



ANGELS
and
DEMONS

John Everett

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Everything you wanted to
know but had no one to ask

John Everett

There is something of a mystery about the words 'angel' and 'demon'. They are not really English words at all, but Greek words simply written with letters from our alphabet. This is because when the original Greek words were being translated, no one really knew what they meant. This book looks at the range of their uses in the Bible and other classical Greek texts to see what they are shown as doing and being. The answers may surprise you, and will certainly give you plenty to think about.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my daughter, Sally, with thanks
for her valuable encouragement

References

For ease of reading, where biblical passages are cited, I have given a footnote number in square brackets. At the end of each chapter the details of each passage are given. The translation used is the World English Bible which is declared to be in the public domain. It is a modern translation, combining scholarship with readability. For greater readability I have removed verse numbers, which were never part of the original material anyway. The cited passages are shown in italics.

Introduction

The idea for this book began when I was developing the narrative of 'Trubshaw's Visitor'. If you have read this book you will know that the hero is a precocious twelve-year-old boy, the son of a Cambridge professor of the Philosophy of Language. Trubshaw has been educated at home, because his father believes in learning rather than teaching, but when he reaches the age of eleven his father recognises that his son needs social experience too. He is therefore sent off to a typical English Preparatory School for Boys as a boarder. After four terms there, in the Christmas holidays of 1951, his father develops the idea of a perfect test of his son's intelligence. He was discussing this with two university friends, and they agreed that a perfect test would be where the subject was not aware that he was being tested. With the help of his friend whose work as an astrophysicist made him an expert in radios, they create a radio that is to all outward appearances a normal one, but which in fact has a built in transmitter in the style of a citizens band radio. But son Trubshaw is not told this. The original idea was that the radio

would send out signals as if from an extra-terrestrial visitor from outer space. But the other friend, who is a theologian, decides that since it will be his job to actually speak the messages he will pretend instead to be an angel. A trainee angel even.

Thus the discussion develops between a boy of twelve and a pretend angel. This fictional discussion raised many interesting philosophical questions, and the theologian decided that he needs to begin a proper research into angelic and demonic activity.

This book is the supposed outcome of the theologian's research into this topic, especially in the light of the issues raised in the original fictional story. While attempting to be a piece of pure research (albeit not technical) into the original texts, it also asks some interesting questions.

John Everett,
January, 2016

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The linguistic problem

The first 'problem' that one encounters when thinking about angels and the rather similar entities that are called demons, is that neither word is free from linguistic difficulties. Neither word is actually a translation of the original (Greek) word. In actual fact both are transliterations: the translators have simply replaced the letters of the Greek alphabet with their equivalent in our own language. This is even true of the earliest translation from Greek into Latin.

It seems as though the translators did not know quite what the Greek words really meant, so they took the short cut of not bothering to translate them at all.

Take 'angel' first: the Greek word is *αγγελος* (*aggelos* except that the double 'gg' is heard as 'ng', hence *angelos*). In Greek the word *angelos* simply means messenger. So why was the word not translated as such? Obviously the original scholars thought that these celestial beings were somehow special messengers, and therefore could not be given an ordinary name. If we take the sum of all references to angels in scripture we can safely

conclude that they are spiritual beings. True, often they are used to deliver messages, but they have other functions too. We will explore these in more detail in due course. The point is that because of this, early translators, in Latin and English certainly, chose not to translate the word, but to transliterate it.

The same is true of 'demon'. It is simply a transliteration of δαιμων (*daimon*) via the Latin *daemon* into the English 'demon'. It is slightly more complicated, because the New Testament Greek usually uses the diminutive version of the word: δαιμονιον (*daimonion*). The problem is made worse from the word used by the King James Version (KJV) made in 1611. There, instead of 'demon' we have 'devil'. But all recent English translations prefer 'demon'.

We will look in more detail about the true meaning of both words. But at this stage it is enough to note the basic problem, which is simply that both words are lost in whatever the original Greek word meant. In both cases the answer is not a simple one.

The cosmic viewpoint

We cannot proceed with our investigation of these words without reference to the cosmic viewpoint of the literature in which they occur. It is in sharp contrast with the modern materialistic stance we are familiar with, which assumes that all that can be examined by scientific methods is all there is.

The Bible assumes that there is not one cosmos but two. Sometimes they are called 'earth' and 'heaven' [1] and sometimes 'the seen' and 'the unseen' [2]. Once more we have a problem, because the word 'heaven' carries so much baggage with it. We think of clouds and harps and other earthly concepts. One religion even promises pretty young ladies (it is rather a male-dominated religion) and lots of feasting and parties. But the scriptural references to heaven make it clear that it is not somewhere else in the material cosmos, but a different kind of cosmos. Its dwellers are not 'flesh and blood', but spiritual. They enjoy a mode of existence that is beyond human experience, and beyond useful words which we could use to describe them. Even to describe them as 'spiritual' is probably deficient, as

words go, because even that word has baggage. The Greek πνευμα (*pneuma*) can also be translated as 'wind' or 'ghost' as well as the more usual 'spirit'.

It is clear that these celestial entities are non-material, non-physical entities, and were created rather than arriving as physical offspring from parents [3]. But they are like us humans in one respect: they have willpower and are able to make decisions. They can choose to obey or disobey. They have purposes and have desired outcomes to attain.

The essential point here is that these non-physical entities are divided into two groups: those who obey their Creator, and those who have rebelled and formed an opposition to their Creator.

Thus angels and demons.

Obviously it is an act of faith to suppose that the Biblical record is true, just as it is an act of faith to believe that the material cosmos is all there is. The purpose of what follows here is to examine in some detail what the Biblical record gives us. And we can only receive information about the 'unseen' if we receive it as revelation rather than information delivered by physical observation.

Notes

[1] Genesis 1:1; Matthew 6:10; Matthew 16:19

[2] 2 Corinthians 4:18

[3] Matthew 22:30

Heaven

It will be useful if we take just a little longer to consider the word 'heaven'. We need to recognise that it is used in three senses in scripture. In the Old Testament of the Bible the word is actually plural in form, (Hebrew *shamayim*) and means literally 'heaved up things'. The English translation varies from a singular 'heaven' to a plural 'heavens'. It is used of what we would call the atmosphere (or the sky), in phrases such as 'the birds of the heavens', or even space: 'the stars in the heavens' and so on.

The trouble comes when we get to phrases which seem to treat heaven as God's own place, and this is carried into the New Testament: in Matthew's gospel the 'Kingdom of Heaven' is used where the exactly equivalent phrase in Luke's gospel is the 'Kingdom of God'. When we say today 'Heaven forbid!' we mean simply 'God forbid!'. Paul talks about *'the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places'* [1]. This helps us understand the third essential meaning for 'heaven': in contrast to earth (the physical universe) there

is heaven (the spiritual universe). As recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus says this to Nicodemus: *'If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?'* [2]

And Paul writes of his own 'out of body' experience: *'I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I don't know, or whether out of the body, I don't know; God knows), such a one caught up into the third heaven. I know such a man (whether in the body, or outside of the body, I don't know; God knows), how he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.'* [3].

