

# The World of Noble Angels In the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah

عالم الملائكة الابرار

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This nicely designed book is Part 2 in the Islamic Creed Series of International Islamic Publishing House (IIPH). It is the translation of the Arabic original that was published in 1990. This English version was published in Riyadh in 2003 (first English edition 1995).

The following summary of this book is written by Abu Banaat. For the transcription of Arabic words, the system of the book has been followed as much as possible, but not always. For the sake of clarification, another manner of numbering the subdivisions in the chapters has sometimes been used than in the original book. Abu Banaat also added some comments in footnotes and some questions for discussion in the end.

## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Allah commands his believers to believe in angels. The Qur'an and the Sunnah speak in detail about angels, and without this, man would not know about angels as they are hidden for mankind. 'The relationship of angels with us, their role in our formation and their watching over us, speaks to man of his importance and valuable status.' (p. 14)

## INTRODUCTION:

### Definition of the Angels and Belief in Them

The word malak (angel, pl. mala'ik) is derived from the root alaka, meaning 'to deliver a message'. Angels are messenger of God. It is also said that its root is la'aka, and that mala'kah means message. Some other scholars believe it comes from al-mulk, meaning sovereignty. If an angel is in control of some affairs, he is described as malak, while when man is in

control he is called malik (king) (p. 15)

A person's faith cannot be complete without believing in angels. It means:

1. Belief that they exist
2. Giving each one of them his rightful status, and believing that they are the slaves of Allah, created by Him, like mankind and the jinn. They are commanded to do things and they are accountable. [...] Death is possible for them, but Allah gives them a long life. They should not be described in any way that would imply association with Allah, and they should not be regarded as gods as they were regarded by the ancients.
3. Acknowledging that among them are messengers whom Allah sends to whomsoever He wills among mankind. [...] This implies acknowledging that among them are the bearers of the Throne, those

who stand in ranks, the keepers of Paradise, the keepers of Hell, those who record man's deeds and those who drive the clouds.

## **1 THEIR PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS, ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES**

### ***1.1. Physical Characteristics***

#### **1.1.1 What they were created from and when**

Angels are created from light, but it has not been revealed what light they were created from. The author quotes some sound hadiths which state that the angels were created from the light of glory, and Iblis from the fire of glory, and that the angels were created from the light of the arms and chest; these views are not permissible, as they may have taken their ideas from Jewish sources. (pp. 17-18)

We do not know when the angels were created, but it was before Adam, as the angels were informed that Allah was planning to create him (Qur'an 2:30) and He commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam (Qur'an 15:29). (p. 18)

Angels cannot be seen as they are made from low density light; the prophet twice saw Jibril in his true form; when angels appear in human form they can be seen. (p. 19)

#### **1.1.2 Their great physical size**

Some hadiths speak of the prophet seeing Jibril fill in the space between the heaven and the earth with his great size. (pp. 19-20)

Muhammad is reported to have seen Jibril with 600 wings – each of which filled the horizon. Multicolored pearls and rubies were falling from his wings. Jibril was sitting on green cushions. The cushions alone filled the space between heaven and earth. (pp. 20-21)

Muhammad is also reported to have spoken with one of the angels bearing the Throne of God. The distance from his earlobes to his shoulders was as far as a bird flies in 700 years. His feet were on the lowest earth and the Throne is resting on his horn. (p. 22)

#### **1.1.3 Their most important physical characteristics**

1.1.3.1 The wings of the angels - some have 2, others 3 or 4 wings. Jibril has 600. (pp. 22-23)

1.1.3.2 The beauty of the angels - Angels are free from any defect in body or mind, beautiful, tall, strong. (p. 23)

1.1.3.3 Is there any similarity in appearance and form between angels and humans? Yes, but only in as far as angels appear to humans in human form. (p. 24)

1.1.3.4 Variations in their physical shape and status - As said before, they are different in number of wings. They are also different in status and rank. The best are those who were present at the battle of Badr. (pp. 24-25)

1.1.3.5 They cannot be described as being male or female. The world of angels has different standards than the human world. The pre-Islamic Arabs thought the angels were female, or even daughters of God. The Qur'an contradicts these views in Qur'an 37:149-156. (pp. 25-26)

