

CHAPTER XXX

GOD AND THE ANGELS

1. Judaism insists with unrelenting severity on the absolute unity and incomparability of God, so that no other being can be placed beside Him. Consequently, every mention of divine beings (*Elohim* or *B'ne Elohim*) in either the Bible or post-Biblical literature refers to subordinate beings only. These spirits constitute the celestial court for the King of the World.¹ All the forces of the universe are His servants, fulfilling His commands. Hence both the Hebrew and Greek terms for angel, *Malak* and *angelos*, mean "messenger." These beings derive their existence from God; some of them are merely temporary, so that without Him they dissolve into nothing. Although Scripture uses the terms, "God of gods" and "King of kings," still we cannot attribute any independent existence to subordinate divine beings. In fact, Maimonides in his sixth article of faith holds that worship of such beings is prohibited as idolatry by the second commandment.² Thus the unity of God lifts Him above comparison with any other divine being. This is most emphatically expressed in Deuteronomy: "Know this day, and lay it to thy heart, that the Lord He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else,"³ and "See

¹ Gen. VI, 2; Job I, 6; II, 1; XXXIII, 7; Gen. XXXII, 29; XXXIII, 10; Jud. XIII, 22; Ps. VIII, 6.

² Comp. Mek. Yithro 7 through 10; Hul. 40; Tos. Hul. II, 18; Ab. Z. 42 b; Maimonides to Sanh. X; Targ. Y. to Ex. XX, 3.

³ Deut. IV, 39.

now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me; I kill and make alive; I have wounded and I heal, and there is none that can deliver out of My hand."¹ The same attitude is found in Isaiah: "I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretched forth the heavens alone, that spread abroad the earth by Myself." "I am the Lord and there is none else; beside Me there is no god."² Such conceptions allow no place for angels or spirits.

2. It was certainly not easy for prophet, lawgiver, or sage to dispel the popular belief in divine beings or powers, which primitive Judaism shared with other ancient faiths. No sharp line was drawn at first between God and His accompanying angels, as we may infer from the story of the angels who appeared to Abraham, and the similar incidents of Hagar and Jacob.³ The varying application of the term *Elohim* to God and to the angels or gods is proof enough of the priority of polytheism, even in Judaism. The trees or springs, formerly seats of the ancient deities, spirits, or demons, were now the places for the appearance of angels, shorn of their independence, looking like fiery or shining human beings. Popular belief, however, perpetuated mythological elements, ascribing to the angels higher wisdom and sometimes sensuality as well. Such a case is the fragment preserved in Genesis telling of the union of sons of God to the daughters of men, causing the generation of giants.⁴ Obviously the old Babylonian "mountain of the gods," with its food for the gods, became in the Paradise legend the garden of Eden, the seat of God;⁵ and the Psalmist still speaks of the "angels' food," which appeared as manna in the wilderness.⁶ On the whole, the sacred writers were most eager to allot to the angels a very subordinate position in the divine household.

¹ Deut. XXXII, 39.

³ Gen. XVIII and XVII, 11, 13.

⁵ Comp. Ezek. XXVIII, 13 f.

² Isa. XLIV, 24; XL, 5.

⁴ Gen. VI, 1 f.

⁶ Ps. LXXVIII, 25.

They figure usually as hosts of beings, numbered by myriads, wrapped in light or in fleeting clouds. They surround the throne or chariot of God; they comprise His heavenly court or council; they sing His praise and obey His call.

Scripture is quite silent about the creation of these angelic beings, as on most purely speculative questions. At the very beginning of the world God consults them when He is to create man after the image of the celestial beings. For this is the original meaning of *Elohim* in Gen. I, 26 and V, 1: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"; "And God created man in his own image, in the image of godly beings He created him." This view is echoed in Psalm VIII, verse 6: "Thou hast made him a little lower than godly beings." In Job XXXVIII, 7, both the morning stars and the sons of God, or angels, "shout together in joy" when the Lord laid the foundations of the earth.¹

