

# Hebrews

## Encouragement for a Life of Faith

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## Angels



The word "angel" is derived from the Greek word for "messenger" (*angelos*; Heb *malak*). The messenger may be human or divine, but typically in both the OT and NT the reference is to a supernatural being entrusted with delivering God's message or carrying out some action as God's agent.

In the OT, angels are portrayed primarily as messengers delivering God's word to God's people. Since, at a later stage in Israel's history, the prophets performed this important function of delivering God's word, angels appear very infrequently in the prophetic books, with the late book of Zechariah being an exception. Angels appear frequently in the narratives of Genesis and Judges, most often addressing people on behalf of God, such as when the angels in Judges remind the people that despite God's faithfulness and efforts on their behalf they have proven faithless in breaking their covenant with God. Angels may also appear to announce some impending event, such as the birth of Samson (Judg 13:3-7). At times, angels act as agents of God in protecting the people or destroying their enemies (cf. Exod 14:19-20; 2 Kgs 19:35). In the descriptions of their appearances, though they are supernatural beings, the angels may not always be recognized as more than humans (cf. Gen 18:1-19:38).

Angels become more prominent in the literature of Israel following the exile, perhaps due to the influence of Persian angelology. During the Hellenistic period, following Alexander the Great's defeat of the Persians, numerous Jewish writings gave a prominent role to angels. One such work, Daniel, even identifies angels by name. Other works of the period and later, written in the form of apocalypses, depict angels as crucial agents active in the struggle

archangels supervising the hierarchy of God's army of angels in their struggles against evil angels. The idea of fallen angels arose, influenced by the Gen 6:1-4 account of the "sons of God" who took human wives and produced a generation of giants.

By the time of the NT, angels were an assumed part of the perspective of many Jews, though the Sadducees were noted (both in the NT and in Josephus) for not believing in angels. Paul shared the perspective of fellow Pharisees in assuming the existence of angels, though he seldom mentions them in his letters. According to Paul, angels watch over believers (1 Cor 4:9; 11:10). Even they, however, will be judged by believers (1 Cor 6:3). Presumably these angels to be judged are evil agents (Rom 8:38) of Satan, who may also disguise himself as an angel of light (1 Cor 11:14). Even good angels should not be worshiped (Col 2:18).

In the rest of the NT, angels appear most prominently in Matthew, Luke-Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation (an apocalypse). Like the angelic messengers of the OT, in the narrative works Gabriel or an unnamed angel appears to announce the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-23) and Jesus (Luke 1:28; 2:13-14) or to guide people (Matt 1:18-25; Acts 8:26). Angels may also carry out the judgment of God on the wicked (Acts 12:23). In Revelation, angels are present among the host of heaven worshiping God (5:11) and are instruments of God's wrath against evil (numerous passages). As in Colossians (2:18), Revelation warns against worshiping angels (19:10; 22:8-9). In Hebrews, while the important role of angels as servants of God is acknowledged (1:7, 14), the author stresses the superiority of Christ over the angels (1:1-14).