1.1.3.6 They do not eat or drink. When the three angels came in human form to Ibrahim, he offered them food but they did not eat. (Qur'an 51:24-28 and 11:70). Angels also do not get married. (pp. 27-28)

1.1.3.7 They do not get bored or tired. The angels worship and obey Allah without

getting bored or tired. They also do not sleep. (Qur'an 21:20 and 41:38). (p 28)

1.1.3.8 The dwelling-place of angels. They live in the heavens but come down to earth if Allah commands them. They come down at Laylat al-Qadr. During that night the angels descend, and also the Ruh (Jibril) with all Decrees of Allah. (p. 29)

1.1.3.9 The total number of angels is unknown, though we know that Hell will be brought down on the Last Day by 49 million angels. Beside that, we know that each person has an angel responsible for the nutfah (embryo), two angels to write down a person's deeds, angels to protect each person, and an angelic companion (qarin) to guide a person. (p. 30)

1.1.3.10 Angels have names but we only know a few:

- Jibril and Mika'il: Jibril brought the Qur'an down to Muhammad, and he is the Ruh sent to Maryam. (Qur'an 2:97-98, 26:193-194, and 19:17) (p. 31)
- Israfil: will blow the final trumpet
- Muhammad mentioned these angels in his prayers: 'O Allah, Lord of Jibril, Mika'il and Israfil, Creator of the heavens and the earth'. (pp. 31-32)
- Malik: the keeper of Hell
- Ridwan: the keeper of Paradise
- Munkar and Nakir: involved in questioning men in the grave
- Harut and Marut: Mentioned in the Qur'an 2:102 as sent to earth to test mankind. Many myths about them in the books of tafsir, but no basis for this in Islam.
- 'Azra'il: Some believe him to be the angel of Death, but no strong basis.
- Raqib and 'Atid: This is a mistaken idea,

based on misinterpretation of Qur'an 50:17-18 where we read that man can not utter a word or there is a watcher (raqib) by him, ready ('atib) to record it. (pp. 32-33)

1.1.3.11 The death of the angels

All angels will die, based on Qur'an 39:68 and 28:88.

After all creation has died, only the One who is the First and the Last will be there. Even the angel of Death will have died as the last one.

It is not clear whether before that Last Trumpet, angels will die. (p. 34)

## **1.2 Attributes**

The angels are honorable and obedient (Qur'an 80:15-16). They are emissaries who reconcile people. (p. 35) They are also modest. (pp. 35-36)

## **1.3 Abilities**

**1.3.1** Their ability to take on different forms

Angels taken on fully human forms, as in the case of Jibreel who appeared to Maryam, Ibrahim, and Lot (Qur'an 19:16-19, 11:77). To Lot they appeared as 'handsome young men'. The prophet saw angels in the form of some of his companions, or Bedouin. Jibril once appeared to the companions in white clothes and black hair. An angel can also take the form of a horse. (pp. 36-38). Some Islamic scholars have discussed how angels can change form, but the author disagrees with questioning how that can be. 'Allah has told us that the angels may take on different forms, but he has no told us how they do so.' (pp. 38-39)

### 1.3.2 Their great speed

The speed of angels is greater than the speed of light. It cannot be measured by human standards. (p. 39)

### 1.3.3 Their knowledge

Angels have been taught by Allah and they have great knowledge, including the knowledge of writing but they do not have the human ability to find out things by themselves. (Qur'an 2:31-32, 82:10-12) (pp. 39-40)

At the same time, the angels discuss about the creation of Adam and other matters of God that are not clear to them. (pp. 40-41)

### 1.3.4 They are disciplined and organized

They worship God in rows (Qur'an 89:22, 78:38) (pp. 42-43)

### 1.3.5 The infallibility of angels

Angels are virtuous believers; they do not commit sin; Iblis was not one of the angels, according to most scholars. (Qur'an 66:6, 37:164-166, 21:19-20, 80:15-16, 56:79, 21:27, 35:1, 6:124) (pp.43-46)

