

**Manifestations of the Divine:
The Appearance and Function of Angels in
TANAKH**



“Let us make humans in our own image”

Genesis 1:26

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To my angels
Daniel Erez, Ariel Zechariah, Zoe Gabriel
and
Eitan Yaniv
Who watches over us with God

Introduction

Abraham is sitting outside his tent in the heat of the day when he sees three אנשים (men) approaching. Abraham welcomes them, and after a frantic flurry of activity, food preparation and formalities, the men are fed. They then turn to Abraham and unceremoniously and matter-of-factly offer the long aspired-for word that a son will be born to Sarah by this time next year.

In the next chapter, two of these men move on to their next mission and present themselves to the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are now referred to in the text as מלאכים (angels).

Has Abraham interacted with angels? Do angels eat? What happened to the angel that did not go down to Sodom and Gomorrah?

What are angels, what is their purpose, and why do they exist?

Angels appear throughout Hebrew writings, in Tanakh, pseudepigraphal literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Lengthy discussions on the topic of angels take place in Talmud and midrashic aggadah and angels are found in the Sabbath and Holy Day liturgy.

In Tanakh, the noun מלאך is used 213 times, and translates into English as “angel” 11 times, “messenger” 98 times and “ambassador” 4 times.¹ The term derives meaning from the root [לִאָךְ] to be sent, wait upon, or minister². When translated into Greek, *aggelos*, sometime in the third century B.C.E., it took on the meaning of messenger or celestial being.

Despite the fact that inferences of divine assembly appear as early as the creation story “let us make human beings”³, the term מלאך does not appear in the biblical text until the Abraham narrative.

An angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness...and said...Hagar, where are you going...⁴

This thesis will explore the early beginnings of angels in Judaism, examining their appearance and functions as seen in the narratives of pre-exilic and early Biblical writing. As there is no set system for classifying celestial beings for the entire Tanakh⁵, this paper will attempt to extrapolate the variety of roles and typologies within the defined category of “heavenly being” as they appear in the biblical writings.

¹ Robert Odom Israel's Angel

² BDB p. 521

³ Genesis 1:26

⁴ Genesis 16:7

⁵ M. Mach Entwicklungsstadien “There is no coherent set of angel beliefs for the entire Hebrew Bible” in Wrestling with Angels Kevin Sullivan

Chapter 1 will concentrate upon the definition and function of the מלאך-איש according to pre-exilic concepts of agents and messengers. Chapter 2 examines the Heavenly Host, specifically Cherubim, Seraphim and Satan. Chapter 3 will explore angels in The Book of Daniel, and Chapter 4 will conclude the thesis with a discussion of Genesis 6.

Chapter One

מלאך-The Messenger

The definition and function of the **איש-מלאך** according to pre-exilic concepts of agents and messengers.

The term **מלאך** in Hebrew is at its most basic level of meaning an *envoy* or *messenger* and may be applied to either human or divine agents. The translation of **מלאך** as “angel” in English serves as the undifferentiated term for all God’s supernatural assistants or “heavenly beings that mediate between humans and the divine”.⁶

In this chapter I will examine the texts in which angels are described as appearing in the form of **איש** (human form) and **מלאכים** (divine beings), are examined. In a number of texts, angels are described as appearing in the form of humans and are indistinguishable from humans until their true nature is revealed. Even with such anthropomorphic descriptions of angels, they remain distinct from humans. The text will support the differences between meeting the **איש** and the awareness of **מלאך**, the angel.

איש in Hebrew means man. However, words derive their meaning from context. As such, there are times that the context of the story will infer that the “man” is something greater than human, rather divine. Whether **מלאך** or **איש** are intended to refer to human or divine agents can only be determined by looking at their use in particular cases. Even

⁶ ABD 1:248-255; DDD 81-96

with awareness of context, the use of the particular term results in some passages where it is unclear if no further details are provided.⁷ Consequently, there are passages in which it remains disputed whether the reference is to a heavenly being or a human one.

And a man found him (Joseph) wandering in the fields. The *אִישׁ* asked him, “What do you request?” He answered “My brothers. Tell me please where do they pasture? And the man said “They have gone, I heard them say, let us go to Dothan” And Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.⁸

We are uncertain who this stranger is or his intended purpose. He never appears again in the text. It is feasible that he is, as the text states, simply a man. There are no textual clues to hint to the true identity of this *אִישׁ*. Nevertheless, if Joseph had not met him, he never would have found his brothers. He never would have been sold into slavery. The events that needed to take place in order for YHVH to redeem the people from Egyptian bondage would not have happened. The consequences of this meeting are pivotal to the entire foundational myth of the Jewish people. Is this a chance human encounter or is he a *מלאך* sent by God to make sure that Joseph would not give up on his mission when he was unable to locate his brothers immediately?

When they appear to humans, either to men or women, angels often take on the form of a young man, a *גבר*, or they converse in the language of human understanding. They

⁷ S. Meier, “Angel” in DDD p. 48

⁸ Genesis 37:15

relate in intimate ways, partaking of human hospitality, interacting in communal settings, and in one unique text, marrying and having viable offspring with human women. When described as appearing in the form of human men אנשים seem to be indistinguishable from humans until they permit their true nature to be revealed.

As messengers, angels announce births as in the cases of Hagar, Sarah and Manoah's wife. Alternatively, they may announce destruction as in the situation of Sodom and Gomorrah. Another role often filled by a messenger is to act as escort to individuals who are traveling under the protection of the sender⁹.

The Lord, the God of heaven... He will send His angel before you.¹⁰

There may be specific visual components associated with the manifestation of angels.

The most common characteristics of this imagery is that once the identity is realized by the human, there is an immediate sense of יראה (fear) accompanied by the action of falling upon the face. This reaction implies an understanding of the unique and awesome nature of that particular divine figure.