It is in this third sense that 'heaven' is contrasted with 'earth' in the Bible. The unseen, or invisible cosmos, as against the seen or visible cosmos. We need to discard all the more common ideas, these days, that heaven is a sort of reward for the righteous, somewhere else in the universe. This is not true to the Bible. Heaven is not a place, in the way that Yorkshire is a place. The key ideas that I want to explore here are the possible

ways in which the 'unseen' can interact with our 'seen' cosmos. What entities have a natural way of existing in the 'unseen' cosmos? In what ways can these spiritual entities interact with us, who are – by contrast – flesh and blood?

Notes

[1] Ephesians 6:12

[2] John 3:12

[3] 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

Angels: overwhelming or ordinary?

We cannot ignore angels if we are to take the Bible seriously. The word occurs somewhere around 200 times in the Bible, and there are other ranks of spiritual beings too, which we will need to come to. I will divide the topic into several chapters, and focus on one aspect in each.

The problem that immediately hits one is that there is rarely any actual description. We are left wondering precisely what happened. There are dozens of times when we read of the angel apparently simply speaking to a person, even to the point of actually asking questions. Consider this passage:

But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your hand. Do to her whatever is good in your eyes." Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face. The LORD's angel found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain on the way to Shur. He said, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where did you come from? Where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the face of my

mistress Sarai.” The LORD’s angel said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands.” The LORD’s angel said to her, “I will greatly multiply your offspring, that they will not be counted for multitude.” The LORD’s angel said to her, “Behold, you are with child, and will bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction. He will be like a wild donkey among men. His hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him. He will live opposed to all of his brothers.” She called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees,” for she said, “Have I even stayed alive after seeing him?” [1]

On reading this one realises straight away that there must have been an encounter of some extraordinary sort. The encounter was sufficiently overwhelming that Hagar was amazed that she was still alive after it. She had supposed she had been talking with God Himself. But we have no idea what Hagar actually saw.

This is a common theme. A message is

given, but no description of the giver. Another similarity is the apparent lack of distinction between 'the angel of the LORD' and 'the LORD' Himself, as in this passage:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to God's mountain, to Horeb. The LORD's angel appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the middle of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush burnt with fire, and the bush was not consumed. Moses said, "I will go now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the LORD saw that he came over to see, God called to him out of the middle of the bush, and said, "Moses! Moses!" He said, "Here I am." He said, "Don't come close. Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing on is holy ground." Moreover he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. [2]

Here is an abbreviated account of the call

of Gideon. Once again, note the reaction at the end. The recipient of such a visit begins to fear for his life.

The children of Israel did that which was evil in the LORD's sight: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel . . . Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. the LORD's angel appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valour!" Gideon said to him, "Oh, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Where are all his wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying, 'Didn't the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian." The LORD looked at him, and said, "Go in this your might, and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Haven't I sent you?" He said to him, "O Lord, how shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." The LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." . .*

. Then the LORD's angel departed out of his sight. Gideon saw that he was the LORD's angel; and Gideon said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Because I have seen the LORD's angel face to face!" The LORD said to him, "Peace be to you! Don't be afraid. You shall not die." [3]

By way of contrast there are occasions when angels can be confused with ordinary people, men rather than women.

The two angels came to Sodom at evening. Lot sat in the gate of Sodom. Lot saw them, and rose up to meet them. He bowed himself with his face to the earth, and he said, "See now, my lords, please come into your servant's house, stay all night, wash your feet, and you can rise up early, and go on your way." They said, "No, but we will stay in the street all night." He urged them greatly, and they came in with him, and entered into his house. He made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. They called to Lot, and said to him, "Where

are the men who came in to you this night? Bring them out to us, that we may have sex with them.” [4]

Not a comfortable passage obviously, but these visitors are actually described as angels, so we cannot ignore it. You can read on from here, if you will, as later the angels warn Lot and his family to flee from Sodom, as it is about to be destroyed as a judgment from God.

The possibility of angels being taken to be ordinary men is confirmed by a short passage from a letter of the New Testament.

Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for in doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it. [5]

The clear conclusion from the passages cited so far is that sometimes a visit from an angel can be seen as effectively a totally overwhelming visit from God Himself, and sometimes as a visit from someone easily mistaken for an ordinary person. And as we shall see soon, there are visits where the chief feature is the brightness of the light.

Notes

[1] Genesis 16:6-13

[2] Exodus 3:1-6

[3] Judges 6:1-23

[4] Genesis 19:1-5

[5] Hebrews 13:2

Ranks of angels

Although we will spend most of the time considering typical angelic activity as recorded in the Bible, let us first note that there are ranks of spiritual beings that may be regarded as above 'ordinary' angels. Scripture also refers to archangels, seraphim and cherubim.

An 'archangel' is simply a 'chief angel', or more literally a 'ruling' angel. Here are the two uses of the word in the New Testament.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, [1]

But Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil and arguing about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him an abusive condemnation, but said, "May the Lord rebuke you!" [2]

Seraphim (this is simply the plural of seraph) are mentioned in this vision seen by Isaiah.

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two he covered his face. With two he covered his feet. With two he flew. One called to another, and said,

*“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Armies!
The whole earth is full of his glory!”*

The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!”

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. He touched my mouth with it, and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin forgiven.”

I heard the Lord’s voice, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

Then I said, “Here I am. Send me!” [3]

Cherubim (plural of cherub) are mentioned at the end of the story of the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were expelled.

So he drove out the man; and he placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. [4]

They come again in the instructions given for making the special container (ark) of the tablets, on which the covenant between YHWH and His people was recorded, were to be transported as the people travelled towards the promised land.

You shall put the covenant which I shall give you into the ark. You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two and a half cubits shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. You shall make two cherubim of hammered gold. You shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end. You shall make the cherubim on its two ends of one piece with the mercy seat. The cherubim shall spread out their wings upward,

covering the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces towards one another. The faces of the cherubim shall be towards the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I will give you. There I will meet with you, and I will tell you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the covenant, all that I command you for the children of Israel. [5]

The ark and its cherubim and mentioned several times in the chapters and books that follow. Then, when Solomon replaced the tent-like structure (tabernacle, to give its old English name) with a permanent building, the temple, we find them mentioned again.

[Solomon] prepared an inner sanctuary in the middle of the house within, to set the ark of the LORD's covenant there. Within the inner sanctuary was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in width, and twenty cubits in its height; and he overlaid it with pure gold; and he covered the altar with cedar. So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure

gold. He drew chains of gold across before the inner sanctuary, and he overlaid it with gold. He overlaid the whole house with gold, until all the house was finished. He also overlaid the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary with gold. In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. Five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub. From the tip of one wing to the tip of the other was ten cubits. The other cherub was ten cubits. Both the cherubim were of one measure and one form. One cherub was ten cubits high, and so was the other cherub. He set the cherubim within the inner house. The wings of the cherubim were stretched out, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the middle of the house. He overlaid the cherubim with gold. [6]

A cubit, by the way, is the distance between a man's finger tips and his elbow.

Cherubim are mentioned several times in the Psalms, and many times in the book of the

prophet Ezekiel. Here cherubim are recorded as appearing to the prophet.

