



Who are the 'angels'?

Angels are the servants of Allāh. They obey his commands and constantly worship Him. In Arabic they are called *al malā'ikah*.



Are angels the same as human beings?

No. They are a separate creation altogether. Humans were made by Allāh from clay. *Jinn*, another creation, were made from smokeless fire. *Malā'ikah*, however, were made from *nūr* (light).

'A'isha رضي الله عنه reported that Allāh's Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said, The Angels were created out of light and the *jinn*s were created out of the spark of fire and Adam was created as he has been defined (in the Qur'ān) for you (i.e. he is fashioned out of clay).
Sahih Muslim



We may be made different, but just like angels, we also worship and obey Allāh. In that way, aren't we humans the same as them?

Many humans do indeed worship and obey Allāh. But then again, many don't! And even amongst those who *do*, they may not be obedient *all* of the time. Even good Muslims sometimes lapse into minor sin - may Allāh preserve us from that. This is not the case with angels. *Every* single angel is *always* obedient to Allāh. They worship Him continuously, without faltering. They never incur His anger or displeasure. They never commit sin.



They never commit sin? How is this possible?



That's the way Allāh سبحانه وتعالى created them. Unlike humans and *jinn*, He did not endow them with free will, the ability to choose between good and evil. Allāh states,

يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِّنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ

They (the angels) fear their Lord above them, and they do what they are commanded.

Sūrah an Nahl, 16:50

We, as humans, can decide either to follow *sirāt al mustaqīm* (the straight path) or to follow the path of wrongdoing and sin. Angels, however, do not have such a choice. They only do good. Consequently, there is no such thing as a bad angel, a sinful angel or, as is sometimes mentioned in Western literature, a 'fallen' angel.



You say that angels never do bad. I thought that Satan was an angel turned bad?

Satan is the avowed enemy of mankind. In Arabic he is known as Shaytān, and also as Iblīs. The incident you refer to is mentioned multiple times in the Qur’ān. Allāh created Ādam عليه السلام (Adam) and then asked the angels to perform *sajda* (to prostrate) before His new creation. *Shaytān* was also amongst those ordered to prostrate but he refused. Allāh tells us,

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ
قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ

And We have certainly created you [O mankind], and given you [human] form. Then We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam;" so they prostrated, except for Iblīs. He was not of those who prostrated. [Allāh] said, "What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?" [Satan] said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay [i.e., earth]."

Sūrah al A'rāf, 7:11,12

Notice what Iblīs says here, "You created me from fire..."



Fire. This means he is a *jinn*.

Yes. Contrary to popular belief, he is NOT an angel, he is a *jinn*. Just like you and I, he had the choice to obey or disobey Allāh. He chose the path of disobedience.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ
وَدُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِن دُونِي وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ بِئْسَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا

And (mention) when We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except for Iblīs. He was of the jinn and disobeyed the command of his Lord.

Sūrah al Kahf, 18:50



Don't angels become weary or tired from their worship of Allāh?

No. Allāh tells us:

فَإِنِ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فَالَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ

But if they (disbelievers) are arrogant - then those who are near your Lord (the angels) exalt Him by night and by day, they do not become weary.

Sūrah al Fussilat, 41:38

There are countless angels constantly in the remembrance of Allāh, many are carrying and circling His Throne, and yet others are in continuous *ruku* and *sujūd* before Him.



Allāh must love them dearly?

Yes. Allāh Himself warns us that anyone who is an enemy to the *malā'ikah*, is an enemy to Him:

مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

Whoever is an enemy to Allāh and His angels and His messengers and Gabriel and Michael – then indeed Allāh is an enemy to the disbelievers.

Sūrah al Baqarah, 2:98



Gabriel and Michael are mentioned above. Who are they?