In the Book of Daniel, the angel Gabriel is referred to as אִישׁ, yet when Daniel becomes aware that this particular man is something more than simply human; he falls upon his face indicating that he is aware that he is in the presence of a divine being.

⁹. Angel I DDD p. 85

¹⁰. Genesis 24:7

And it happened, when I, Daniel, was seeing the vision, and trying to understand it, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." He came near where to where I was standing, and as he came I was terrified and fell upon my face...¹¹

At Jericho, Joshua sees an **אִישׁ** standing before him with a sword drawn. Upon responding to his query over whom he serves, awareness brings Joshua to the ground:

Are you for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, No; but as captain of the army of the Lord, I am now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and prostrated himself, and said to him, what does my lord command to his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, Take your shoe from off your foot; for the place on which you stand is holy.¹²

A second feature that often accompanies certain divine creatures but is not readily apparent to the human is some form of non-anthropomorphic aspect, the most common being an association with fire or bright light. The Angel of the Lord appears to Moses from within the burning bush. The **מַלְאָךְ** that appears to Manoah and his wife ascends heavenward in a flame of fire. The men who travel to Sodom save Lot from the

¹¹ Daniel 8: 15-17

¹² Joshua 5: 13-15

marauding horde by casting a stupefying light upon them, and the **איש** who appears to Daniel in his vision had blazing eyes and a face that appeared like lightening.

Many cultures share formal mannerisms when greeting a guest. In the Biblical world, the particular type of “bow” extended to a visitor can illuminate the degree of importance attributed to the individual. Word phrases can hint to the human’s level of awareness or ignorance of the situation. The phrase **וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲפָיִם אֲרָצָה** he bowed in greeting to an honored guest is used here as opposed to the Hebrew term, **וַיִּפֹּל עַל-פָּנָיו** fell to his face which is the phrase applied to one in the divine presence. In Genesis 18, we read that YHVH appeared to Abraham by the terebinths of Mamre. Abraham looks up and sees three **אנשים** approaching. Abraham rushes to welcome **וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה** and offer hospitality to the men. Clearly, he is unaware that these men are divine, as he does not posture in the manner of being in the divine presence. Hence, Abraham must not have known the identity of his special visitors, including God.

From this we can see that there is a specific textual formula applied to the appearance of **מלאכים**. Clues emerges as the identity of the divine messenger becomes manifest. It is a pattern that includes some form of inquiry followed by a response, where upon the divine message is delivered. Then the recipient of the message responds with astonishment or **יראה** concluding with some form of posturing. This posturing varies anywhere from a

physical response of falling upon the face, to naming a person or consecrating a location after the experience of the encounter.

The following three texts will better illuminate this pattern. Beginning with Genesis 16:

And the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness,
the spring on the way to Shur.

Inquiry: "Hagar, where did you come from and where are you going?"

Response: "I am running away from my mistress Sarai."

Message: "Return to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." And the
angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son,
and shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has heard your affliction."

Awareness: And she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, El-Roi. Have
I not gone on seeing after He saw me?

Posturing: Therefore, the well was called Beerlahairoi.

Applying this pattern to Genesis 18, we see that it is Sarah who becomes conscious of the identity of the guests, while Abraham seems to remain oblivious. True, Abraham greets the wayfarers, prepares food and sees to their comfort. They eat and then a question is posed to Abraham in such a way for Sarah to hear.

Inquiry: Where is your wife?

Message: When I return your wife shall have a son.

Response: Sarah laughs and she is confronted by her response.

Awareness: Sarah is filled with **יראה** replying, "I did not laugh".

The task is completed, the message delivered, and the men set out toward Sodom.

In Genesis 19, the text shifts from using the word **איש** to the word **מלאך** to identify the beings who sojourn to Sodom. Interestingly, the text switches back and forth between the terms. The interchange in terminology plays out in a very interesting way. Twice Lot is touched by the beings, and in each case they are referred to as **אנשים** however, when extra-ordinary occurrences take place, such as the delivery of the divine message that the town is on the verge of annihilation, the term **מלאכים** is employed. The physical engagement, in this case "touch", can only be accomplished through anthropomorphic means. However, unlike the reader, Lot is clearly unaware of the identity of these beings until he is redeemed from death. Until that time, however, he refers to them as **אנשים**. Lot sees them, greets them, and bowing low **וישתחו אפנים ארצה**, offers hospitality. He prepares a feast for them and they eat.

Inquiry: The town inquires, as to the location of the visitors.

Response: Lot responds to protect them, but the townsfolk attack Lot; the אנשים reach out their hands to grab Lot and pull him into the house. "Then a bright light went out from that place and the townsfolk were blinded".

Message: The divine message is delivered: "We are to destroy this place."

Awareness: At dawn, the מלאכים direct Lot to depart immediately. The אנשים grab Lot and his wife and his two daughters and bring them out of the city. Lot is fearful; he is permitted to flee to a place that is saved from destruction.

Posturing: The name of the town is established as Tzoar.¹³

Thus as has been demonstrated, the signs of angelic involvement and human awareness include an inquiry and response, the delivery of a message, human understanding of the extraordinary event to take place, and the reaction to the divine state of the messenger.

There are situations when the מלאך visits and is not recognized as more than a human visitor. The individual maybe alerted to the presence of the divine personage:

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "YHVH is with you, you mighty man of valor."¹⁴

¹³ Little, small, insignificant

¹⁴ Judges 6:12

Nevertheless, if the human is uncertain to the legitimacy of the messenger he will request proof of his authority. Such a test is found in Judges 6. An **איש** appears to Gideon and carries with him a message. Gideon responds with doubt, and requests a test of the individual. He requests that the man not depart their company until food has been prepared. He says “if I have found favor, allow me to detain you and prepare a kid for you.”¹⁵ The food is presented to the messenger, however fire consumes the food gift, and the **מלאך** disappears from sight. It is only then that Gideon reacts with **יראה** ; “I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.”¹⁶ And yet the test has been met and the message accepted.