3. In Biblical times — which does not include the book of Daniel, a work of the Maccabean time — the angels and demons were not invested with proper names or special functions. The Biblical system does not even distinguish clearly between good and evil spirits. The goat-like demons of the field popularly worshiped were merely survivals of pagan superstitions.²

In general the angels carry out good or evil designs according to their commands from the Lord of Hosts. They are sent forth to destroy Sodom, to save Lot, and to bring Abraham the good tidings of the birth of a son.³ On one occasion the host of spirits protect the people of God; on another they annihilate hostile powers by pestilence and plagues.⁴ At one time a multitude appear, led by a celestial chieftain; at an-

¹ See Dillmann, l. c., 318-333; Davidson, l. c., 289-300; J. E., art. Angelology; Enc. Rel. and Eth. IV, 594-601, art. Demons.

² Lev. XVII, 7; Deut. XXXII, 17; Isa. XXXIV, 14. ³ Gen. XVIII.

⁴ Ex. XXIII, 20; II Sam. XXIV, 16; II Kings XIX, 35 *et al.* See J. E., art. Angelology.

other a single angel performs the miracle. In any case the destroying angel is not a demon, but a messenger of the divine will. Originally some of these primitive forces were dreaded or worshiped by the people, but all have been transformed into members of the celestial court and called to bear witness to the dominion of the Omnipotent.

4. The belief in angels served two functions in the development of monotheism. On the one hand, it was a stage in the concentration of the divine forces, beginning with polytheism, continuing through belief in angels, and culminating in the one and only God of heaven and earth. On the other hand, certain sensuous elements in the vision of God by the seers had to be removed in the spiritualization of God, and it was found easiest to transform these into separate beings, related to Deity himself. Thus the fiery appearance of God to the eye or the voice which was manifested to the ear were often personified as angels of God. This very process made possible the purification of the God idea, as the sublime essence of the Deity was divested of physical and temporal elements, and God was conceived more and more as a moral and spiritual personality. Hence in Biblical passages the names of God and of the angel frequently alternate.¹ The latter is only a representative of the divine personality — in Scriptural terms, the presence or "face" of God. Therefore the voice of the angel is to be obeyed as that of God himself, because His name is present in His representative. A similar meaning became attached later on to the term *Shekinah*, the "majesty" of God as beheld in the cloud of fire. This was spoken of in place of God that He might not be lowered into the earthly sphere. For further discussion of this subject, see chapter XXXII, "God and Intermediary Powers." In fact, we note that the post-exilic prophets all received their revelations, not from God, but through a special angel.² They no longer

¹ Ex. III, 2-4; XXIII, 20-21; Isa. LXIII, 9. ² Zech. I, 9 f.; II, 1 f.

believed that God might be seen or heard by human powers, and therefore their visions had to be translated into rational thoughts by a mediating angel.

5. Persian influence gave Jewish angelology and demonology a different character. The two realms of the Persian system included vast hosts of beneficent spirits under Ahura-Mazda (Ormuzd) and of demons under the dominion of Angromainyus (Ahriman). So in Judaism also different orders of angels arose, headed by archangels who bore special names. The number seven was adopted from the Persians, while both names and order were often changed. All of them, however, were allotted special functions in the divine household. The pagan deities and primitive spirits which still persisted in popular superstition were given a new lease of life. Each force of nature was given a guardian spirit, just as in nature-worship; angels were appointed over fire, water, each herb, each fountain, and every separate function of life. A patron angel was assigned to each of the seventy nations of the world mentioned in the genealogy of Noah.¹

Thus the celestial court grew in number and in splendor. A beginning was made with the heavenly chariot-throne of Ezekiel, borne aloft by the four holy living creatures (the *hayoth*), surrounded by the fiery *Cherubim*, the winged *Seraphim*, and the many-eyed *Ophanim* (wheels).² This was elaborated by the addition of rows of surrounding angels, called "angels of service," headed by the seven archangels. Of these the chief was Michael, the patron-saint of Israel, and the next Gabriel, who is sometimes even placed first. Raphael and Uriel are regularly mentioned, the other three rarely, and not always by the same names. The *Irin* of Daniel — known as "the Watchers," but more precisely "the ever-watchful Ones" —

¹ See J. E., art. Angelology.

