

A Reflection on Angels in the book of Genesis

A Study
Through
The
Book of

Exploring the Role of **ANGELS** IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

The above verse from Hebrews stresses the importance of showing kindness to strangers, reminding us that in so doing some have shown kindness to angels without knowing it.

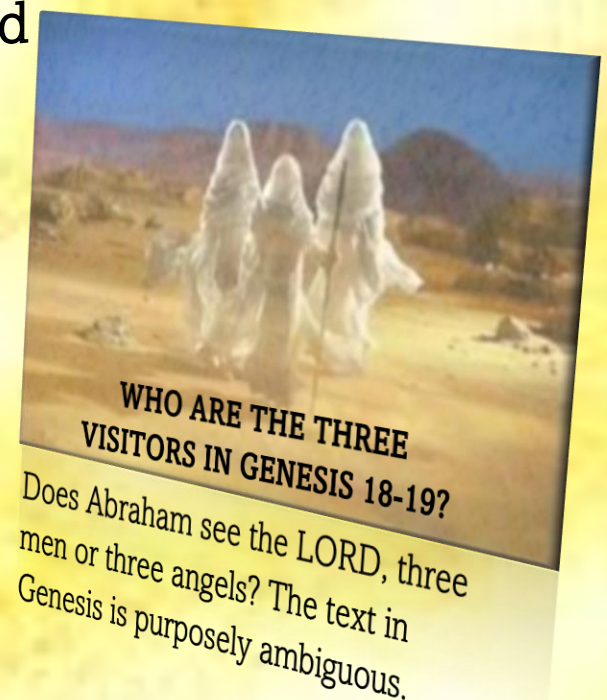
Such is the case in Genesis 18 and 19. In the first instance, God “appears to Abraham near the trees of Mamre” (Gen. 18:1), and yet what Abraham sees is “three men.” When they speak with him however, we are told that it is the LORD who is both speaking and being spoken to by Abraham, *cf. Gen. 18:13–20*.

So, did Abraham see and speak with God, or three men?

The text is purposely ambiguous. When the “men” turn to leave for Sodom, we are told that Abraham remained standing “before the LORD” (*Gen. 18:22*), who was presumably one of the three “men,” seeing as only two of them arrive in Sodom in the next chapter. When they do, they are now called “angels” (Heb. *malākîm*) or “sent ones” instead of “men” (*anāsîm*), *cf. Gen. 19:1*.

But what are *angels*, and what role do they play in the Bible?

In short, they are *messengers sent by God to communicate His word, enact His will, or manifest His presence in the world in some tangible way*.



Hebrew: Mal'ak - מלאך

The Hebrew word for “angel” (mal'ak) literally means a *messenger* or *delegate (someone sent)* and is used in the Bible as a referent for both human and spiritual beings.

Ironically, the image that most of us have in our minds when we think of an angel is closer to what the Bible calls “cherubim,” which are the winged spiritual beings first mentioned in the Bible as guardians placed at the entrance of Eden.

...at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim...to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

While cherubim and angels are both spiritual beings, the major difference between them is in their function. Angels are primarily used as **messengers**, while cherubim are primarily **guardians**, or **keepers** who surround the divine throne.

*...the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.
(1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2)*

*Hear us, Shepherd of Israel...
You who sit enthroned
between the cherubim...
(Psalm 80:1)*

The cherubim were winged spiritual beings who were pictured as guardians above the ark of the covenant.



When most Israelites thought of angels or spiritual beings, what they usually envisioned were cherubim. The reason is because for most of their history there were images of cherubim engraved throughout the tabernacle and the temple (*cf. Exod. 25:17-22, 26:1, 26:31; 1 Kgs. 6:23-29*).

Greek: Angelos - ἄγγελος

The Greek word used in the New Testament for “angel” (angelos) also means *messenger* or *delegate* and is used as a referent for both human and spiritual beings as well.

For example, when Jesus sends his human disciples ahead of him to prepare the way, they are called his “angelous” (plural for “angels”) (Luke 9:52).

And when God sends His own messengers to minister to Jesus in his earthly form they are called “angeloi” (plural for “angels”) as well (cf. Mark 1:13; Matthew 4:11).

In distinguishing between human and heavenly messengers, we should note that most English Bibles translate the Hebrew and Greek word for “angel” differently when they are referring to a human or a spiritual being. For example...

So, Saul sent messengers (Heb. mal’ak “angels”) to Jesse and said, “Send me your son David...” (1 Samuel 16:19)

Now Jephthah sent messengers (Heb. mal’ak “angels”) to the king...” (Judges 11:12)

The two angels (Heb. mal’ak) came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate... (Genesis 19:1)

As Jacob went on his way, the angels (Heb. mal’ak) of God met him. (Genesis 32:1)

Jacob sent messengers (Heb. mal’ak) ahead of him to his brother Esau... (Genesis 32:1-3)



Even though the image of angels with wings is so popular, we should note that angels in the Bible are NEVER depicted this way.

CONCLUSION: ANGELS IN THE BIBLE NORMALLY LOOK LIKE YOU.

There is a reason why the writer of Hebrews tells us that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Because when angels in the Bible appear to human beings they usually look like human beings as well. Or at least appear in human likeness.

To sum this up, angels normally appear to people in the Bible looking like people as well. Their primary roles seem to be...

Delivering messages to human beings on God's behalf	Performing wonders or acts of deliverance for God's people	Bringing comfort or provision to the people of God
And an angel from the Lord appeared to Zacharias, standing to the right of the altar of incense... the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard ..." – Luke 1:11-13	The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him and rescues them. – Psalms 34:6-7	...and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. – 1 Kings 19:5-6
The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news." – Luke 1:19	And behold, an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. – Acts 12:6-7	...and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels came and ministered to him. – Mark 1:13

Grace and blessings!
– **Pastor Marc**