A similar scenario plays out in Judges 13 when Manoah questions the message delivered to his wife and requests not only proof but to hear the message directly from the **מלאך** . He, like Gideon, prepares food to present as an offering. Rather than consuming it, as did the angels who visited with Abraham, it is consumed by fire upon which the angel ascends. Only then are Manoah and his wife convinced that the message was indeed divine, at which point they fall upon their faces in fear for their lives. “We shall surely die for we have seen a divine being.”¹⁷

¹⁵ There is great debate over angels partaking of food and drink with humans. Raising a theological question as to the nature of divine beings based upon the consumption of human food. Genesis 18-19 the divine beings consume food that is presented to them prior to their delivery of the important message. Neither Abraham nor Lot knew the identity of the visitors. Where as in Judges 6 and 13. Gideon and Manoah are skeptical that the messenger is divine. The offering of food is made after the divine message has been delivered, and is used as a test to determine whether in fact the beings are **מלאכים**. The refusal to eat does not signify that **מלאכים** do not eat, rather it denotes that they refuse to be questioned upon the authenticity of their message/information.

¹⁶ Judges 6:24

¹⁷ Judges 13:22

Thus, until certain evidence is presented, the human is either unable to discern the unique nature of the messenger being, or may detect that there is something distinctive, yet is unable to determine exactly what it is.

The treatment of human reality by YHVH and the divine assembly is grounded in the understanding that מלאכים are able to transform humans into agents of change for people on earth. Isaiah's vision is more than a physical experience, for not only does the prophet see YHVH seated on his throne, and hear the praises sung by the Seraphim in attendance, but upon interacting with one of the Seraphim, he is moved to respond to the divine request, to become a messenger on behalf of YHVH.

"I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." I heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me."¹⁸

18. Isaiah 6:5-8

מלאכים have the power to intervene and effect changes in human affairs. In the prophetic books, angels appear as representatives of the prophetic spirit, and bring to the prophets the word of YHVH. Micaiah experiences a similar vision to that of Isaiah. He finds himself aware of the Divine throne with the attendants surrounding YHVH.

And יחזקאל said, "Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" And one said this and one said that. And there came forth a רוח, and stood before יחזקאל and said, "I will persuade him." And יחזקאל said to him, "With what?" And he said, "I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And he said, "You shall persuade him, and prevail also; go forth, and do it."¹⁹

In these examples, we see the מלאך proactively redirecting, empowering or infusing the human in order to propagate the will of YHVH on earth. The אֱלֹהִים who meets Joseph in Genesis 37 is not coincidental. Joseph must find his brothers in order for the divine plan to be fulfilled. Unfortunately, Joseph is unable to locate his brothers. He must be redirected; the אֱלֹהִים appears on the road to correct the error. Though the textual evidence is light, offering only the inquiry-response piece of the formula, the power of redirection serves to support the claim that this אֱלֹהִים is a divine functionary.

¹⁹ I Kings 22: 20-22

Thus angels are understood in the Bible to travel among humans. For the מלאכים movement between heaven and earth was simply a matter of fact. In terms of creation, heaven and earth were considered part of a unified whole and yet, it appears that there is clearly regulated control of the interpersonal interactions²⁰ between human and supernatural beings. Hence, in the Jacob narrative, a very interesting series of events take place. While asleep Jacob dreams of a ladder with angels of God going up and down. While observing the movement of the angels, God speaks to Jacob, introducing himself as the God of his father and grandfather. God invites Jacob to accept him for his own God.

He dreamed, and here was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

Unlike in pagan mythology in which stairways often become passages of communication between humans and the gods, Jacob's ladder does not serve this purpose. YHVH is not upon the ladder, nor is Jacob. The ladder appears to be for the angels alone, whose purpose seems unrelated to Jacob, other than perhaps a signpost of sorts pointing to God.

Jacob awakes from his sleep and reacts according to the set textual pattern; he demonstrates being in a state of יראה by anointing and naming the location. However,

²⁰. Beatrice Lawrence points out "one of the underlying issues behind Gen 3-4, Gen 6 and Gen 11 is God's desire to regulate and control interaction between the earthly and heavenly realms."2/14/08

there is an interesting twist in the events that follow. Jacob questions the integrity or authenticity of the experience, yet he does so after the awareness of encountering the Divine. Additionally, he makes his future relationship with God conditional upon the fulfillment of his promise to Jacob. Perhaps what Jacob needed was to be addressed by one of the angels instead of YHVH for the message to be taken at face value.

Jacob vowed a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me safe and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear, and if I come back to my father's house in peace; then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you shall give me I will surely tithe to you."

It is possible that the experience that takes place with the שׂא on the Jabbok²¹ in Genesis 32 is linked to this ambiguity on the part of Jacob's loyalty to YHVH we saw in Genesis 29. At no other time, other than Genesis 6, do we see an interaction between a human and a divine being on such an intense physical level. It is intimate, erotically charged and neither being is able to break contact. Their physical embrace can only end with a verbal negotiation of a blessing. Demanding to know the name of the שׂא , much like in Judges 13:17, Jacob is informed that he may not know the name of the שׂא . Although Jacob is physically scarred by the experience, he is impacted internally by the encounter as he completes the pattern of response-awareness begun in Genesis 29.

²¹ ANE myths abound with river demons who attack wayfarers at night

Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, meaning “for I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he limped upon his thigh.