Then I looked, and see, in the expanse that was over the head of the cherubim there appeared above them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. He spoke to the man clothed in linen, and said, "Go in between the whirling wheels, even under the cherub, and fill both your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city."*

He went in as I watched. Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. The LORD's glory mounted up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD's glory. The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

It came to pass, when he commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," that he went in, and stood

beside a wheel. The cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and took some of it, and put it into the hands of him who was clothed in linen, who took it and went out. The form of a man's hand appeared here in the cherubim under their wings.

I looked, and behold, there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub. The appearance of the wheels was like a beryl stone. As for their appearance, the four of them had one likeness, like a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn as they went, but to the place where the head looked they followed it. They didn't turn as they went. Their whole body, including their backs, their hands, their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes all around, even the wheels that the four of them had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, "the whirling wheels". Every one of them had four faces. The first face was the face of the cherub. The second face was the face of a man. The third face was the face of a lion. The fourth was the face of an eagle.

The cherubim mounted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar.
[7]

There is only one reference to cherubim in the New Testament, where the letter to the Hebrews describes the ark of the covenant exactly as in Exodus. [8]

Medieval and later art sometimes confused putti (chubby male children) with cherubs. Today we still have people using 'cherubic' about children to imply that they are somehow angelic in appearance. This is a simple mistake. It is also wrong to suppose that 'angelic' is a good word to use of any children.

Notes

[1] 1 Thessalonians 4:16

[2] Jude 1:9

[3] Isaiah 6:1-8

[4] Genesis 3:24

[5] Exodus 25:16-22

[6] 1 Kings 6:19-28

[7] Ezekiel 10:1-15

[8] Hebrews 9:1-8

Angels as messengers

Remembering that the word 'angel' – if simply translated – means 'messenger', we can now move to their primary function: the giving of a message. This is the common type of angelic encounter, and I will cite just a few of the many examples, all on the same theme of announcing a birth.

¹The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the LORD's sight; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and childless. the LORD's angel appeared to the woman, and said to her, "See now, you are barren and childless; but you shall conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore please beware and drink no wine nor strong drink, and don't eat any unclean thing: for, behold, you shall conceive, and give birth to a son. No razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb. He shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, “A man of God came to me, and his face was like the face of the angel of God, very awesome. I didn’t ask him where he was from, neither did he tell me his name; but he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink. Don’t eat any unclean thing; for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”

Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, “Oh, Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us, and teach us what we should do to the child who shall be born.”

God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field, but Manoah, her husband, wasn’t with her. The woman hurried and ran, and told her husband, and said to him, “Behold, the man who came to me that day has appeared to me,”

Manoah arose, and followed his wife, and came to the man, and said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to my wife?”

He said, “I am.”

Manoah said, “Now let your words

happen. What shall the child's way of life and mission be?"

The LORD's angel said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that comes of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. Let her observe all that I commanded her."

Manoah said to the LORD's angel, "Please stay with us, that we may make a young goat ready for you."

The LORD's angel said to Manoah, "Though you detain me, I won't eat your bread. If you will prepare a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD." For Manoah didn't know that he was the LORD's angel.

Manoah said to the LORD's angel, "What is your name, that when your words happen, we may honour you?"

The LORD's angel said to him, "Why do you ask about my name, since it is incomprehensible?"*

So Manoah took the young goat with the meal offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD. Then the angel did an amazing thing as Manoah and his wife watched. For when the flame went up towards the sky from off

the altar, the LORD's angel ascended in the flame of the altar. Manoah and his wife watched; and they fell on their faces to the ground. But the LORD's angel didn't appear to Manoah or to his wife any more. Then Manoah knew that he was the LORD's angel. Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

But his wife said to him, "If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he wouldn't have received a burnt offering and a meal offering at our hand, and he wouldn't have shown us all these things, nor would he have told us such things as these at this time." The woman bore a son, and named him Samson. The child grew, and the LORD blessed him. The LORD's Spirit began to move him in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. [1]

Announcing an impending birth seems to be a very common feature of angelic messages. This next passage has many similarities with the previous one.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the priestly division of Abijah. He had a wife

of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they both were well advanced in years. Now while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. The whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Don't be afraid, Zacharias, because your request has been heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. You will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord,

their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to prepare a people prepared for the Lord.'

Zacharias said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. Behold, you will be silent and not able to speak, until the day that these things will happen, because you didn't believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."*

The people were waiting for Zacharias, and they marvelled that he delayed in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple. He continued making signs to them, and remained mute. When the days of his service were fulfilled, he departed to his house. After these days Elizabeth, his wife, conceived, and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus has the Lord done to me in the days in which he looked at me, to take away my reproach amongst men." [2]

On the same theme is the most well-known of all angelic appearances.

Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man whose name was Joseph, of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. Having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, you highly favoured one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you amongst women!"

But when she saw him, she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered what kind of salutation this might be. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and give birth to a son, and will call his name 'Jesus.' He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. There will be no end to his Kingdom."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, seeing I am a virgin?"

The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit

will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God. Behold, Elizabeth, your relative, also has conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing spoken by God is impossible.”

Mary said, “Behold, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.” The angel departed from her. [3]

The importance of the event just described is made clear by a further angelic visit, also recorded by Luke.

While they were there, the day had come for her to give birth. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a feeding trough, because there was no room for them in the inn. There were shepherds in the same country staying in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said to them,

“Don’t be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. For there is born to you today, in David’s city, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. This is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough.” Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men.”

When the angels went away from them into the sky, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem, now, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” [4]

These are obviously very well-known passages, which we are reminded of every year at Christmas. We cannot easily dismiss them, since they are at the very heart of the beliefs that all Christians hold.

It is also worth noting that there are numerous other passages where angels are simply acting as messengers, but for sake of brevity I have only included the most notable.

Notes

[1] Judges 13:1-25

[2] Luke 1:3-25

[3] Luke 1:26-38

[4] Luke 2:6-15

Angels using dreams

Although angels are usually recorded as visiting people directly, there are times when they are recorded as delivering a message by means of dreams. The most obvious ones to cite are those surrounding the birth of Jesus.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this: After his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly. But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall give birth to a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins." [1]

Joseph (and the wise men) were also given warnings by means of dreams.

The [wise men] came into the house and saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country another way.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.” . . . But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child’s life are dead.” [2]

It is worth including at this point angelic appearances that are described as visions. In this passage there are two.

Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of

what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, who gave gifts for the needy generously to the people, and always prayed to God. At about the ninth hour of the day, he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God coming to him, and saying to him, “Cornelius!”

He, fastening his eyes on him, and being frightened, said, “What is it, Lord?”

He said to him, “Your prayers and your gifts to the needy have gone up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and get Simon, who is also called Peter. He is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the seaside.”[†]

When the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of those who waited on him continually. Having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. Now on the next day as they were on their journey, and got close to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray at about noon. He became hungry and desired to eat, but while they were preparing, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and a certain

container descending to him, like a great sheet let down by four corners on the earth, in which were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and birds of the sky. A voice came to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."

A voice came to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean." This was done three times, and immediately the vessel was received up into heaven. Now while Peter was very perplexed in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was lodging there. While Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men seek you. But arise, get down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

Peter went down to the men, and said, "Behold, I am he whom you seek. Why have you come?"

