

Angels Throughout the Ages



LESSON 1: Who are the Angels?

Suggested Responses

1. In their early history, the Hebrew people inherited the pagan belief that the world was under the influence of countless localized “gods,” or *elim*. As time went on, the Hebrew faith in the one true God became purified, and these lesser gods were seen as utterly powerless and even unreal. Yet, their ability to capture the hearts of men and women, even from the loving and provident hands of Yahweh Elohim, kept the idea alive that there were, in fact, spiritual personalities in the heavenly realm other than Yahweh Elohim, even if they were totally unlike him in every other respect. Yahweh Elohim is the source of the being of everything else there is—“of all things,” as we say in the Nicene Creed, “visible and invisible.” So, these spiritual personalities who exert influence over our lives, sometimes attending mystical experiences that draw us more fully into covenant with God and sometimes leading us astray, must themselves be creatures like us. They belong to a different plane of reality than we do, but they are willed into being by God, just the same. This is the basis of the biblical concept of angels and demons.
2. The idea of angels as distinct spiritual beings created by God, but not a part of the corporeal world, was a fairly late development in the consciousness of the Hebrew people. In many instances in the Old Testament, and even in some instances in the New Testament, the word *angel* refers only to a manifestation of God’s presence as he communicates with human beings. But as time went on, the Hebrew people began to perceive a complex spiritual landscape inhabited by distinct creatures with personalities much like their own. Some of these angels gained prominence in the culture and came to be associated with names.
3. At first, the angelic and the demonic realms were seen as the same reality. The angels were just created spirits who, like us, could be more or less good or bad. The figure of the Satan as he appears in the Book of Job is just a member of the heavenly court of Yahweh, clearly subject to him and obviously created by him, but, nonetheless, present to him in a relationship that cannot be dismissed as entirely hostile. Over

time, however, Hebrew thinking about angels and demons developed to the point of placing them in clear and definite antagonism toward one another. The angels were on the side of God, and the demons had taken up arms against him. By the 2nd century B.C., and certainly by the time we arrive at the Book of Revelation, the distinction between angels as good and demons as evil is firmly established.

4. The word *baal* means something like *lord* or *master*. It was applied to the pagan gods throughout ancient Mesopotamia and also to kings. As people developed covenantal relationships with local gods who demanded their undivided loyalty or who were seen as especially powerful, these gods would sometimes come to be called simply Baal.
5. Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael. Daniel 12:1—“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people.” Tobit 12:17-15—“I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One.” Luke 1:19—“And the angel answered him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.’”