In Islām they are known as Jibrīl and Mika'īl. A number of angels are actually mentioned in the Qur'ān or *ahadīth* either by name or title. They are as follows:

- Jibrīl عليه السلام - The most important of all the *malā'ikah*, through whom the Qur'ān was revealed to Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. Mentioned in [2:98];
- Mika'īl عليه السلام – Again, one of the angels closest to Allāh [2:98]. He is responsible for the movement of clouds, wind and rain at Allāh's Command. He does this with helpers who follow his instructions.
- Isrāfīl عليه السلام – Deputed to sound the deafening and terrifying trumpet at the initiation of The Last Day. [Tirmidhi, Muslim];
- Malik Al Mawt – The Angel of Death, leading those angels responsible for carrying away our souls, either violently or in comfort. [32:11]¹;
- Munkar and Nakīr – The angels who question us in our graves [Tirmidhi];
- Mālik – The Chief Guard of Hellfire. [43:77];
- Hārūt and Mārūt – Two angels mentioned in *Sūrah Baqarah*, sent to test the people of Babylon. [2:102];
- Kirāman Kātibīn – The Noble Recorders, recording our deeds. [82:10,11].



And those last two? Who are they?

Every one of us has two angels accompanying them always. One is based on our right and the other on our left. They note our good and bad deeds respectively.



All our deeds?

Yes. At Allāh's command, every single action, however big or small is noted. Nothing escapes being recorded. Allāh reminds us of this:

إِذْ يَتَلَقَّى الْمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ مَّا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ

When the two receivers receive², seated on the right and on the left. He (i.e., man) does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared (to record).

Sūrah Qaaf, 50:17,18



How many angels are there?

Only Allāh knows the true figure, but they are more than we could ever imagine.



Do the angels have wings?

Yes, they do. We know this because we are told so in the Qur'ān and *ahadīth*.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعًا ۗ

¹ There are no authentic reports from the Qur'ān or *ahadīth* that his name is Azra'īl, as is widely mentioned. Prominent scholars past and present have indicated that this name most probably emanates from Jewish texts. Al Albāni and Al Uthaimīn have both stated that we should name him as Allāh has named him the Qur'ān.

² Angels recording each word and deed

(All) Praise is (due) to Allāh, Creator of the heavens and the earth, (Who) made the angels messengers with wings, two or three or four.
Sūrah Fātir, 35:1

Also, in Sahih Bukhāri, Jābir bin Abdullāh رضى الله عنه mentions the presence of *malā'ikah* at the time his father was martyred,

"When my father was martyred, I lifted the sheet from his face and wept and the people forbade me to do so but the Prophet did not forbid me. Then my aunt Fātima began weeping and the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "It is all the same whether you weep or not. The angels were shading him continuously with their wings till you shifted him (from the field)."

Having said that, it is not for us to speculate at all as to what those wings look like, or indeed what angels themselves look like.



So, we cannot imagine what they look like, or draw pictures of them.

No. Speculating about them or representing that speculation in the form of a painting or sculpture, is a major sin in Islām. In the West, you will find many portrayals of angels, for example as:

- ☒ small naked babies (cherubs);
- ☒ cupids with bows and arrows;
- ☒ partially naked women;
- ☒ human beings with wings and haloes above their heads.

These depictions are all based upon nothing more than conjecture. We must simply accept angels as the devoted servants of Allāh that they are and not waste our time contemplating what they really may or may not look like. If we do wish to understand their appearance, then we must limit ourselves strictly to what we are told about them in the Qur'ān and ahādīth.



Do the *malā'ikah* eat, drink, marry and have children like us? Are they male or female?

The consensus of scholarly opinion is that angels do none of the above acts, and, in terms of gender, Allāh Knows Best, what they are. The *kuffār* (unbelievers) in Makkah at the time of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, used to claim that they were female. They referred to them as the daughters of Allāh. Such comments are without foundation and brought down severe words from Allāh:

أَفَأَصْفَاكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنَاثًا إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا

Then, has your Lord chosen you for (having) sons and taken (i.e., adopted) from among the angels, daughters? Indeed you say a grave saying.
Sūrah al Isrā', 17:40



Daughters? This is *shirk*, is it not?

Yes. It is *shirk*. It is a breach of both *tawhīd al rubūbiyyah* and *ulūhiyyah* and a sin, which, if not repented for, will remain unforgivable. Remember, Allāh سبحانه وتعالى has no sons, daughters, mother, father and so on. Nothing is equal to Him. He gave birth to nothing. He created everything and that includes the *malā'ikah*.

Also, it is absurd that the Qur'aish should refer to them as 'daughters of Allāh'. The pagans of Arabia at that time were known for their preference towards sons over daughters, many of whom were despised so much, that they were in fact killed at birth.