## 2 THE WORSHIP OF THE ANGELS

### 2.1 *A Look at the Nature of the Angels*

Angels instinctively worship Allah. They do not have the ability to disobey Him. (Qur'an 66:6) They are commanded to obey Allah and they are held accountable for that; some scholars are mistaken in saying that they are not held accountable. (Qur'an 16:50) (p. 47)

### 2.2 *The Status of the Angels*

They are honored slaves of Allah. They fully serve God. They are not the daughters of Allah

as the mushrikin said. (Qur'an 21:26-29) They do not make suggestions before God and they do not oppose any command. (pp. 48-49)

Some of the aspects of their worship are:

### 2.2.1 Tasbih (glorifying Allah)

They remember Allah and the greatest dhikr is tasbih. (Qur'an 40:7, 42:5, 21:20 37:165-166) (pp. 49-50)

### 2.2.2 Standing in rows

They worship God while standing in rows (Qur'an 37:165) (pp. 50-51)

### 2.2.3 Hajj

The angels have a Ka'bah in the seventh heaven to which they go on hajj. This is al-Bayt al-Ma'mur (the much-frequented house) (Qur'an 52:4). According to some hadiths each day 70,000 angels enter into that Bayt. Abraham leans against it as he inhabits that heaven. This Bayt is exactly above the earthly Ka'bah. Each heaven has such a Ka'bah. (pp. 51-53)

### 2.2.4 Their fear of Allah

They are so fearful of God that when He decrees a matter in heaven, they beat their wings in submission to what He has said. Jibril is like a worn mat for his fear of Allah. (p. 53)

## 3 THE ANGELS AND MAN

### 3.1 *The Angels and Adam*

Before God wanted to create Adam, He first informed the angels. They asked Him the reason for that because they knew that mankind would cause corruption and bloodshed. God told them that He had reasons which the angels did not know. (Qur'an 2:30)

After Adam's creation, the angels were told to prostrate before Adam. All angels did, but Iblis did not. (Qur'an 38:71-74)

The angels taught Adam to add wa rahmat Allah to the greeting as-Salaamu 'alaykum.

When Adam died, angels washed his dead body, as Adam's sons did not know what to do. This is also reported of some of the prophet's companions. (pp. 55-57)

### **3.2 The angels and the sons of Adam**

#### **3.2.1 Their role in the creation of man**

When 42 days are passed, Allah sends an angel to the nutfah (embryo) and he gives it shape, forming its hearing and sights, its skin, flesh and bones. Then the gender is also formed. (p. 57).

Angels are also sent to the womb after 120 days to write on the child its deeds, provision, whether he is doomed or blessed. Then his soul is breathed into him. This is based on different hadiths. (p. 58)

#### **3.2.2 The angels guard the sons of Adam**

Angels guard people – before and after them. When Allah wants a person to suffer, he withdraws his angels. Angels guard man at sleep and during the day, against jinn, men and wild beasts. (Qur'an 6:61, 13:10-11) (pp. 58-59)

#### **3.2.3 The emissaries of Allah to His Messengers and Prophets**

Jibril is the only one who carries out this mission. He brought the Qur'an down to the Prophet's heart. (Qur'an 2:97, 26:193-194)

Wahy (revelation) may be given by other angels as well, but this happens rarely.

Angels appear also to others than messengers or prophets. (pp.59-61)

How did the wahy come to the Messenger? According to Muhammad, sometimes as the ringing of a bell; sometimes the angels come in the form of a man who speaks to him. Jibril used to also come in angelic form, but it was easier for the prophet if he changed into human form. Twice he appeared 'in the form in which Allah had created him'. This meant: sitting on a throne between the heavens and the earth. (pp. 60-62)

During Ramadan Jibril also came each night to teach Muhammad to understand the Qur'an. Jibril also taught Muhammad how prayers should be performed. (pp. 63-64)

Jibril also fought with Muhammad at certain battles, like Badr, and he accompanied him on his Night Journey. (p. 64)

God did not send angels as messengers, as that is very difficult for mankind. 'Allah willed that He should send mankind Messengers of their own kind. He could not have sent them down in their angelic form. He would have had to make them appear in human form, so that the people could have learned from them.' (Qur'an 6:8-9)

Kafirs demand to see angels and to have a messenger from the angels come to them, but this is sheer stubbornness. (Qur'an 6:111) pp. 65-66.

