

# Angels

عالم الملائكة

[ English - إنجليزي ]

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Muslims believe in the existence of angels. In Islam there are six pillars of faith; belief in God, the One and Only, the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists, belief in His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day and divine predestination.

Angels are part of the unseen world, but Muslims believe in their existence with certainty because God and His messenger, Muhammad, have provided us with information about them. The angels were created by God in order to worship and obey Him..

“They, (angels) disobey not, the Commands they receive from God, but do that which they are commanded.” (Quran 66:6)

God created angels from light. Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, said, “**The angels are created from light,**”<sup>1</sup> We have no knowledge of when the angels were created, however, we do know that it was before the creation of humankind. Quran explains that God told the angels of His intention to create a vicegerent on earth. **(2:30)**

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<sup>1</sup> Saheeh Muslim.

Muslims know that angels are beautiful creations. In Quran 53:6 God describes the angels as *dhoo mirrah*, this is an Arabic term that renowned Islamic scholars<sup>2</sup> define as, tall and beautiful in appearance. Quran (12:31) also describes Prophet Joseph as beautiful, like a noble angel.

Angels have wings, and can be very large. There is nothing in either the Quran, or the traditions of Prophet Muhammad that indicate that angels are winged babies or have any form of gender.<sup>3</sup> We do know however, that angels are winged and some are extremely large. From the traditions of Prophet Muhammad we know that the angel Gabriel's great size filled "**the space between heaven and earth**"<sup>4</sup> and that he had six hundred wings<sup>5</sup>.

"...Who made the angels, messengers with wings - two, or three, or four (pairs)..." (Quran 35:1)

There are also differences in the status of angels. Those angels who were present at the first battle, the Battle of **Badr**, are known to be the "best" of the angels.

"Angel Gabriel came to the Prophet and asked, 'How do you rate the people among you who were present at Badr?' Muhammad, may God praise him, answered, 'They are the best of the Muslims,' or something similar. Gabriel then said: 'So it is with the angels who were present at Badr.'"<sup>6</sup>

Muslims believe that angels have no need to eat or drink. Their sustenance is glorifying God and repeating the words, there is no god but God. (**Quran 21:20**).

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2 Ibn Abbas & Qutadah.

3 The use of the term he is for grammatical ease and in no way indicates that the angels are male.

4 Saheeh Muslim

5 The Musnad of Imam Ahmad.

6 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

“. . . For in the presence of your Lord are those who celebrate His praises by night and by day. And they never flag (nor feel themselves above it).” (Quran 41:38)

The story of Prophet Abraham in Quran also indicates that the angels have no need of food. When angels, in the form of men, visited Prophet Abraham to give him the good tidings of the birth of a son, he offered to them a calf in their honour. They refused to eat and he became fearful, it was then that they revealed themselves as angels. **(Quran 51:26-28)**

There are many angels, but only God knows the exact number. During his ascension to heaven, the Prophet Muhammad visited a House of Worship known as ‘the much-frequented house’, or, in Arabic *al Bayt al-Mamoor*, the heavenly equivalent of the Kaaba.<sup>7</sup>

Then I was taken up to ‘the Much-Frequented House’: every day seventy thousand angels visit it and leave, never returning to it again, another (group) coming after them.”<sup>8</sup>

Prophet Muhammad has also informed us that on the Day of Judgement, hell will be brought forth and shown to the people. He said, **“Hell will be brought forth that day by means of seventy thousand ropes, each of which will be pulled by seventy thousand angels.”**<sup>9</sup>

The angels have great powers. They have the ability to take on different forms. They appeared before both Prophet Abraham and Prophet Lot as men. The angel Gabriel appeared before Mary the mother of Jesus as a man, **(Quran 19:17)** and he appeared before

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7 The cube shaped building, in the centre of the Holy Masjid, in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

8 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

9 Saheeh Muslim

Prophet Muhammad as a man, whose clothes were exceedingly white, and whose hair was exceedingly black.<sup>10</sup>

The angels are strong. Four angels carry the throne of God, and on the Day of Judgement their number will be increased to eight. Among the traditions of Prophet Muhammad is a narration that describes one of the angels carrying God's throne. **“The distance between his ear-lobes and his shoulders is equivalent to a seven-hundred-year journey.”**<sup>11</sup>

Angels carry out various duties and responsibilities. Some are responsible for matters of the universe. Some are responsible for the seas, or the mountains or the wind. Once, after visiting the city of Ta'if, a town near Mecca, Prophet Muhammad was pelted with stones. The angel Gabriel and the angel of the mountains paid him a visit.

The angel of the mountains offered to destroy the intractable people by burying them under the rubble of two nearby mountains. Prophet Muhammad declined the offer for he believed that if they had a chance to settle down and look at Islam, they would accept it and love God.<sup>12</sup>

Angels carry out God's commands without flinching or hesitating. Each angel has a duty or function. Some angels guard and accompany human beings, others are messengers. In part two we will examine these duties and learn the names of some of the angels who perform them.