They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a

righteous man and one who fears God, and well spoken of by all the nation of the Jews, was directed by a holy angel to invite you to his house, and to listen to what you say.” So he called them in and provided a place to stay. On the next day Peter arose and went out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. On the next day they entered into Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and his near friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up! I myself am also a man.” As he talked with him, he went in and found many gathered together. He said to them, “You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man who is a Jew to join himself or come to one of another nation, but God has shown me that I shouldn’t call any man unholy or unclean. Therefore I also came without complaint when I was sent for. I ask therefore, why did you send for me?”

Cornelius said, “Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour,^s I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said,

‘Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your gifts to the needy are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and summon Simon, who is also called Peter. He is staying in the house of a tanner named Simon, by the seaside. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ Therefore I sent to you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God to hear all things that have been commanded you by God.” [3]

For Peter, a Jew, to associate with non-Jews was a very challenging step, contrary to all his upbringing, hence the need for clear intervention. Similar directions and guidance were also given to the apostle Paul.

Passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing, begging him, and saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go out to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the Good News to them. [4]

And this was not the only time Paul received instructions in this way.

The Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Don’t be afraid, but speak and don’t be silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” [5]

When they had been long without food, Paul stood up in the middle of them, and said, “Sirs, you should have listened to me, and not have set sail from Crete and have gotten this injury and loss. Now I exhort you to cheer up, for there will be no loss of life amongst you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel, belonging to the God whose I am and whom I serve, saying, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. Behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore, sirs, cheer up! For I believe God, that it will be just as it has been spoken to me. [6]

In the Old testament we have dreams too.

Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went towards Haran. He came to a certain place, and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. He took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. He dreamt and saw a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. I will give the land you lie on to you and to your offspring. [7]

The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Now lift up your eyes, and behold, all the male goats which leap on the flock are streaked, speckled, and grizzled, for I have seen all that Laban does to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow to me. Now arise, get out from this land, and return to the land of your birth.'" [8]

We may well ask: 'why dreams and not a direct visit?' It may have something to do with

the circumstances, such as other people being present, or perhaps the possibility that for certain people a direct visit would be too overwhelming.

It also raises the obvious question about dreams themselves. Traditionally psychology, following the example of Freud, is interested in the causes of dreams, and what they reveal about the person's psyche who has them. We all have them after all. But the idea that an external force or personality could manage the content of our dreams is a bit disturbing for many of us. We will return to this later.

Notes

[1] Matthew 1:18-21

[2] Matthew 2:11-20

[3] Acts 10:1-33

[4] Acts 16:9-10

[5] Acts 18:9

[6] Acts 27:21-25

[7] Genesis 28:10-13

[8] Genesis 31:11-13

Angels in the gospels

We turn now to the incidental references that can be found in the four gospels. As is widely known, three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) have many passages in common. Only one version of each will be cited, and I have selected nearly all in this chapter from just one gospel, Matthew.

We have already seen the involvement of angels in the birth narratives, so we now look at those that follow. The first is the account of the temptations that Jesus face during a time alone in the desert.

Then the devil took him into the holy city. He set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you.’ and, ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don’t dash your foot against a stone.’” . . .

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him. [1]

In talking about the judgment that will

eventually come, Jesus often made references to angels.

The Son of Man will send forth his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, [2]

So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous. [3]

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then will he render to every man according to his deeds. [4]

He will send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. [5]

But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only. [6]

But when the Son of Man comes in his

glory, and all the holy angels with him, then will he sit on the throne of his glory. [7]

Referring particularly to children, but I think not exclusively, there is a reference in Jesus' teaching on guardian angels.

See that you don't despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. [8]

When asked about the condition that people will enjoy in the afterlife, in response to a question from a group that did not believe in any life beyond death, Jesus said this of those who are raised to a new life:

For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. [9]

This is a most significant comment about the actual nature of angels. It implies that, in contrast to us humans, angels do not have physical bodies. They are part of a different cosmos.

Just before Jesus was arrested he was with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, aware that to stay there would ensure that he was arrested. This was a moment of great mental stress.

He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. Being in agony he prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. [10]

The final aspect from the gospels relating to angels is their involvement with the burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled

away the stone from the door, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men. The angel answered the women, “Don’t be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.” [11]

The description of the angel, immensely and terrifyingly bright, is worth noting. The guards here had a very similar reaction to the shepherds in the birth narrative. We may deduce a great deal from this.

Notes

[1] Matthew 4:5-11

[2] Matthew 13:41

[3] Matthew 13:49

[4] Matthew 16:27

[5] Matthew 24:31

[6] Matthew 24:36

- [7] Matthew 25:31
- [8] Matthew 18:10
- [9] Matthew 22:30
- [10] Luke 22:41-43
- [11] Matthew 28:1-7

Angels in the Acts of the Apostles

We have already noted in the chapter about angels using dreams several incidents from this book. This chapter will cite the others.

The high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy and laid hands on the apostles, then put them in public custody. But an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors by night, and brought them out and said, “Go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” When they heard this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and taught. But the high priest came, and those who were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But the officers who came didn’t find them in the prison. They returned and reported, “We found the prison shut and locked, and the guards standing before the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!” [1]

A similar incident is recorded here.

When [Herod] had arrested [Peter], he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. Peter therefore was kept in the prison, but constant prayer was made by the assembly to God for him. The same night when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Guards in front of the door kept the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side, and woke him up, saying, "Stand up quickly!" His chains fell off his hands. The angel said to him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." He did so. He said to him, "Put on your cloak and follow me." And he went out and followed him. He didn't know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. They went out, and went down

one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. [2]

We have noted guidance given to Peter and Paul by angels using dreams. Here is another similar incident.

An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise, and go towards the south to the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert." He arose and went; and behold, there was a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, "Go near, and join yourself to this chariot." Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He said, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" He begged Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this,

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.

*As a lamb before his shearer is silent,
so he doesn't open his mouth.
In his humiliation, his judgement was taken
away.
Who will declare His generation?
For his life is taken from the earth.”*

The eunuch answered Philip, “Who is the prophet talking about? About himself, or about someone else?” Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached to him about Jesus. As they went on the way, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Behold, here is water. What is keeping me from being baptised?” He commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptised him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch didn't see him any more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. Passing through, he preached the Good News to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea. [3]

A further reference, albeit with very little detail, comes here.

On an appointed day, Herod dressed himself in royal clothing, sat on the throne, and gave a speech to them. The people shouted, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he didn’t give God the glory. Then he was eaten by worms and died.
[4]

Notes

[1] Acts 5:17-23

[2] Acts 12: 4-10

[3] Acts 8:26-40

[4] Acts 12:21-23

Angels in the letters of Paul

Paul was very conscious of the existence of angels, and sometimes refers to them in a quite matter-of-fact way.

For, I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last of all, like men sentenced to death. For we are made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men. [1]

Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? [2]

If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. [3]

But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any gospel other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed. [4]

What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise has been made. It was

ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. [5]

That which was a temptation to you in my flesh, you didn't despise nor reject; but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. [6]

Let no one rob you of your prize by self-abasement and worshipping of the angels. [7]

God was revealed in the flesh, Justified in the spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the nations, Believed on in the world, And received up in glory. [8]

I charge you in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality. [9]

The 'elect' angels, indeed! Implying so much. Are there two categories of angels? Are some angels somehow outside in some way? We have raised a huge topic now, and will deal with it in more detail after we have assembled some more passages to consider.