#### **3.2.4 Stirring up good motives in human hearts**

Each person has a constant qarin (constant companion) from among the angels and another from the jinn. The angel is to guide the person to do good, versus the jinn. The two companions compete with each other to lead the person. (pp. 66-67)

### 3.2.5 Recording the good and bad deeds of the sons of Adam

Some angels are appointed to write down the good and bad deeds of man. Each man has two angels. (Qur'an 50:16-18, 82:10-12).

The angel on the right records the good, the one on the left the bad words and deeds of man. (Qur'an 17:13-14)

Even neutral statements and deeds are recorded, but these are erased each Thursday. (Qur'an 13:39)

The angel who writes down the bad deeds, gives a person 6 hours to repent. If he does, the deed is not written down, according to hadiths.

An evil intent is not recorded. If the person does not do according to his evil intent, this is written down as a good deed. If he does do the evil intent, it is written as one evil deed. If he has a good intent, that is written down as a good deed. If he implements the intent, that is written down as ten good deeds.

Angels are able to know good and bad intentions in man's heart, but not their beliefs. (pp. 68-73)

### 3.2.6 Testing the sons of Adam

God sends angels to test man. They can also cure people and (pp. 73-75)

### 3.2.7 The angels take the soul from the body when the appointed time of death comes

Angels take the soul out of bodies when their appointed time to die has come. (Qur'an 32:11, 6:61-62). With kuffar and sinners they do that in a harsh manner. The souls of believers are taken gently. (Qur'an 6:93, 8:50, 47:27). Unbelievers get the tidings of hell and believers get glad tidings and help. (Qur'an 41:30-31, 6:93) (pp. 75-77)

When the angel of death came to Moses, Moses slapped him so that he lost an eye. God then gave Moses more years to live. Moses did not know it was the angel of death; according to shariah a Muslim is allowed to take out the eye of a person who looks without permission into his home. (pp. 77-78)

In this context, the author deemed it important to say: 'If a report from Allah or from His messenger is sahih, then there is no option but to believe it' (Qur'an 3:7) (p. 78)

### 3.2.8 The relationship of the angels with man in the grave, on the Day of Resurrection, and in the Hereafter.

Two angels, Munkar and Nakir, question man in the grave. There are angels who bless people in the grave and those who punish.

Israfil will blow the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection and other angels will gather the people for the reckoning. Angels will drive the kuffar to hell and lead the believers to paradise. They will punish those in hell and greet the believers with salaam in paradise. (p. 78)

## 3.3 The angels and the believers

### 3.3.1 The role of the angels with the believers

3.3.1.1 Angels love the believers (p. 79)

3.3.1.2 Angels try to guide believers as to good behavior

(in this context, the writer suggests that the Ruh al-Qudus is an angel) (p. 79)

3.3.1.3 Angels send blessings to believers – meaning they pray for people and seek forgiveness for them. (Qur'an 33:43, 56) (pp. 80-81)

Examples of deeds for which the angels send blessings upon a person:

- Teaching people good things
- those who wait for prayer in congregation
- those who pray in the first row
- those who fill the gaps in the rows
- those who eat suhur (last meal before fasting)
- those who send blessings upon the prophet
- those who visit the sick (pp. 81-82)

Does the angels sending blessings on us have any effect? Yes, it has the effect of ridding us from the darkness of kufr and shirk and sin, leading us to Islam. (Qur'an 33:43) (p. 83)

3.3.1.4 The personally assigned angel says 'amen' to the du'aa' (personal supplications) of believers, making them more likely to be answered. They say 'amen' to anything the believer prays, so the prophet advised to be careful not to pray anything that may hurt the one who prays. (p. 83)

3.3.1.5 The angels who bear God's throne and the angels around the throne ask forgiveness for believers, especially for those who repent. (Qur'an 40:7-9, 42:3) (pp. 84-85)