In order to distinguishing between the concept of messenger מלאך or איש, and God’s visible form to humans described as מלאך יהוה a revisting of Genesis 18 can illuminate some of the challenges. “And YHVH appeared to him as Abraham sat at the door of his tent”. It is not clear from this text if YHVH appears to Abraham separately, or with the other two אנשים. Later in the narrative, there is a distinction between the two who go down to Sodom, while one seems to remain and debate Abraham. This does suggest that one of the three אנשים is YHVH. Yet it is instances like this when the text seems blurred in attempting to distinguish between YHVH and the מלאך. This is clearly demonstrated in Genesis 22 when the text conflates God with God’s messenger throughout the passage.

Then an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven...²²

The מלאך-יהוה called out to Abraham a second time from heaven and said “By Myself I swear, because you have not withheld your son, your favored one, I will bestow my blessing upon you...because you have obeyed My command.”²³

²². Genesis 22: 11

²³. Genesis 22:15-19

While at other times, the roles are strikingly clear such as in Exodus 23:20-22 when the Divine self is solidly differentiated from the guardian angel:

I am sending a מלאך before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready. Pay heed to him and obey him. Do not defy him, for he will not pardon your offenses, since My Name is in him; but if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

A further ambiguity is due to the fact that the Bible does not always distinguish clearly between YHVH and His messenger. The figure מלאך יהוה appears throughout the Tanakh. In context, when he appears, unusual statements are made. He is called מלאך יהוה in one verse then in another context is referred to as YHVH. What is the relationship between the messenger angel and the מלאך יהוה, or between the מלאך יהוה and YHVH?

In contrast to the מלאך-יהוה of Zechariah, who is a distinct entity, the early biblical writings, conflate YHVH and the generic מלאך. This angel speaks as if he is God himself and states that God's spirit is within him. Consistently, the context makes it apparent that he is no ordinary angel.

And the מלאך-יהוה said to her, "I will greatly increase your offspring, and they shall be too many to count." And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael; because the Lord has heard your affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live alongside of all his kinsmen." And she called the Lord who spoke to her, You are El-Roi...and named the well Beer-lahai-Roi²⁴

The shift into the first person, leads the reader to the assumption that the מלאך יהוה is in fact a visible manifestation of YHVH. מלאך יהוה, much like the nonspecific מלאך may intercede, at crucial moments to change or guide a person's actions, much like the איש who meets Joseph on his way to Shechem, the מלאך that sends Hagar back to serve Sarai or the one who stays Abraham's hand on Mt. Moriah.

God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the Lord placed himself in his way as an adversary.²⁵

In Numbers 22, the Angel of the Lord appears; it is only the donkey that is able to perceive his presence that alerts us to the power of Balaam's flawed intent. Yet when Balaam's eyes are opened by YHVH, and he sees the sentient being standing before him; he falls to the ground with יראה. The description of the מלאך-יהוה is similar to the

24. Genesis 16:9-13

25. Numbers 22:22

figure that appears to Joshua; perhaps one of the members of divine retinue or צבאות seen in Daniel.

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; thereupon he bowed down to the ground.

Whether the מלאך יהוה is acting on behalf of God or as a manifestation of God, the message becomes quite clear; Balaam was blind to the divine will and it took a מלאך functioning as an adversary (שׂתן) to correct human misdirected actions.

Two main issues are involved in understanding the relationship between the terms מלאכים and אנשים. First is the semantic relationship, מלאך can be applied to any human or divine being whose function is that of messenger or guardian. However, as stated earlier, words derive their meaning from context. There are few passages where the context does not provide clear meaning for מלאך as “divine being”. Second, the physical manifestation: מלאכים assume human form in their initial appearance to humans, yet the texts suggest that even with anthropomorphic descriptions, these characters remain distinct from humans. When they reveal themselves to be unique the human is filled with a sense יראה and a desire to consecrate the experience. The manifestation of the מלאך in human form allows for the role of messenger to be accepted by the human recipient of the message. Additionally, physical interaction (touch) with humans

requires the divine being, YHVH or מלאך to assume a human form and will then be perceived as איש.

The introduction of מלאך-יהוה adds a confusing dimension to understanding the identity of the character, though the role he plays is in keeping with the function of מלאך as previously discussed.

Chapter Two

Heavenly Host

“I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by
Him on his right hand and on his left”²⁶

Toward the beginning of Genesis, YHVH issues a command before the creation of the human. “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”²⁷. Rabbinic scholars interpret the word נִעְשָׂה “let us” as referring to a counsel of angels whom YHVH consulted before forming the human. These heavenly beings referred to as בני-האלוהים in Job 38:7, describe their unique relation to God in distinction to human beings and other created beings.

As in many ancient Near Eastern cultures, the Israelite understanding of the heavenly world was of a royal court with YHVH as king and various divine beings at his service.

The gods of the Mesopotamians and Hittites had their subordinate messengers, as did the Egyptian gods who also had divine couriers. Undoubtedly, the concepts of these Near Eastern societies worked to form the background out of which biblical stories of angels emerged.²⁸

²⁶ 1 Kings 22:19

²⁷ Genesis 1:26

²⁸ Ron Isaacs Ascending Jacob's Ladder Jason Aronson NJ 1998

As depicted in Isaiah, YHWH is seated upon a great throne that is surrounded by a council of divine powers who, among other things, engage in praise of God. It is not until Isaiah's prophetic ecstasy that the heretofore-unseen spiritual world is exposed. Isaiah reports an experience in which God is seated upon an exalted throne, with winged, fiery beings flying about and reciting a chorus of praise. These attendants play a role unlike the previous divine beings seen in the earlier narratives. Unlike the human looking messenger מלאך of the Torah, only prophets in ecstatic states are able to see these extraordinary creatures. Their features so unearthly and awe-inspiring certainly could not have filled the function of mediators of God's message to humans.

Cherubim were considered to be in the service of God; they function as guardian figures. The term כרובים is first seen in Genesis chapter 3, when God places cherubim to stand watch at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. They were placed at the gates of the Garden to prevent humans from re-entering and thus gaining access to the Tree of Life.