Notes

- [1] 1 Corinthians 4:9
- [2] 1 Corinthians 6:3
- [3] 1 Corinthians 13:1
- [4] Galatians 1:8
- [5] Galatians 3:19
- [6] Galatians 4:14
- [7] Colossians 2:18
- [8] 1 Timothy 3:16
- [9] 1 Timothy 5:21

Angels in the other letters

The Letter to the Hebrews may have been written by Paul, but it bears no signature and scholars are divided on the attribution. It begins with a lengthy comparison between the Son and the angels. Here it is with omissions.

His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, who, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels as the more excellent name he has inherited is better than theirs. . . .When he again brings in the firstborn into the world he says, "Let all the angels of God worship him." . . .But which of the angels has he told at any time, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet? Aren't they all serving spirits, sent out to do service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? . . . But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of

God he should taste of death for everyone. [1]

We have in this passage an excellent definition of angels as 'serving spirits sent out to do service'. And the phrase 'a little lower than the angels' is an echo from the Psalm where man is described in just those terms. [2]

The same letter also speaks of 'clouds of witnesses', obviously referring to the company of angels in heaven, who observe everything we do. [3]

There are references to angels in the two letters of Peter.

[The salvation] which now has been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into. [4]

Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him. [5]

We will also need to come back to the phrase 'angels and authorities and powers'. The further we go, the more complex the ideas are that are raised for our consideration. As is the case in the next passage.

God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved to judgment. [6]

Once again we find ourselves presented with the idea of rebel angels, and their being excluded. 'Tartarus' is translated as 'Hell' in most English translations, but this rendering is correct with regard to the word used in the original Greek, and is the only occurrence of that word in the New Testament. The whole idea is expanded on in the next passage.

Angels who didn't keep their first domain, but deserted their own dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting bonds under darkness for the judgement of the great day. [7]

Although this verse occurs in a different

letter (Jude's) it acts as a perfect explanation of the expulsion to Tartarus (Hell) noted in the statement made by Peter above. Further explanations will follow in due course.

Notes

[1] Hebrews 1:1 - 2:9

[2] Psalm 8:5

[3] Hebrews 12:1

[4] 1 Peter 1:12

[5] 1 Peter 3:22

[6] 2 Peter 2:4

[7] Jude 1:6

War in Heaven

In our broad survey of what the Bible tells us about angels we have now opened up the subject of rebel, disobedient, angels. And in our progression through the New Testament we have come to its last book, that of the Revelation given to John. So let us open up with a quotation from that book.

There was war in the sky. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war. They didn't prevail. No place was found for them any more in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, the power, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ has come; for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life,

even to death. Therefore rejoice, heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time.” [1]

Here we meet reference to 'the devil', 'the dragon', 'the old serpent', 'Satan', 'the accuser', as the leader of the rebel angels. The Greek for accuser is διαβολος (*diabolos*), from which comes the adjective 'diabolical', and effectively the English word 'devil', which is used as the translation here of *diabolos*.

Let us compare this with a saying of Jesus, which needs to be seen in the context shown here.

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” He said to them, “I saw Satan having fallen like lightning from heaven. [2]

We need to compare this casting down with a prophecy from Isaiah.

How you have fallen from heaven, shining

one, son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north! I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High!" Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit. [3]*

'Sheol' is the Hebrew word usually translated by 'Hell' in English translations, and when the first Latin translation was made of the 'shining one' the name 'Lucifer' was used, literally 'light-bearer.' Most commentators see this passage also as a reference to the War in Heaven, and the casting out of the defeated leader of the rebel angels, Lucifer, or Satan, by name. The reason for the rebellion is taken to be Satan's pride, and a desire to outshine even his Creator.

Before we move on we need to refer to a passage about which there has been much debate.

Now on the day when God's sons came to present themselves before the LORD,[†] Satan also came amongst them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, "From going back and forth in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant, Job? For there is no one like him in the earth, a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil." Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Haven't you made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Behold,^{} all that he has is in your power. Only on himself don't stretch out your hand." [4]*

And thus began the permitted testing of Job faithfulness by the 'accuser', which is narrated in the rest of the book.

Who were 'God's sons'? Obviously the company of angels who assembled in God's presence. And Satan came with them. There is one other place where the expression 'sons of God', 'God's sons', occurs, and in this narrative they are described as taking human form, thus showing themselves to be part of the group of rebel angels.

When men began to multiply on the surface of the ground, and daughters were born to them, God's sons saw that men's daughters were beautiful, and they took any that they wanted for themselves as wives. The LORD said, "My Spirit will not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; so his days will be one hundred and twenty years." The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when God's sons came in to men's daughters and had children with them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. [5]*

This conjunction of angelic beings taking flesh and consorting with humans is given as the cause of God's determination to remove these offspring because of their unremitting

evil, by means of a flood, saving only one righteous family. Some scholars will dispute this interpretation of the two passages referring to the 'sons of God', but in my view it is consistent with everything else the Bible gives us about fallen angels.

I recognise that I am now branching away from the topic of 'good' angels to consider the origin and nature of 'bad' angels. This is what leads us to demons, of course. There is a great deal more about the angels in heaven in the book of Revelation which we will need to return to, but this is, in my view, the best point for digression into the topic of demons.

Notes

[1] Revelation 12:7-12

[2] Luke 10:17-18

[3] Isaiah 14:12-15

[4] Job 1:6-12

[5] Genesis 6:1-4

Authorities and powers

Let us now revisit a verse from the first letter of Peter.

Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him. [1]

From this verse we can see that the beings of heaven are not only angels but spiritual beings of even greater importance. The Bible refers, in addition to the two just included, seraphim and cherubim, as well as archangels.

Consider this comment from Paul.

Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. [2]

'Principalities' is the usual translation we are familiar with, but N. T. Wright uses

'authorities' in his 'New Testament for Everyone', as well as 'powers'. Paul refers to these categories of spiritual powers in his letter to the Colossians.

For by him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth, visible things and invisible things, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers [3]

Having stripped the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it [4]

What we get from these verses from Paul is a clear teaching that there were powerful allies of Satan that were expelled from the presence of God in this War in Heaven, and that these are the real enemies of those who follow Jesus now, even though they are not visible.

The Gospel of John refers to Satan as the 'prince of this world' [5]. The reality taught throughout the whole of the New Testament is that there is a spiritual battle continually being fought, and that the enemy consists of very powerful spiritual entities.

Notes

[1] 1 Peter 3:22

[2] Ephesians 6:12

[3] Colossians 1:16

[4] Colossians 2:15

[5] John 14:30

Religion in the ancient world

We are accustomed to thinking of the three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as being monotheistic, and the pagan religions of Greece and Rome as being polytheistic. One god or many gods.

The gods of the Greeks and Romans were many, and looking at the scene from a distance we may wonder how important they were to the people. Edward Gibbon's comment was that 'the various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord.'

Looking a little more closely, we note that particular gods were associated with particular places, and that particular gods were associated with particular areas of life. Mars was to the Romans the gods of war. Artemis was a local god at Sparta, as Athene was at Athens. The word used to describe a religion

that focuses on just one god without denying the possibility of there being other gods is 'henotheism'. If you lived at Ephesus you would concentrate your worship, possibly exclusively, on Artemis, where her temple was described as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Given what we have read in the previous chapter, the question I want to ask is this: is there any connection between the spiritual powers expelled from heaven with the deities worshipped locally across the ancient world? Who or what were these people worshipping?