² Ezek. I, 4-24; X, 1-22; Isa. VI, 2; Dan. IV, 10 f.; VII, 9 f.; VIII, 16 f.; X, 13 f.; Enoch XV, 1 f., and elsewhere.

are another of the ten classes of angels included. Below these are myriads of inferior angels who serve them. Their classification by rank was a favorite theme of the secret lore of the Essenes, partly preserved for us in the apocalyptic literature and the liturgy. The Essenic saints endeavored to acquire miraculous powers through using the names of certain angels, and thus exorcising the evil spirits.

This secret lore seems to be patterned after the Zoroastrian or Mazdean system. It is noteworthy that the most prominent angelic figure is *Metatron*, the charioteer of the *Merkabah* or chariot-throne on high, which is merely another form of *Mithras*, the Persian god of light, who acts as charioteer for Ahura Mazda.¹ Two other angels are mentioned as standing behind the heavenly throne, *Akathriel*, the crown-bearer of God," and *Sandalphon*, "the twin brother" = Synadelphon.

6. A striking contrast exists between the simple habitation in the sky depicted in the prophetic and Mosaic books, and the splendor of the heavenly spheres according to the rabbinical writings. The Oriental courts lent all their grandeur to the majestic throne of God, on which He was exalted above all earthly things. The immense space between was filled in by innumerable gradations of beings leading up to Him. There was no longer a question how far these other beings shared the nature of God; His dominion was absolute. Still a new question, not known to the Bible, arose, as to when the angelic world was created and out of what primordial element. At first a logical answer was given, that the angels emanated from the element of fire. Later the schoolmen, trying to dispose of the angels as possible peers or rivals of the eternal God, ascribed their creation to the second day, when the heaven was made as a vault over the earth, or to the fifth

¹ See J. E., art. *Merkabah*, though still doubted by Bousset, l. c., p. 406. For *Akathriel* see Ber. 7 and J. E., art. *Sandalphon*.

day, when the winged creatures arose.¹ On the whole, the rabbis denied every claim of the angels to an independent or an eternal existence. Just because they firmly believed in the existence of angels and even saw them from time to time, they felt bound to declare their secondary rank. Only the archangels were made from an eternal substance, while the others were continually being created anew out of the breath of God or from the "river of fire" which flowed around His throne. Thus even the realm of celestial spirits was merged into the stream of universal life which comes and goes, while God was left alone in matchless sovereignty, above all the fluctuations of time.

On the other hand, the rabbis opposed the Essenic idea of assigning to the angels an intermediary task between God and man, and deprecated as a pagan custom the worship or invocation of angels. "Address your prayer to the Master of life and not to His servants; He will hear you in every trouble," says R. Judan.² Some of the teachers even declared that any godly son of Israel excels the angels in power. It is certainly significant, as David Neumark has pointed out, that the Mishnah eliminates every reference to the angels.³

7. In spite of this, none of the medieval Jewish philosophers doubted the existence of angels.⁴ Indeed, there was no reason for them to do so, as they had managed to insert them into their philosophic systems as intermediary beings leading up to the Supreme Intelligence. All that was necessary was to identify the angels of the Bible with the "ideas" of Plato or the "rulers of the spheres," the "separate intelligences" of Aristotle. By this one step the existence of angels as cosmic powers was proved to be a logical necessity. The ten

¹ Jubilees II, 2; Slav. Enoch. XXIX, 3; I, 3; Gen. R. III, 11.

² Yer. Ber. IX; Sanh. 93 a; Hul. 91 b; Ned. 32 a; Gen. R. VIII, XXI; Midr. Teh. to Ps. CIII, 18; CIV, 1.

³ Neumark, l. c.

⁴ Schmiedl, l. c., 69-87.

rulers of the spheres even corresponded with the ten orders of angels in the cosmography of the Jewish, Mohammedan, and Christian schoolmen. The only difference between the Aristotelian and the rabbinical views was that the former held the cosmic powers to be eternal; the latter, that they were created.