"So he drove the man out; and placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and the flamingever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life."²⁹

²⁹ Genesis 3:24

Ezekiel chapter 1 relates the appearance and function of the כרובים as the creatures that pull the divine chariot and guard the throne of glory. These creatures are assigned such distinctive names חיות (creatures or living things) and אופנים (wheels), and are unlike humans in all aspect of their being. Except for a single reference from the verse in Ezekial 3:12, כָּרְיָהּ קְבוֹד־יְהוָה מִמָּקוֹמוֹ, we assume that they do not speak. Unlike the messenger angels, they have limited functions, they serve as guardian figures and bearers of the throne chariot:

...of its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. And each one had four faces, and each of them had four wings; the legs of each were as a single leg, and the feet of each were like a calf...they had human hands below their wings...each could move in the direction of its faces...³⁰

Figures of cherubim were embroidered on the curtain of the Holy of Holies³¹ in the Mishkan as well as on the lid to the Ark of the Covenant. This particular placement of the cherubim suggests that the Ark represented God's throne. They are depicted as facing one another³² their outstretched wings turned upward forming a protective frame or throne from which YHVH directs the Israelite people. The Exodus text reads that the voice of God would emanate from this frame or mercy seat.

³⁰ Ezekiel 1:6-8

³¹ Exodus 26:31

³² Exodus 25:32

And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings on high, shielding the cover with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another...And there I will meet with you, and I will talk with you from above the cover, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark. ³³

Similarly, Solomon placed two freestanding three-dimensional cherubim in the Holy of Holies, and had them carved in relief on the two sets of doors in the main building³⁴ of the Temple.

A second classification of celestial creatures is that of the שרפים described in Isaiah's vision. These angels constitute the celestial choir that sings unceasing praise to God, and tend to the royal throne room.

I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with two, he covered his face, and with two, he covered his feet, and with two, he did fly. And one called to another, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; His presence fills all of the earth!³⁵

The word שרפים based on the root [שרפ] meaning "to burn" may stem from the fiery imagery often associated with the Presence of God³⁶. Additionally, it has been

³³ Exodus 25:20-22

³⁴ I Kings 6:32

³⁵ Isaiah 6:1-3

speculated that the Seraphim were serpentine in form and in some sense "fiery" creatures due their poisonous bite. The term seraph appears several times with reference to the creation of the nechushtan, following the serpents encountered in the wilderness in the Book of Numbers.

The Lord sent seraph serpents against the people. They bit the people and many Israelites died...Then God said to Moses: make a seraph figure and mount it on a standard...when anyone was bitten by a serpent, he would look at the copper serpent and live.³⁷

These formidable creatures do not appear in later biblical accounts of the divine retinue. It has been conjectured by some biblical scholars that the cherubim and seraphim belonged to an older Israelite tradition, which by the time of the construction of the second Temple, ceased to be utilized.³⁸

An extension of the heavenly court concept may have led to the individualization of one of the primary denizens of the judicial court setting, the Satan. The term שָׂטָן means accuser or adversary in a legal context. This figure emerges in the Book of Job in the court scenes of chapters 1-2 and appears in a similar setting in Zechariah 3 and I Chronicles 21.

³⁶ See chapter 1; divine association with fire

³⁷ Numbers 21:6-9

³⁸ Plaut A Modern Torah Commentary p. 554

According to the book of Job, השתן appears, together with other celestial beings, בני-האלהים to present themselves before God.

One day the divine beings presented themselves before the Lord, and the Adversary came along with them. And YHVH said "Where have you been?" The adversary responded "I have been roaming all over the earth."

Based upon the question and the response we can characterize השתן as the member of the divine council who watches over human activity, with the purpose of searching out men's weaknesses and appearing as their accuser. He is, therefore, the celestial prosecutor, who sees and tests human weakness. This can be substantiated by the fact that he persists in testing Job even after Job has successfully passes his first trial. השתן demands another test through physical suffering. His role is difficult to embrace, and yet he is but one of God's agents. Though השתן has great leeway in his movement, he has limited power of independent action; he may not transgress the will of God.

See all that he has in is your power; only do not lay a hand upon him.³⁹

God permits השתן to bring suffering upon Job, but not to kill him. It is as if he is the side of God that we do not want to see, the side we fear. As we have seen in previous examples, angels have great power, but may not act independently of the will of God.

39. Job 1:12

When השתן accuses without reason he is rebuked as the text demonstrates in Zechariah 3:1-2.

And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and the Adversary standing at his right hand to thwart him. And the Lord said to the Adversary, The Lord rebukes you, O Accuser; the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you.

השתן then is like all other agents of the Divine, he is simply a functionary of God. His task is to call God's attention to the sins of the people. He accuses and prosecutes according to the will of YHVH.

Zechariah speaks of the מאלך יהוה, השתן and a cohort of angels who walk the earth. Unlike the divine messages and supernatural visions received by the other prophets, angels appear constantly in Zechariah's many apocalyptic-symbolic visions.

I saw in the night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees in the glen; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, "what are those my lord?" And the angel who talked with me said, "I will show you what these are." And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are the ones sent out by the Lord to roam the earth."⁴⁰

40. Zechariah 8-10

In Torah, the identity of מלאך יהוה is somewhat confused⁴¹, whereas in Zechariah מלאך יהוה functions as a distinct character of the heavenly world. He serves as commander of the angelic guard and functions as both the representative of YHVH and the advocate of Israel, interceding with God on behalf of Israel.

The angel of the Lord exclaimed "O Lord of Hosts, how long will you withhold pardon from Jerusalem...which you placed under a curse seventy years ago?" The Lord replied with words of comfort to the angel, who talked with me.⁴²

It is evident from these various accounts that the מלאכים are members of the heavenly court, where they are called "sons of God", "holy ones", and "host of heaven". They are in the service of God, yet distinct from God. Some are destructive in character, others have a guardian function, while yet others have an intermediary function in prophecy.