The Old Testament seems to give the impression of a henotheistic approach. When YHWH (the best we can do for the Hebrew name given to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) gives his Law to the people recently out of Egypt, this is how it begins.

God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me." [1]

This is a distinctly henotheistic command, and does not actually say that YHWH is the only god. When Elijah challenged the priests of the local god Baal on Mount Carmel, he proposed a competition to see which was the more powerful god.

So Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together to Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you waver between the two sides? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people didn't say a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left as a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bull, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under it. You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the LORD's name. The God who answers by fire, let him be God." . . . At the time of the evening offering, Elijah the prophet came near, and

said, “LORD, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you, LORD, are God, and that you have turned their heart back again.” Then the LORD’s fire fell, and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. They said, “The LORD, he is God! the LORD, he is God!” [2]

This is just one example of there being conflict between YHWH (which is always translated as the LORD – using upper case letters) and other local gods. The chosen nation are often depicted as following others gods, and being called by the prophets to return allegiance to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). The Bible makes it clear that the competing local gods were not entirely imaginary, fictitious, powers, but rather real, competing, expelled from heaven, powers; the enemies of the true God.

This thought is confirmed by passages from the Old Testament. Take, for example, these complaints made by God about his erring people.

They sacrificed to demons, not God, to gods that they didn't know, to new gods that came up recently, which your fathers didn't dread. [3]

They served their idols, which became a snare to them. Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. [4]

And this leads us into a discussion of the big word in the title of this book: demon.

Notes

[1] Exodus 20:1-3

[2] 1 Kings 18:22-39

[3] Deuteronomy 32:17

[4] Psalm 106:36-7

The word 'demon'

As we noted at the very beginning, the word 'demon' is a transliteration of the Greek words *daimon*. We now must consult our dictionary. In Classical Greek the word can be translated as 'divine power' and even simply as 'god'. In its diminutive form (*daimonion*), which is the form in which it nearly always used in the New Testament, it can be taken as a 'benign spirit'. Socrates believed he had often been guided by a *daimonion*, and even believed his *daimonion* was allowing him to be tried at the end of his life.

This passage from Wikipedia is worth noting: '. . . in the ancient Greek religion, *daimon* designates not a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity: it is an occult power that drives humans forward or acts against them: since *daimon* is the veiled countenance of divine activity, every deity can act as *daimon*; a special knowledge of *daimones* is claimed by Pythagoreans; for Plato, *daimon*, is a spiritual being who watches over each individual, and is tantamount to a higher self, or an angel;

whereas Plato is called 'divine' by Neoplatonists, Aristotle is regarded as *daimonios*, meaning 'an intermediary to deities' – therefore Aristotle stands to Plato as an angel to a deity; for Proclus, *daimones* are the intermediary beings located between the celestial objects and the terrestrial inhabitants.' [Note: the use of italics for the key words has been made by me, otherwise the quotation is as copied and pasted.]

It is worth pausing to reflect on this. It seems that the Greeks did not distinguish very much between the power of any deity and the person (if we may use that term) of the deity. *Daimon*, as a word, could refer to either. When we come to look at the instances where our New Testament translation has the word 'demon', it is worth substituting 'power' in the passage to see if that helps to understand it.

A very interesting insight into the use of the Greek word *daimon* comes in this passage from Paul's travels. He has got to Athens.

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as

he saw the city full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who met him. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also were conversing with him. Some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be advocating foreign deities," because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. [1]

The Greek word translated as 'deities' is *daimonion*, and earlier translations (the KJV for instances) actually used the word 'gods'. The locals had taken Jesus and Anastasia (resurrection in Greek) as two new gods they were being asked to believe in.

When the New Testament was being written, Greek thinking had developed to the point where a *daimon* was usually seen as an evil unseen power, capable of influencing human activity. If this happened there was even a word for it, best translated as 'demonized' (*daimonizomai*), though often rendered as 'demon-possessed'.

That demons possess intelligence and have emotions is taken for granted.

You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder. [2]

It is also clear that they are considered to be the angels of Satan.

Then will he say also to them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. [3]

We will record the occurrences in the New Testament of events involving demons in the next two chapters.

Notes

[1] Acts 17:16-18

[2] James 2:19

[3] Matthew 25:41

Demons in the gospels

This chapter will provide the opportunity to consider the incidents involving demons recorded in the gospels. There are possibly far more than you might expect. This is how Mark records the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes. Immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying, "Ha! What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" The unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, so that they questioned amongst themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" The

report of him went out immediately everywhere into all the region of Galilee and its surrounding area. Immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. He came and took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them. At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to him all who were sick, and those who were possessed by demons. All the city was gathered together at the door. He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. He didn't allow the demons to speak, because they knew him. [1]

Note how 'unclean spirits' and 'demons' are used interchangeably, and that releasing people from demonic influence is closely associated with healing physical ailments. There is another pattern that is regularly repeated in later narratives regarding demons: they recognised who Jesus was, and that Jesus had a superior power to theirs.

Continuing with the early chapters of Mark we read how Jesus authorised his own chosen followers to exercise the same ministry, with controversy from the religious authorities the outcome.

He went up into the mountain, and called to himself those whom he wanted, and they went to him. He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach, and to have authority to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: . . . Then he came into a house. The multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. When his friends heard it, they went out to seize him; for they said, "He is insane." The scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul," and, "By the prince of the demons he casts out the demons." He summoned them, and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. If Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he can't stand, but has an end. But no one can enter into the house of the

strong man to plunder unless he first binds the strong man; then he will plunder his house.” [2]

Mark's next narrated incident is here.

They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. When he had come out of the boat, immediately a man with an unclean spirit met him out of the tombs. He lived in the tombs. Nobody could bind him any more, not even with chains, because he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the fetters broken in pieces. Nobody had the strength to tame him. Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and bowed down to him, and crying out with a loud voice, he said, “What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, don’t torment me.” For he said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” He asked him, “What is your name?” He said to him, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” He begged him much that

he would not send them away out of the country. Now on the mountainside there was a great herd of pigs feeding. All the demons begged him, saying, "Send us into the pigs, that we may enter into them." At once Jesus gave them permission. The unclean spirits came out and entered into the pigs. The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea. Those who fed them fled, and told it in the city and in the country. [3]

Mark again records the commissioning of the twelve.

He called to himself the twelve, and began to send them out two by two; and he gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff only: no bread, no wallet, no money in their purse, but to wear sandals, and not put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter into a house, stay there until you depart from there. Whoever will not receive you nor hear you, as you depart from there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony

against them. Assuredly, I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement than for that city!” They went out and preached that people should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed many with oil who were sick, and healed them. [4]

Here is the next occurrence in Mark.

From there he arose, and went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon. He entered into a house, and didn’t want anyone to know it, but he couldn’t escape notice. For a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by race. She begged him that he would cast the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said to her, “Let the children be filled first, for it is not appropriate to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” But she answered him, “Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” He said to her, “For this saying, go your way. The demon has gone out of your daughter.” She went away to

her house, and found the child having been laid on the bed, with the demon gone out. [5]

The casting out of demons was so integral a part of Jesus ministry that it even attracted copiers.