In both Biblical and rabbinical literature the angels are usually conceived of as purely spiritual powers superior to man. Maimonides, however, following his rationalistic method, declared them to be simply products of the imagination, the hypostases of figurative expressions which were not meant to be taken literally. To him every force and element of nature is an angel or messenger of God. In this way the entire angelology of the Bible, including even Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly chariot (the *Merkabah*), in becoming a part of the Maimonidean system turns into natural philosophy pure and simple.¹ Of course, Saadia, Jehuda ha Levi, and Gabirol do not share this rationalistic view. To them the angels are either cosmic powers of an ethereal substance, endowed with everlasting life, or living beings created by God for special purposes.²

The later Cabbalistic lore extended the realm of the celestial spirits still more, creating new names of angels for its mystical system and its magical practices. Yet in this magic it subordinated the angels to man. In fact, it followed Saadia largely in this, making man the center and pinnacle of the work of creation, in fact, the very mirror of the Creator.³

8. For our modern viewpoint the existence of angels is a question of psychology rather than of theology. The old Babylonian world has vanished, with its heaven as the dwell-

¹ *Yesode ha Torah*, II, 4-9; *Moreh*, I, 43; II, 3-7, 41; III, 13; Husik, l. c., 303 f.

² *Emunoth*, IV, 1; VI, 2; *Hoboth ha Lebaboth*, I, 6; *Cuzari*, IV, 3; *Emunah Ramah*, IV, 2; VI, 1; *Ikkarim*, II, 28, 31.

³ Zohar, III, 68; Joel: *Religionsphilosophie des Zohar*, 278 f.

ing place of God, its earth for man, and its nether world for the shades and demons. The world in which we live knows no above or beneath, no heaven or hell, no host of good and evil spirits moving about to help or hurt man. It sees matter and energy working everywhere after the same immutable laws through an infinitude of space and time, a universe ever evolving new orbs of light, engendering and transforming worlds without number and without end. There is no place in infinite space for a heaven or for a celestial throne. A world of law and of process does not need a living ladder to lead from the earth below to God on high. Though the stars be peopled with souls superior to ours, still they cannot stand nearer to God than does man with his freedom, his moral striving, his visions of the highest and the best. Through man's spiritual nature God, too, is recognized as a Spirit; through man's moral consciousness God is conceived of as the Ruler of a moral world; but this same process at once does away with the need for any other spirits or divine powers beside Him. God alone has become the object of human longing. Man feels akin to His God who is ever near; he learns to know Him ever better. He can dispense with the angelic hosts. As they return to the fiery stream of poetic imagination whence they emerged, nebulous figures of a glorious world that has vanished, man rises above angel and Seraph by his own power to the dignity of a servant, nay, a child of God. Indeed, as the rabbis said, the prophets, sages, and seers are the true messengers of God, the angels who do His service.¹

¹ Ned. 20 b; Midr. Teh. Ps. CIII, 17-18; Ibn Ezra: Introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch.

CHAPTER XXXI

SATAN AND THE SPIRITS OF EVIL

1. The great advantage of Judaism over other religious systems lies in its unified view of life, which it regards as a continuous conflict between good and evil influences within man. As man succeeds in overcoming evil and achieving good, he asserts his own moral personality. Outside of man Judaism sees no real contrast between good and evil, since both have emanated from God, the Spirit of goodness. Judaism recognizes no primal power of evil plotting against God and defying Him, such as that of the Persian dualism. Nor does Judaism espouse the dualism of spirit and matter, identifying matter with evil, from which the soul strives to free itself while confined in the prison house of the body. Such a conception is taught by Plato, probably under Oriental influence, and is shared by the Hindu and Christian ascetics who torture themselves in order to suppress bodily desire in their quest of a higher existence. The Jewish conception of the unity of God necessitates the unity of the world, which leaves no place for a cosmic principle of evil. In this Judaism dissents from modern philosophers also, such as John Stuart Mill and even Kant, who speak of a radical evil in nature. No power of evil can exist in independence of God.¹ As the Psalmist says: "His kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye mighty in strength that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word."²

¹ Compare Gen. R. to Gen. I, 31.

² Ps. CIII, 19-20.