You alone are the Lord; you created the heavens, the highest heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to them all, and the heavenly host worships you⁴³

It is not surprising that the exilic and early postexilic writings explore the heavenly world and its angelic inhabitants. With so much uncertainty over the social reality of the period, biblical writers looked to the divine world for meaning. As the prophetic visions

⁴¹. See chapter 1

⁴² Zechariah 1:12-13

⁴³ Nehemiah 9:6

of the divine realm become more fantastic, the visions include angels who are part of the army of YHVH who roam the earth preparing to engage in change, restoring God's house and bringing order to God's world.

Chapter Three

The Book of Daniel⁴⁴

“A river of fire streamed forth before Him; thousands upon thousands served Him; myriads upon myriads attended Him; the court sat and the books were opened.”⁴⁵

In the Book of Daniel angels suddenly become individualized; they are given specific names, and are ranked, much like the Babylonian spirits briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. In the Book of Daniel מִיכָאֵל and גַּבְרִיאֵל are introduced, as is the concept of national guardian angels. Michael and Gabriel act as guardians to those who are true to YHVH; they function as vision interpreters and announce futuristic events.

In all previous accounts of angels in TANAKH, the מַלְאָכִים appear to a select few. In the early chapters of the book of Daniel, angels have a more public role. Courtiers experience the awesome behaviors of the angels who are immediately referred to as divine. While there is no falling upon their faces, royal decrees do come as a result of hearing or witnessing the experiences.

In the description of the burning fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar decrees that anyone who fails to worship the statue of gold set up in the plain of Dura will be cast into the furnace.⁴⁶ Three men who are faithful to YHVH refuse to do homage to an

⁴⁴ Although the story of Daniel takes place during the Babylonian exile, it is generally agreed among scholars that the book was put into its final version sometime during the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes about 165 BCE.

⁴⁵ Daniel 7:10

⁴⁶ Daniel 3:6

image, and verbalize their trust in God alone. They are cast into the furnace, but to the amazement of everyone, they are seen unharmed in the depth of the furnace together with a fourth person, a man who looks like a בר-אלהין⁴⁷ divine being. The men are freed, and the king praises God who has sent his angel to save his servants.

Chapter 6 describes a similar event. Whomsoever offers petition to any god or man other than to King Darius is to be cast into a pit of hungry lions. Daniel, who serves in the royal court, is apprehended by his jealous enemies for continuing to pray to YHVH. Despite the king's distress, the sentence must be executed. Daniel is cast into the pit, but the next morning is discovered to be unharmed. He reports to Darius that "God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths and they had not injured him."⁴⁸ In this situation, the מלאך functions as protector of the righteous believer, the role that will be articulated in the later apocalyptic visions.

The last five chapters of the Book of Daniel are eschatological in their message. It is the appearance of the two angels Gabriel and Michael that are of interest in this thesis. The appearance of these named מלאכים become the exclusive and intimate experience of one individual, Daniel. It is through his visions that he encounters the angels who explain to him the long-range impact of the prophecies that he receives. The biblical text returns to the pattern described in chapter 1, a human encountering a מלאך.

Daniel sees a גבר⁴⁹ At first unaware that this גבר is something other than a human man. Then he hears קול-אדם a human voice, addressing the גבר. The man is referred to by

⁴⁷ Aramaic *bene-elohim*, divine being Jastrow p. 67

⁴⁸ Daniel 6:23

⁴⁹ Term גבר is equal to איש man

name, Gabriel, meaning “divine strength”. Upon hearing the voice, Daniel is filled with **קראח** and falls upon his face when approached by Gabriel.

All the while that I, Daniel, was seeing the vision, I was trying to understand it. Suddenly I saw standing before me one with the appearance of a man; at the same time I heard a human voice calling to him across the bend of the Ulai, “Gabriel, explain the vision to this man.” He came to where I was standing; and at his approach I prostrated myself in terror.⁵⁰

Gabriel, fulfilling his role as divine messenger, explains to Daniel the significance of his visions regarding what is to happen in the future. Gabriel appears again in chapter 9 in response to Daniel’s prayer to God to forgive the people. His interpretation of Daniel’s vision is more than one of explication; it is also one of comfort. The angel is acting as an agent in the role of carrying out the prophetic will of God, in this case by passing along information from YHVH directly to Daniel

It is interesting to note that the **איש גבריאל** defies the natural order by flying, an ability previously assigned to seraphim and cherubim who reside in God’s realm. The non-human behavior of Gabriel flying may be explained by Daniel’s prophetic vision. It is possible that while in an ecstatic state Daniel left the earthly world, and entered into the divine realm.

The next appearance of an **איש** in the Book of Daniel takes place in chapter 10, where he is described much like other divine beings previously described as clothed in white

⁵⁰ Daniel 8:15-17

linen.⁵¹ Again, Daniel responds to the divine with a deep sense of יראה and a falling upon his face.

I looked and saw a man dressed in linen, his loins girt in fine gold. His body like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightening, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and legs had the color of burnished bronze, and the sound of his speech was like the noise of a multitude.⁵²

Though Daniel sees many angels in his visions, it is the one described as dressed in linen, who tells of the future events that details the role that the angel Michael⁵³ will fill in those events. Confused and overwhelmed, Daniel is strengthened and comforted by this divine being. It is a heavy load to carry, but the messenger eases Daniel's burden.

"O man greatly beloved, do not fear; peace be to you, be strong and of good courage." And when he had spoken to me, I was strengthened.

Reminiscent of the Seraph touching Isaiah's lips, enabling him to address YHWH's request for help, so too, Daniel is touched by one of the divine men upon the mouth, infusing him with the ability to speak with the Divine messenger, the man in white linen.