3.3.1.6 Angels attend gathering of knowledge and circles of dhikr and surrounds those present with their wings. (p. 85-86)

3.3.1.7 Angels record those who attend Friday prayers in the mosque. They stand at the door and record the ones who come first. There are about 30 of those in the mosque, so these are not the personal recording angels. (p. 86)

3.3.1.8 Angels come and go among us; especially at fajr prayer they witness the behavior of the believers. (Qur'an 17:78) (p. 87)

3.3.1.9 They come down when a believers recites the Qur'an. (p. 88)

3.3.1.10 They convey the salaams of the ummah to the prophet. (p. 89)

3.3.1.11 They bring glad tidings to the believers (Qur'an 31:24-28, 3:39) (pp. 89-90)

3.3.1.12 Angels may appear to believers in dreams. (pp. 90-91)

3.3.1.13 Angels fight alongside the believers and support them at times of war, (Qur'an 8:9-12, 3:123-127, 33:9) (pp. 91-94)

3.3.1.14 They protect the prophet (p. 94)

3.3.1.15 They protect and support righteous people and relieve their distress (Qur'an 27:62) (pp. 94-96)

3.3.1.16 Angels attend the funerals of the righteous. (p. 96)

3.3.1.17 They shade the martyrs with their wings (p. 97)

3.3.1.18 Angels brought the Ark of the Covenant to Israel (Qur'an 2:248) (p. 97)

3.3.1.19 They will protect Makka and Medina from the plague and the Dajjal (Antichrist) (pp. 97-98)

3.3.1.20 'Isa (Jesus) will descend at the white minaret east of Damascus, wearing two garments dyed with saffron and placing his hands of the wings of two angels.(p. 98)

3.3.1.21 The angels will spread their wings over Syria, Jordan and Palestine. (pp. 98-99)

3.3.1.22 If believers say ameen and that coincides with the ameen said by the angels in heaven, 'all his previous sins will be forgiven'. Likewise when believers say the rabbanaa wa laka al-hamd in the mosque. (p. 99)

### 3.3.2 The obligation of the believers towards the angels

The believer who worships Allah and seeks his pleasure has to regard the angels as friends and view them with love and respect, and avoid anything that offends them. (pp. 99-100)

#### 3.3.2.1 Not offending the angels

Whosoever insults the angels should be executed. This is both in regard to general insults and to personal insults to angels. Disbelief is seen as an insult. Whoever slanders their honor is kaafir. It is obligatory to respect all of the prophets and all of the angels. (p 100)

#### 3.3.2.2 Keeping away from sin and disobedience

Sin, disobedience to Allah, kufr and shirk are abhorred by the angels. They do not enter the home of such people. They do not enter places with altars, statues and pictures, a dog, people in a state of ritual impurity, the dead body of a kafir, a bell, a drunkard, or someone perfumed with saffron. (p. 101)

3.3.2.3 They are offended by that which offends the believers, like smells and filth and dirt. Garlic, onion and leeks are abhorred by angels, so believers must not eat that before going to the mosque. (p. 102)

3.3.2.4 Do not spit to the right during prayers, because an angel stands there. (p.102)

#### 3.3.2.5 Befriending all the angels

All angels are servants of God and we must love them all equally. The Jews, following deviant kufr, rejected the prophet's message with the excuse that Jibril was supposedly their enemy. This is a lie. (Qur'an 2:97-98) (p. 103)

### 3.4 *The Angels and the Kuffar and Evildoers*

#### 3.4.1 Bringing the punishment down upon the kuffar.

Sometimes when a messenger was not believed and rejected, Allah sued angels to punish them. (p. 104)

#### 3.4.2 Their destruction of the people of the prophet Lot.

Angels disguised as beautiful young men came to Lot; when the men of the city wanted to misuse those angels, Jibril struck them with his wing so that they were blinded. (Qur'an 11:77-83, 54:37) (pp. 104-106)

#### 3.4.3 Their cursing of the kuffar

Angels curse the kuffar in general. (Qur'an 2:161, 3:86-87)

They also curse people committing certain sins, like:

- A woman who does not respond to her husband
- One who points toward his brother with a weapon
- Those who slander the companions of the prophet
- Those who prevent the shariah from being implemented
- Those who give sanctuary to those innovators or criminals. (pp. 107-108)

#### 3.4.4 The demand of the kuffaar to see the angels

Kuffar demand to see angels in order to believe, but they will see those angels on the Day of Judgment. (Qur'an 25:21-22) (pp. 108-109)

#### **4 THE ANGELS AND OTHER CREATED THINGS**

##### ***4.1. The Bearers of the Throne***

The throne is the greatest of all created things; 8 angels carry it. (Qur'an 69:17) (p. 111)

##### ***4.2 The Angels of the Mountaint***

There are angels appointed over the mountains. (pp. 111-112)

##### ***4.3. The Angels Who Are Appointed Over Rain, Vegetation and Provision***

Mika'il is appointed over rain and vegetation for the provision of the world. He has helpers for that task. (p. 112)

Al-Ra'd is appointed over the clouds, to give or withhold rain as lah commands. (pp. 112-113)

Each movement in the universe stems from the angels. (Qur'an 79:1-5, 51:4, 77:1-5, 37:1-3) (pp. 113-114)

#### **5 WHO IS SUPERIOR – THE ANGELS OR THE SONS OF ADAM?**

This is an old dispute in Islam. The dispute is mostly found in the books of the scholars of kalam (scholasticism) and the dispute is with the Mu'tazilah. Verses from the Qur'an (98:7 and 7:20) are used for defending the opposite statements. (p. 115).

Allah honored Adam by creating him with His own hand and breathing into him the soul, making the angels prostrate to him and bringing prophets and messengers from mankind. Angels serve them (p. 116)

The matter was discussed by the companions of the prophet, not just later by the scholastics.

(pp. 116-117) The author mentions different viewpoints and gives his own conclusion.

There is no dispute that the kuffar and hypocrites are not included in the discussion of superiority. They are like cattle, nay even more astray. (Qur'an 7:179) (p. 117) So the issue is not about whether the essence of man or the essence of the angels is superior. The issue is about believers and angels. (p. 117)

Those who say that the righteous human beings are superior to angels use the following evidence:

1. Allah commanded his angels to prostrate to Adam. If he had not been superior, He would not have commanded them to do so. (Qur'an 2:34) (pp. 117-118) However, some say that the prostration was to Allah and that Adam was just the qiblah. But if that is true, why would Iblis have refused with the argument that he was better than Adam? (p. 118)
2. Adam was honored over Iblis (Qur'an 17:62) (p. 118)
3. Allah created Adam with his hands, and the angels with his word.
4. The one who is a khalifah is higher than the one who is not a khalifah (Qur'an 2:30) (p. 119)
5. The sons of Adam are superior in terms of knowledge. When Allah asked the angels the names of things, they could not answer. Adam told them the names of things. (Qur'an 39:9) (p. 119)
6. Man's obedience to Allah is more difficult, and that which is more difficult to fulfill is dearer when fulfilled. (p. 119)

7. The salaf used to narrate hadiths which spoke of the superiority of righteous human beings over angels. Had this been wrong it would have been denounced. (p. 119)
8. Allah praises righteous human beings before his angels, which indicates that the angels are superior. Some of this opinion also quote Qur'an 6:50: 'Nor I tell you that I am an angel'. They also point to the imperfection of believers, while angels are perfect. (p. 120)

The correct view that reconciles the different viewpoint is based on Ibn Taymiyah. He suggested that righteous human beings will be better in the end, when they enter Paradise and gain closer access to Allah than the angels. (Qur'an 38:25).

But the angels are better at the beginning, for presently they are closer to Allah. They are fully devoted to worship, and sinless, so undoubtedly more perfect than mankind in their present situation. (pp. 120-121)

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## SOME QUESTIONS

1. Can you summarize the role of angels in Islam?
2. How do Allah and the angels relate in Islam?
3. How do the believers and angels relate in Islam?
4. What role do the angels play in ensuring that believers go to paradise?
5. What aspects of Islamic angelology are most different from what the Bible says of the angels?