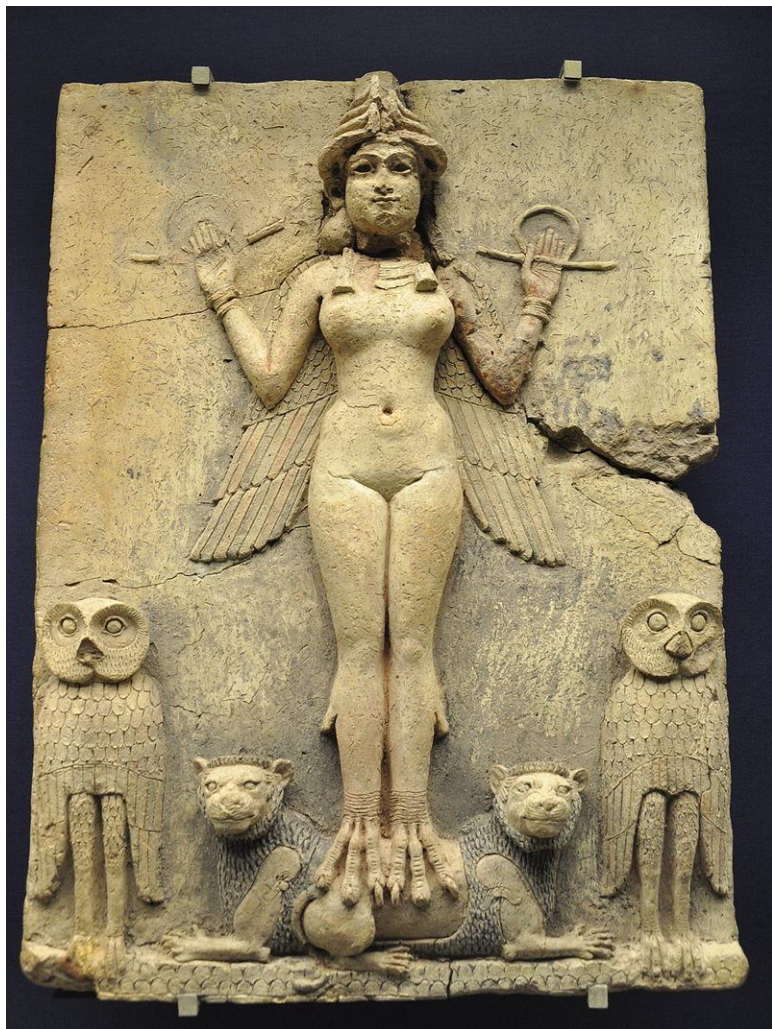
Psa 106:36 They served their idols, which became a snare to them.

Psa 106:37 They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons;

Psa 106:38 they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood.

In both cases, the Shedim seek sacrifice from humans, and in the psalm, the particular charge is that the Shedim demanded child-sacrifice. Child sacrifice was not uncommon in the ancient Middle East and there is some evidence for it in pre-monarchy Israel, but Israel was one of the first nations to turn away from this practice – that is how many understand the story of Isaac, as a teaching against the necessity of child sacrifice.

The origin of this idea of Shedim isn't clear, but one clue is that they don't really show up in Israelite thought or scripture before the exile in Babylon. So, it is possible that the Israelites borrowed the concept and some of the features of the Shedim from the Babylonian culture to describe their experiences.



The bird-footed night shedah, Babylonian ca 1800BC

The second kind of creatures mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures are the Se'irim, which is often translated as "goat-demon." The Se'irim were believed to be hairy malevolent creatures that lurked in the wilderness. They were thought to have horns, tails, and feet like goats, but a body like a human (sound familiar?). Their king or leader was known as Azazel, which is also the name of the place where the goat sacrificed for Yom Kippur (the Day of atonement) was sent.

These make three appearances in the Bible, in two books.

2Ch 11:15 and had appointed his own priests for the high places, and for the goat-demons, and for the calves that he had made.



Isa 13:21 But wild animals will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will live, and there goat-demons will dance.

Isa 34:14 Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, goat-demons shall call to each other; there too Lilith shall repose, and find a place to rest.

Goat/human hybrid creatures were common in several Mediterranean belief systems, including Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cosmologies. We are probably familiar with the Roman/Greek Fauns & Satyrs. They are associated with the wilderness and the pastoral. The most familiar is probably Pan (Faunus in Roman) who was the god of the wild, of shepherds and flocks, & rustic music. He was also a companion to the Nymphs (female spirits of natural places) and so is associated with sexual excess.



The Egyptian god, Khnum, is one of the oldest identified Egyptian gods and was believed to be the creator and sustainer of the Nile and the god who created babies on his potters wheel and placed them in their mother's wombs.



The third creature mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures is the satan. The satan or just the one, Satan, show up in only three books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The earliest is in Job and in Job, Satan is not an adversary of God but is part of God's heavenly court, the inner circle if you will. As you may recall, God is bragging to the court about how faithful Job is when "the satan" calls God out on his favoritism. The Hebrew here is *ha'satan* which literally means "the accuser" or the adversary" and was usually used in the context of legal disputes. It is a title and not a name, as such. He challenges God by saying Job is only righteous because of the good things God has given him; take away his stuff and Job will surely lose his faith. So God allows Satan to take away from Job nearly everything, and yet his faith persists.

Job 1:6 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

Job 1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

Job 1:8 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil."

Job 1:9 Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

Job 1:10 Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

Job 1:11 But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

Job 1:12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!" So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Satan Takes Job's Property and Children

Job 1:13 One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house,

Job 1:14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them,

Job 1:15 and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Job 1:16 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Job 1:17 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Job 1:18 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house,

Job 1:19 and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Job 1:20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped.

Job 1:21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Job 1:22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

**Job 2:1** One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.

**Job 2:2** The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

**Job 2:3** The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."

**Job 2:4** Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives.

**Job 2:5** But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

**Job 2:6** The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

**Job 2:7** So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

**Job 2:8** Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

**Job 2:9** Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die."

**Job 2:10** But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

A similar role of accuser is attributed to "the satan" in Zechariah

**Zec 2:12** The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

**Zec 2:13** Be silent, all people, before the LORD; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

**Zec 3:1** Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

**Zec 3:2** And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?"

In the final appearance of Satan in the Hebrew Scriptures, he appears not as a prosecutor, accusing humans of misdeeds, but as a tempter of humans. This is from an episode in Chronicles, and here it is used as a name and not as "the satan," where it is suggested that David himself has been tempted to undertake a census of Israel.

**Ch 21:1** Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel.

**1Ch 21:2** So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, "Go, number Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, and bring me a report, so that I may know their number."

**1Ch 21:3** But Joab said, "May the LORD increase the number of his people a hundredfold! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"