وَيَجْعَلُونَ لِلَّهِ الْبَنَاتِ سُبْحَانَهُ ۚ وَلَهُمْ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ
يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ ۚ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ ۗ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

And they attribute to Allāh daughters - exalted is He - and for them is what they desire (i.e. sons). And when one of them is informed of (the birth of) a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.

Sūrah an Nahl, 16:57,58,59



I have a non-Muslim friend who tells me that angels are the stuff of children's stories. As Muslims, are we required to believe totally in the *malā'ikah*?

Yes. Absolutely, without question. Although they are part of *al ghaib*, belief in the *malā'ikah* is a *rukn al ēmān* (a pillar of faith). You cannot claim to believe in the other parts of faith, but then decide not to believe in angels. Such a decision would bring a person outside the fold of Islām and into the same state of *kufr* (disbelief) as your non-Muslim friend. Allāh makes this very clear many times in the Qur'ān:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

O you who have believed, believe in Allāh and His Messenger and the Book that He sent down upon His Messenger and the Scripture which He sent down before. And whoever disbelieves in Allāh, His angels, His books, His messengers and the Last Day has certainly gone far astray.

Sūrah an Nisā' 4:136



How will the angels carry our souls away at death?

This depends upon your obedience, or lack of it, to Allāh during your life.



So, if we neglected our duties towards Allāh, we can expect rough treatment?

Yes. It is *malā'ikah* who take the souls of the wicked initially and lead those very souls to *Jahannam* (Hellfire).

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ

And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved... They are striking their faces and their backs (saying), "Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire..."

Sūrah al Anfāl, 8:50

It is angels who stand guard over the wicked in *Jahannam* (Hellfire). They are stern towards its inhabitants.



How can an angel be stern?

Here they act strictly in accordance with Allāh's command,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ

O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are (appointed) angels harsh and severe; They do not disobey Allāh in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.
Sūrah at Tahrīm, 66:6



And what of those who had remained obedient throughout their lives?

The words from the *malā'ikah* for them are sweet and beautiful expressions of welcome,

الدَّارِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى

And the angels will enter upon them from every gate, (saying), "Peace be upon you for what you patiently endured. And excellent is the final Home"
Sūrah Ra'd, 13:23,24



Will angels be able to help us on the day of Judgement?

They will not be able to speak on our behalf, unless Allāh grants permission:

وَكَمْ مِنْ مَلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَى

And how many angels there are in the heavens whose intercession will not avail at all except (only) after Allāh has permitted (it) to whom He wills and approves.
Sūrah an Najm, 53:26

Despite Allāh's immense love for His *malā'ikah*, on that Day they will remain humble and silent before Him.



Are *malā'ikah* always in *al ghaib*?

Generally speaking, yes. They remain invisible to us. However, if Allāh Wills, they can become visible.³ During the time of the *anbiya* (prophets), angels had been known to come down in the form of humans. They relayed messages to the Prophets of Allāh and helped them in their struggles.



Can you give me some examples? Yes. Insha'Allāh in the next chapter.

³ In fact, one animal that is noted as being able to see *malā'ikah* are cockerels. Abu Hurairah narrates that Allāh's Apostle صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "When you hear the crowing of cockerels, ask for Allāh's Blessings for (their crowing indicates that) they have seen an angel. And when you hear the braying of donkeys, seek refuge with Allāh from Satan for (their braying indicates) that they have seen a Satan." (Sahih Bukhāri; 4:522)

The Angels (part a)

Questions

1. Who are the angels?
2. What are they called in Arabic?
3. What are angels made from?
4. How is it that angels never commit sin?
5. Was Iblīs (Satan) an angel?
6. Name five of those angels actually mentioned in the Qur'ān and ahadīth.
7. Who are the Kirāman Khātibīn? What do they do?
8. How many angels are there?
9. According the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, what were the angels doing to the father of Jābir bin Abdullāh, after he was martyred?
10. Are we permitted to draw pictures of angels?
11. Describe the personality of the angels that guard Hellfire?
12. Will angels be able to help us on the Day of Judgement?
13. A person believes in all the basic beliefs of Islām but he does not believe in angels. Explain what's wrong here?



Decorated lorry on Islamkhot Road, Sindh, Pakistan