⁵¹ Post-exilic descriptions of angels liken to Temple priests robed in white linen

⁵² Daniel 10:5-6

⁵³ The vision when Michael first appears brings into play the ANE theology that held that each city-state or nation had a tutelary god who was in a particular way its protector. Guardian angels in Israelite tradition were always subject to the authority of YHWH. Michael, a prince of the first rank, is described in later writings as the guardian angel to God's nation.

The one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and spoke, saying "My lord, because of the vision I have been seized with pangs and cannot summon strength. How can this servant of my lord speak with my lord seeing that my strength has failed me?" He who looked like a man touched me again, and strengthened me.⁵⁴

From the description in Daniel's dream vision it is understood that Michael,⁵⁵ who serves as the commanding officer of the heavenly hosts and advocate for the people, will come. He will come to battle on behalf of God. As the nation experiences political unrest and uncertainty of the future, the angels bring a message of cataclysmic proportions, and yet along with this comes hope, a great *nechemta* that all who stay true to YHVH will survive, as did Daniel in the lion's pit.

At that time, the great prince Michael who stands beside the sons of your people, will appear. It will be a time of trouble, the like of which has never been since the nation came into being. At that time your people will be rescued, all who are found to be inscribed in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life and some to the reproach of eternal abhorrence. And the knowledgeable will be radiant like the bright expanse of sky...⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Daniel 10: 16-17

⁵⁵ meaning "who is like God"

⁵⁶ Daniel 12:12

The angelic army prepares for battle on behalf of YHVH. They will battle forces both in heaven as well as on earth. Michael emerges as the warrior angel, preparing to lead the angelic army into battle against the forces who corrupt the world.

...the prince of the Persian kingdom⁵⁷ opposed me for twenty-one days; now

Michael, a prince of the first rank, has come to my aid...⁵⁸

This role is reminiscent of Joshua 5:13-15, when the **איש** appears to Joshua and announces himself to be **שר-צבא-יהוה**, the captain of the Lord's host. Is this un-named **מלאך** Michael? Perhaps having previously lead the vanguard of the human army, he now returns to lead the angelic army in a final battle. This notion of the angelic army who aids Israel in times of crisis is found in Deuteronomy with references in Psalms and other related literature.

⁵⁷ guardian angel of Persia, per JPS Study Bible

⁵⁸ Daniel 10:13 "Guardian angels of Israel battle those of Persia and Greece in turn. The battle of the heavenly army is also found at Qumran" JPS commentary notes page 1662

Chapter Four

Genesis 6

“Now that the humanity has become like us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take from the tree of life and live forever!

So YHVH banished אדם from the garden...”⁵⁹

The extraordinary use of the first person plurals, *we* and *us*, throughout the creation story lends to an understanding that the ancient Israelites believed in a world beyond earth where non-human beings existed along with YHVH. The heavenly council, with YHVH at the helm of his entourage, parallels Canaanite descriptions of the heavenly pantheon. “The tradition in Genesis 6:4 may reflect the Canaanite myth of the birth of minor gods from the union of *El* and human women.”⁶⁰ The conception of the Nephilim as superhuman may reflect this same Canaanite tradition of heavenly gods coming to seduce or rape mortal women, resulting in heroic offspring.

The term employed in Genesis 6 for these nonhuman god-like beings is בני-האלוהים

The Book of Job employs this term in its description of the divine consorts to YHVH, reinforcing the idea that these beings can be likened to what is defined as מלאכים.

Moreover, by juxtaposing the terms daughters of man to sons of God, we can interpret בני-האלוהים to mean nonhuman, god-like beings such as “angels”.

⁵⁹ Genesis 3:2

⁶⁰ John Gray *Near Eastern Mythology*

The seemingly odd placement of Genesis 6:1-4 with its description of interbreeding between human and divine beings certainly raises questions. Is this yet another mythic tale that the redactors of TANAKH chose to keep or is this four-verse story intended to link the creation narrative to the flood narrative and/or provide explanation for the flood narrative?

Interestingly, this is the only time that the biblical text alludes to the possibility that there may have been independent action on the part of divine beings. The conjecture that divine beings exploit free will, in order to transgress boundaries, in and of itself maybe the crux of the issue.

When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that most pleased them. YHVH said, "My spirit shall not dwell in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred twenty years."-It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth-when the divine beings cohabitated with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the great ones, the ones of great renown.

The issue of transgressing boundaries may be at odds with the Divine plan for creation. Going back to the first declaration to the earth, "be fruitful and multiply", we must consider that each species had been created to propagate itself "according to its type."⁶¹ This suggests that there is to be a distinct separation between the species of human and divine. The law of Leviticus 20:16 prohibiting mating between non-like species may be a continuation of this strain of thinking.

A second interpretation may liken divine-human mating to eating from the tree of life, and hence acquiring eternal life for man. Adam and Eve were sent out from the garden so that they would not be able to consume produce from the tree of life and become immortal "like one of us,"⁶² the angels. To forestall any attempt to "live forever,"⁶³ God casts them out. Genesis 6:1-4 offers a narrative that could produce similar consequences, immortal divine hybrids. This attempt to undo God's plan is therefore fated. God establishes the human lifespan and limits it to a maximum of 120 years.

Some scholars⁶⁴ have put forward a theory that the flood narrative was intended not only to destroy the humans who had become evil but also to reestablish a boundary between the two species, heavenly and earthly.

⁶¹ Genesis 1: 20-24

⁶² Genesis 3:22

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ "Spirit-Human Marriages and Their Aftermath" in Word Biblical Commentary p. 146

And the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the winged of the air; for I regret that I have made them."

Though the use of rabbinic literature can be problematic for interpreting the Bible, if we understand the words עוף השמים as winged things, in keeping with Midrash Rabba 1:3⁶⁵, that angels were created on the fifth day along with the other winged creatures of Genesis 1:20, we can then apply the same meaning to Genesis 6:5 linking these verses to the flood narrative.