Angels are beings created by God, from light. They carry out the duties prescribed for them without flinching or hesitating. Muslims gain their understanding of angels from the Quran and the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad. In part one we established that angels are beautiful winged creatures, which come

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10 Ibid.

11 Sunan Abu Dawood

12 Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

in various sizes and by the permission of God, are able to change their form. The angels have names and duties they are required to perform.

The name most familiar to Muslims and non-Muslims alike is Gabriel (Jibreel). The angel Gabriel is referred to in both Jewish and Christian traditions as an archangel and messenger of God, and he<sup>13</sup> holds great status in all three monotheistic religions.

“Verily, this is the Word (this Quran brought by) an honourable messenger (Gabriel), from God to the Prophet Muhammad. Owner of power, and high rank with (God, the Lord of the Throne). Obeyed (by the angels), trustworthy there in the heavens.” (Quran 81:19-21)

Gabriel brought down the words of God – the Quran – to Prophet Muhammad.

“...Jibreel - for he brings down the (revelation) to your heart by God’s will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings to those who believe”. (Quran 2:87)

Michael (Mikaeel) is the angel responsible for rain and *Israfeel* is the angel who will blow the trumpet on the Day of Judgement. These three are from the greatest of the angels due to the great importance of their duties. Each of their duties deals with an aspect of life. Angel Gabriel brought the Quran from God to Prophet Muhammad, and the Quran nourishes the heart and the soul. Angel Michael is responsible for the rain, and it nourishes the earth and thus our physical bodies, Angel Israfeel is responsible for the blowing of the trumpet and it signals the beginning of life everlasting, either in Paradise or in Hell.

When Prophet Muhammad rose in the night to pray he would begin his prayer with the words, **“O God, Lord of Jibreel, Mikaeel and Israfeel, Creator of heaven and earth, Knower of**

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13 The use of the term he is for grammatical ease and in no way indicates that the angels are male.

**the unseen and the seen. You are the Judge of the matters in which Your slaves differ. Guide me with regard to disputed matters of Truth by Your permission, for You guide whomever You will to the Straight Path.”**<sup>14</sup>

We also know the names of several other angels. *Malik*, is the angel known as the gatekeeper of Hell. “They [the people in Hell] will cry: ‘O Malik! Would that your Lord put an end to us!’ . . .” **(Quran 43:77)** Munkar and Nakeer are the angels responsible for questioning people in their graves. We know these names and understand that we will be questioned by angels in the grave as is mentioned in the traditions of Prophet Muhammad.

“When the deceased is buried, there come to him two blue-black angels, one of whom is called Munkar and the other Nakeer. They ask him, ‘What did you used to say about this man?’ and he says what he used to say: ‘He is the slave and Messenger of God: I bear witness that there is no god except God and that Muhammad is the slave and Messenger of God. They say, ‘We knew beforehand that you used to say this.’ Then his grave will be widened for him to a size of seventy cubits by seventy cubits and it will be illuminated for him. Then they tell him, ‘Sleep.’ He says, ‘Go back to my family and tell them.’ They tell him, ‘Sleep like a bridegroom whom no-one will wake up except his most beloved,’ until God raises him up...”<sup>15</sup>

In Quran we find the story of two angels named *Haroot* and *Maroot*, who were sent to Babylon to teach the people magic. The use of magic is forbidden in Islam but these angels were sent as a test for the people. Before revealing or teaching magic Haroot and Maroot clearly warned the inhabitants of Babylon that they were sent as a trial, and that the buyers of magic would have no share in the hereafter, i.e. they would go to hell. **(Quran 2:102)**

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14 Saheeh Muslim

15 Sunan At Tirmidhi. Abu Isa said: It is a ghareeb hasan hadeeth. It is judged hasan in Saheeh al-Jaami’, no. 724.

Although it is sometimes assumed that the Angel of Death is named Azraeel, there is nothing in Quran or the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad that indicates this. We do not know the name of the Angel of Death but we do know his duty and that he has assistants.

“Say: “The Angel of Death, who is set over you, will take your souls. Then you shall be brought to your Lord.” (Quran 32:11)

Until when death approaches one of you, Our messengers (i.e. the Angel of Death and his assistants) take his soul, and they never neglect their duty. Then they are returned to God, their Master, the Just Lord.” (Quran 6:61-62)

There are a group of Angels who travel throughout the world, seeking out people remembering God. From the traditions of Prophet Muhammad we know that, **“God has angels who travel the highways seeking out the people of remembrance. When they find people remembering God, they call out to one another, “Come to what you hunger for!” and they enfold them with their wings, stretching up to the lowest heaven. Their Lord asked then, and He knows better than them, “What are My slaves saying?” They say: “They are glorifying, magnifying, praising and extolling You.” He asks, “Have they seen Me?” They say, “No, by God, they have not seen You.” He asks, “And how would it be if they saw Me?” They say, “They would be even more fervent and devoted in their praise and worship.” He asks, “What are they asking me for?” They say, “They ask You for Paradise.” He asks, “And have they seen it?” They say, “No, by God, O Lord, they have not seen it.” He asks, “And how would it be if they saw it?” They say: “They would be even more eager for it and they would beseech You even more earnestly.” He asks, “And what do they seek My protection from?” They say, “From the Fire of Hell.” He asks, “Have they seen it?” They say, “No, by God, they have not seen it.” He asks, “And how would it be if they saw it?” They say: “They would be even more afraid and anxious to**

**escape it.” God says: “You are My witnesses that I have forgiven them.” One of the angels says: “So-and-so is not really one of them; he came (to the gathering) for some other reason.” Allah says, “They were all in the gathering, and one of them will not be excluded (from forgiveness).”<sup>16</sup>**

Muslims believe that angels have special duties to perform pertaining to human beings. They guard and protect them, and two angels write down good and bad deeds. They witness prayers and one is even responsible for the foetuses in wombs. In part three we will go into more detail and describe the associations between angels and human beings.