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone who doesn’t follow us casting out demons in your name; and we forbade him, because he doesn’t follow us.” But Jesus said, “Don’t forbid him, for there is no one who will do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me. For whoever is not against us is on our side.” [6]

I have deliberately selected the narratives of the casting out of demons from just one gospel (Mark) so as to avoid repetitions from parallel passages in the other gospels. And Mark's gospel concludes with a commissioning that promises an enduring power over demons to the followers of Jesus after his resurrection. [7] The victory over the forces of evil is an absolutely integral part of the ministry of Jesus and his followers. In modern times we may wonder how relevant this this. And this is,

I suggest, part of the problem. In spite of one notorious film, 'The Exorcist', it is a topic widely ignored by the modern Church. Why is this? We will need to return to this question in due course.

Notes

[1] Mark 1:21-34

[2] Mark 3:13-27

[3] Mark 5:1-14

[4] Mark 6:7-13

[5] Mark 7:24-30

[6] Mark 9:38-40

[7] Mark 16:17-18

More demons

This chapter will consider references to demons outside the gospels in the New Testament. It should not surprise us to find both recorded exorcisms and passages of teaching. In fact, looking in the Acts of the Apostles, we find passages very reminiscent of the ministry of Jesus.

They even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mattresses, so that as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might overshadow some of them. Multitudes also came together from the cities around Jerusalem, bringing sick people, and those who were tormented by unclean spirits: and they were all healed. [1]

The multitudes listened with one accord to the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many of those who had them. They came out, crying with a loud voice. [2]

Here is a further account which shows Paul

dealing with a spirit of divination, which he clearly regards as demonic.

As we were going to prayer, a certain girl having a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much gain by fortune telling. Following Paul and us, she cried out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation!" She was doing this for many days. But Paul, becoming greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" It came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. [3]

Paul's regular ministry is described a few chapters later.

God worked special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and the evil spirits went out. But some of the itinerant Jews, exorcists, took on themselves to invoke over those who had the evil spirits

the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." There were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did this. The evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" The man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived at Ephesus. Fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many also of those who had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds. Many of those who practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. They counted their price, and found it to be fifty thousand pieces of silver. [4]

Here is what Paul says on the subject of idols and demons, which is entirely the same message that we noted in the Old Testament.

What am I saying then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? But I say that the things which

the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God, and I don't desire that you would have fellowship with demons. You can't both drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can't both partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons. [5]

But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. [6]

Paul also referred to 'a messenger of Satan', which was permitted to afflict him.

By reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted excessively, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, that I should not be exalted excessively. [7]

James also in his letter refers to demons.

You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder. [8]

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed. [9]

There are also references to demons in the book of Revelation, and we intend to look at that book on its own. It is a special type of literature, and we will review its references both to angels and demons.

Notes

[1] Acts 5:15-16

[2] Acts 8:6-7

[3] Acts 16:16-19

[4] Acts 19:11-19

[5] 1 Corinthians 10:19-21

[6] 1 Timothy 4:1

[7] 2 Corinthians 12:7

[8] James 2:19

[9] James 3:14-16

The book of Revelation

The Revelation given to John is the last book of the New Testament, and possibly the last to be written. It is set when Christianity was being persecuted by the Roman Empire officials, because Christians were refusing to offer worship to the Roman Emperor.

The book opens with a vision of the risen Jesus, and then are recorded seven letters to be sent to seven church in the locality that John knew well, currently in western Turkey. Then follows a visionary experience of heaven itself, with insights into the relationship between heaven and earth.

The key thing about the book is the type of literature it belongs to. It is visionary and apocalyptic (from the Greek word for 'revelation'). The subject of apocalyptic literature is a huge one, so anything said here will inevitably be superficial and an oversimplification. But we need to understand the basics if we are going to use Revelation at all.

The key thing is symbolism. We already

know from the New Testament, especially from Paul's experience of heaven already cited, that we just do not have the vocabulary or the background that would allow us to understand the reality of heaven, as it truly is. So the answer is that we receive symbols, that convey ideas. The ideas themselves will be inadequate, but they will be the nearest we can get to a true understanding.

Reading just the first few chapters you will be presented with many symbols: a loud voice like a trumpet; golden lamp stands; eyes a flame of fire; feet of burnished brass; stars; a sharp two-edged sword; a face like the sun shining at its brightest. This list is taken from just the first 17 verses.

When heavenly beings are described as having wings, this simply means that they can get places quickly. When they are described as being covered all over with eyes, this clearly means that they are all-seeing.

After the letters to be sent to the angel of each of the seven churches, which are in chapters 2 and 3, we find 'a door opened in

heaven' Now we get into a lot more symbols: thrones; white garments; crowns of gold; lightning and thunder; lamps of fire; creatures who are like a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle. All this in just the first few verses of chapter 4. Then we come to a book sealed with seven seals. Remember that seven is the number symbolic of completeness in the Bible.

Regarding angels, we learn in this fifth chapter that they number ten thousands of ten thousands. Millions, as we might say.

The whole of the book of Revelation is like this. We read on to a white horse, a red horse, a black horse, and a pale horse. We have bowls out of which things are poured. We have the picture of an altar, and incense, and a golden censer. In this case the symbolism is explained: the smoke of the incense is the prayers of the followers of Jesus here on the earth as they rise to heaven.

Do read the whole book to experience this wonderful display of symbolism. The purpose of the book will unfold as you do. It is to proclaim the reality of heaven, and the

ultimate victory of God. It is to emphasise to the Christians suffering persecution that they are involved in a cosmic battle between good and evil. There will be great suffering, and some will lose their lives, but ultimately the Lamb will triumph over the Dragon (both wonderful symbols in their own right). There will be a New Jerusalem. The Tree of Life will be restored to mankind. The Bride will be received by the Lamb. Every tear will be wiped away. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain. The Lamb's servants will reign for ever and ever.

What the book of Revelation does above all, by means of all this symbolic language, is emphasise that there is a reality beyond the seen cosmos we dwell in. That unseen powers are at work all the time, both for good and evil. That these unseen powers are real, even though we may not be able to see them, and that they are instrumental in what is going on in the seen world we live in. That we fail often to understand this is, I suggest, at the heart of the problem we have in dealing with angels and demons.

Ancient and modern medicine

It is only in the last century or two that medical science has reached the level of understanding we currently have, and no one believes that the end of this journey has yet been reached.

Two thousand years ago, with the profound ignorance of medical matters that prevailed then, for an epileptic fit to be described as 'a non-beneficial force' was perfectly reasonable. Even today those words would not be all that far away from a reasonable description. To quote wikipedia: *The cause of most cases of epilepsy is unknown.* It is also worth noting that the word 'epilepsy' is from a Greek word, which can be translated as 'seize, possess, afflict.' It is therefore entirely possible that what comes out in our translations as demon-possession is simply what modern medicine would call an epileptic fit. Other illnesses in ancient times could also equally well be attributed to an evil force, not fully accounted for by any other means. This is why it is important to note that in all the narratives we have noted, healing and relief from demons

(unknown forces) are always linked together.