What of the hybrid offspring of these human-angelic unions: the Nephilim? Very little is written about them. The term is cited only in one other place in Tanakh, Numbers 13:33. The Israelite spies enter Canaan and are overwhelmed to find Nephilim whose size intimidates them.

And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight.

Hence, one plausible interpretation is that these hybrid beings were the ancestors of the giants at odds with the Israelites at various times in ancient biblical history such as King

⁶⁵R. Chanina said: They were created on the fifth day, for it is written, And let fowl fly above the earth [Genesis 1:20], and it is written, And with twain he did fly [Isaiah 6:2].

Og of Bashan and Goliath of Gath. The rabbis speculate through aggadah that at least one of these creatures survived the flood by hanging on to the boat, having made a deal with Noah to supply him with food.⁶⁶ If we accept this explanation, then the previously discussed supposition to the flood narrative is weakened.

⁶⁶As the flood waters swelled, Og, King of Bashan sat himself upon one of the rungs of the ark's ladders and swore to Noah that he would be his slave forever. What did Noah's do? He punched a hole in the ark, and through it he handed out food to Og every day. Og's survival is intimated in Deutronomy 3:11 "Only Og remained of the remnant of Rephaim" The Book of Legends p. 27

Conclusion

“When the stars were created, all My angels sang praises to Me.”⁶⁷

This thesis has looked at the appearance of heavenly beings: the מלאך, the angel as איש, named angels and the heavenly host and the key issues involved in understanding their function in relation to humans and to YHVH.

The general definition of a מלאך is a divine being who mediates between the earthly and the non-earthly realms. He speaks in the language of human understanding and can appear as a human male, the איש or גבר. His primary function is the delivery of a Divine message or plan to specific human beings. Sometimes the role of the מלאך is to interpret the message, dream or vision. The מלאך is not bound by earthly constraints and can alter his form from anthropomorphic to non-anthropomorphic states. He may have a fiery or luminous appearance and often will cause a sense of יראה inducing the human to fall upon the ground in reverence.

At times, the line between angels and God is blurred as in Hagar's encounters with the מלאך-יהוה, but whether functioning as the manifestation of God or on behalf of God, the role of מאכים are defined and finite; to move the human characters along and protect the divine plan. As messengers of God, angels serve as part of God's holy retinue in heaven, attending to God as courtiers would attend an earthly king.

⁶⁷. Job 38:7

Winged creatures called cherubim and seraphim are described in great detail. There is no clear linguistic distinction between מלאכים and these heavenly creatures. The "hosts of heaven" clearly included a great many types of divine creatures, but the precise list is not clear. These beings are perceived to be superior to humans in knowledge and power, but subordinate to God.

The prophets vary in their experiences with divine beings. Isaiah's call to his prophetic mission offers the first biblical description of God's theophany, replete with throne room and winged seraphim. The angels provide God with a chorus of voices proclaiming his sovereignty, they also serve to prepare Isaiah to receive his prophetic charge from YHVH. The prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah, who were active in the years after the first Destruction and Exile, had important visions involving angels. The first chapter of Ezekiel depicts the Divine Presence seated on a throne supported by four חיות living creatures, later identified as cherubim. His experience of direct visual and mystical encounter with God and the divine beings are part of his prophetic beginnings. Similarly, in the book of Zechariah, angels appear throughout his many symbolic visions, to assist him in understanding his role as prophet. Unlike Isaiah and Ezekiel's winged creatures, Zechariah's angels manifest themselves in the human form and are referred to only as אנשׁ. Additionally, these angels begin to take on more of an independent life by shifting their roles to "interpreting angels" rather than simply the deliverer of the divine message.

To the Biblical authors, angels are agents of God. They sense inherently the danger of ascribing independent power to any being outside God. השטן is a prime example. Satan as the Adversary, in the Book of Job challenges God but cannot act without God's consent and decree. However, there is a developmental change that seems to be emerging of the divine being as an independent functionary.

By the the Book of the Daniel angels have separate names and personalities: Gabriel and Michael. They appear as attendants to the divine throne, they save Daniel from the lions and they interpret the eschatological events to take place in the future time. They serve as part of YHVH's holy army and "each nation has an angelic patron whose actions and destinies are bound up with those of his nation."⁶⁸

Excluding the seraphim and cherubim, the shape that angels take in their initial appearance to humans is often anthropomorphic. This serves two purposes; first, to comfort of the human, for fear of death is often associated with divine encounters. By taking on human shape, messages are received with less impediment. Second, all direct physical contact between humans and divine beings, sans Genesis 6,⁶⁹ occur when the divine being is in an anthropomorphized state of אִישׁ, leading to the conclusion, that this is the only state in which physical contact can occur.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ron Isaacs Ascending Jacob's Ladder Jason Aronson, NJ. 1998

⁶⁹ We have no idea as to the physical form of the בני-האלוהים other than they were capable of sexual reproduction

⁷⁰ The seraph who touched Isaiah held tongs, there was no direct physical contact.

The behavior of all but one category of divine being is prophetic, usually beneficent and sometimes punitive; although they may appear or disappear without warning, they are not characterized as supernatural or immaterial, unlike the מלאכים described by the later post-exilic and Second Temple writers. In general, biblical מלאכים are obedient to the divine will.

The development of angelic involvement in human affairs seems to follow the historical condition of the people and the nation. As the people needed to understand their political circumstances, their individual and national weaknesses and the hope for the future, angels brought messages that responded to the psychological state of the nation. The persona of מלאך filled a need for an intermediary between themselves and the unknowable and transcendent force of God.⁷¹

⁷¹ Theodora Ward Men and Angels Viking Press, New York, 1969

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