Muslims believe that angels play an active part in the lives of human beings. This begins soon after conception and continues until the moment of death. Angels and human beings even interact in the afterlife. Angels usher people into Paradise and guard the gates of Hell. Belief in the angels is one of the fundamental beliefs of Islam.

From the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, we understand that a few months after conception life is breathed into it by the permission of God. An angel then writes the answer to four questions in this human being’s book of deeds. Will it be male or female? Will this person be happy or sad? How long will his or her life span be, and will this person perform good or bad deeds?<sup>17</sup>

There are angels responsible for guarding people throughout their lives.

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16 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

17 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

“For each (person), there are angels in succession, before and behind him. They guard him by the Command of God.” (Quran 13:10)

Each person has been assigned two recording angels. These angels have honourable scribes and their duty is to write down all the good and bad deeds.

“. . . and He sends guardians (angels guarding and writing all of one’s good and bad deeds) over you . . .” (Quran 6:61)

“Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private counsel? (Yes We do) and Our Messengers (appointed angels in charge of humankind) are by them, to record.” (Quran 43:80)

“(Remember!) that the two receivers (recording angels) receive (each human being after he or she has attained the age of puberty), one sitting on the right and one on the left (to note his or her actions). Not a word does he (or she) utter, but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it).” (Quran 50:17-18)

“But verily, over you (are appointed angels in charge of humankind) to watch you, *Kiraaman* (honourable) *kaatibeen* - writing down (your deeds).” (Quran 82:10-11)

The angels record in an honourable yet strict manner. Not a single word is left unrecorded. However, as always, God’s mercy is evident. Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, explained that God has defined and given details about the methodology of recording good and evil deeds. **“Whoever intended to do a good deed, but did not do it, it is written for him as a complete good deed. If he actually performed the good deed then it is written as ten good deeds, or up to seven hundred times or more. If a person intended to do an evil deed, but did not do it, it is**

**written as a good deed, while if he entertained the thought and acted on it, it is written as a single evil deed.”**<sup>18</sup>

The renowned Islamic scholar Ibn Kathir commented on Quran 13:10-11 by saying, “Each person has angels who take turns in guarding him by night and day, who protect him from evil and from accidents, just as other angels take turns in recording his deeds, good and bad, by night and by day.”

“Two angels, on the right and the left, record his deeds. The one on the right writes down good deeds and the one on his left writes down evil deeds. Two other angels guard him and protect him, one from behind, and one from in front. So there are four angels by day and four others by night.”

Apart from the four angels constantly with each human being, guarding, and recording, other angels continually visit human beings. In his traditions, Prophet Muhammad reminds his followers that they are constantly being visited by angels. He said, **“Angels come to you in succession by night and day and all of them get together at the time of the Fajr (early morning) and Asr (afternoon) prayers. Those who have passed the night with you (or stayed with you) ascend (to the Heaven) and God asks them, though He knows everything about you well, “In what state did you leave my slaves?” The angels reply: “When we left them they were praying and when we reached them, they were praying.”**<sup>19</sup> They gather to witness the prayer and listen to the recited verses of Quran.

It can therefore be understood that angels are very much involved with the life of human beings and this interaction does not end when the angel of death removes the soul, nor does it end

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18 Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim.

19 Ibid.

after the angels question the deceased person is his grave<sup>20</sup>. Angels are the gatekeepers of Paradise.

“And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say: Assalamu alaikum (May God’s peace be upon you!). You have done well, so enter here, to abide therein.” (Quran 39:73)

“And angels shall enter unto them from every gate (saying), “Assalamu Alaikum (May God’s peace be upon you) for you persevered in patience! Excellent indeed is the final home!” (Quran13:23)

Angels are also the gatekeepers of Hell.

“And what will make you know exactly what Hell-fire is? It spares not (any sinner), nor does it leave (anything unburnt)! Burning the skins! Over it are nineteen (angels as guardians and keepers of Hell). And We have set none but angels as guardians of the Fire, and We have fixed their number only as a trial for the disbelievers - in order that the People of the Scripture may arrive at a certainty and the believers may increase in Faith.” (Quran74:27-31)

God created the angels from light. They are unable to disobey God and follow His orders without flinching or hesitating. Angels worship God. It is their sustenance. These noble creatures play a significant role in the life of human beings. They guard and protect, record and report, and gather with human beings who remember God.

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20 See above