These comments do not encompass every aspect of those accounts. We are left with a problem. How do we account for the record of how those who were described as under the influence of demons seemed to recognise who Jesus was, and spoke aloud that recognition?

Modern psychiatry has many encounters with those who 'hear voices', often voices urging them to do specific things which no healthy person would consider doing. If the same were to be occurring two thousand years ago you can be sure that this too would be attributed to an 'unknown force', in other words, a demon. Schizophrenia is again from the Greek, and means a splitting of the mind, essentially an 'affliction' of the mind. Once again modern medical science has no simple understanding of the causes, except to note that sometimes there seem to be indications of genetic inheritance. If you have parents with the problem it statistically increases the probability, though not the certainty, that you may inherit the tendency. Modern medicine does not talk about cure, simply management.

So we can review our narratives of the activity of 'demons' to conclude that very often it may have been the only way for someone living two thousand years ago to describe what was going on. A person had been afflicted in their mind, strange and unaccountable things had ensued, and then a healing ministry, also not understood, had been applied.

These days this kind of healing is often described as 'faith' healing. Not a bad idea to use the word faith here. The one delivering the healing, and the one receiving it, both need faith for it to take place. The commission that the followers of Jesus have been given, 'to heal and cast out demons', many Christians believe still applies.

What are angels like?

We have enough information to hand now to look at some obvious questions, and this is the first of them. We saw that when Jesus was asked a question that was supposed to ridicule the very idea of life beyond the grave, he said this of those who are eventually resurrected:

. . . in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. [1]

If resurrected people are like angels, then angels are like resurrected people. The best guide to what this actually means is to look at the narratives of the resurrected Jesus. The vivid description from John's Gospel [2], begins with there being something about the disposition of the grave clothes that allowed John to see and believe. The body had obviously passed through them, leaving them undisturbed. Later we find the risen Jesus able to enter a room, in spite of a locked door. He even offered that a doubting member of the group of disciples there, Thomas, should touch the wounds of his body from the crucifixion.

He later appeared to them by the side of the sea of Tiberias and had breakfast with them. In Luke we read of him walking unrecognised, then disappearing from sight after breaking bread with two other followers [3].

Finally the risen Jesus simply disappeared in such a way as to indicate that this would be the last time his chosen followers would see him. This momentous event was explained to the bemused followers by two angels, who are simple described as men dressed in white clothing.

When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky." [4]

From all these incidents we can draw the conclusion that a resurrected person has a

body which can not only materialise but also de-materialise. And this has been a very common feature of angelic appearances. They can take a form that is recognisably human-like, but also take a form that is dazzlingly bright. Their materialised form is substantial enough to affect physical things, as when Peter was rescued from prison, but they can revert to de-materialised at will. They can speak audibly and conduct responsive conversations, as Gabriel did with Mary. We will never understand the 'how' of all this. But then the mystery of how the spiritual cosmos (heaven) can interact with and overlap the physical cosmos (earth) will always remain a mystery. In this life we only know in part.

Notes

[1] Matthew 22:30

[2] John 20:1 to the end of the book

[3] Luke 24:13-32

[4] Acts 1:9-11

Socrates' angel

Socrates lived about five centuries before Jesus, and he did not use the word 'angel' when he spoke of a being that guided him from within his own consciousness. He used the diminutive of the word 'demon'. His guide was a *daimonion*. To quote D. Philip Kenny:

After being sentenced to death, Socrates told the jurors they gained nothing from it. He then spoke to the jurors who voted against the punishment of death, revealing that a guilty verdict must be what is good to the god. Socrates revealed that in all previous times his daimonion, a warning voice, opposed him whenever he was about to do something wrong. However, the daimonion did not stop him from leaving home that morning, coming to the court, or speaking to the jurors. He asks:

“What do I think is the reason for this? I will tell you. What has happened to me may well be a good thing, and those of us who believe death to be an evil are certainly mistaken. I have convincing proof of this, for it is impossible that my familiar sign did not

oppose me if I was not about to do what was right.”

Socrates is able to conclude that the lack of the daimonion’s constraint is convincing proof that his current action is good. [1]

Socrates is recorded as explaining that his *daimonion* never told him what to do, but sometimes told him what not to do. He believed that this was genuine guidance from a reliable and beneficial source. But at his trial his opponents used this belief as part of the case against him. It was contrary to the usual beliefs of the Athenians.

Was Socrates actually guided by a guardian angel? We will never know of course, but the possibility exists. Christians do believe that there may be activity like this, both in ancient times and today.

We may be asking how do guardian angels put ideas into our heads. Neuroscience is developing methods of observing what goes on in our brains with physical measuring devices that can track the presence of neural activity. This science is rudimentary at present, merely

able to determine that there is activity, and roughly whereabouts in the brain it is taking place. We do know that chemicals can affect neural activity, and that certain chemicals can bring about intense hallucinations. In simple terms it is the case that external influences can affect brain activity. So far neuroscience has only superficial knowledge in this realm. But who knows how far it will progress, and how long this will take?

If we ask how can a spiritual guidance come from the 'unseen' cosmos to the 'seen' cosmos, from 'heaven' to 'earth', it raises the idea of the reverse: from here to there. Anyone who ever prays silently, and I am sure this will apply to many readers, is assuming that what is neural activity in my brain is readable by the One to whom I am addressing my thoughts. We do not believe, at least I do not, that we have to speak audibly for our prayers to be meaningful. We take it for granted that the overlap between this cosmos and that cosmos makes it possible for my innermost thoughts to be discerned from 'above'. So why not in the other direction too? That certain thoughts may have an external origin.

To suppose that this might be possible does not imply that we can be turned into zombies or controlled like a robot. We will always have to take responsibility for our actions. But there remains the possibility that what we might call guidance, from a good source, or temptation, from a bad source, may be part of what we have to accommodate in our lives.

If this is so, and I for one believe it is, then we are now at the very heart of our angels and demons. Perhaps the word that Socrates used is a good one. Perhaps we are surrounded by *daimones*, helpful *daimones* and adversarial *daimones*. If they come in both varieties it may be smart to use a single word, which would have to be *daimone*, to give the best way of rendering the Greek letters, where the 'o' is a long 'o'.

I began this short and introductory survey of the topic of angels and demons by noting the linguistic problem. Both words are simply Greek words with English letters. Now we have a better idea of what these two entities are like we are still hard pressed to find better words

for them. The Biblical account has them as being the same essentially, the difference between them being simply which side they are on. So it does make some sense for us to end up with just one word for them. They are both *daimones*! Though I am not sure if this word will ever get into our dictionaries.

Notes

[1] http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/Kenny-Socratic_Knowledge_and_the_Daimonion.pdf

About the author

John Everett read Classics and Theology at Cambridge University, and then went straight into secondary teaching. He taught both Ordinary and Advanced Level Religious Education. The syllabus for the former was the four gospels, and for the latter was simply the whole of the New Testament. After 22 years of teaching John had taught himself computer programming, and founded a software house writing back office systems for private client stockbrokers. This firm employed 70 people when John retired as its CEO. In the late 90s John began using the internet to publish blog articles which he called Meditations of a Netcaster. He has also written several short novels and other theological books which you can find at <http://johneverettbooks.co.uk>. His email address can be found there too.