

## **Hierarchy of Angels.**

### **Number Six**

Heaven is a home that is ordered by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an abode of indescribable beauty and perfect harmony. It is a place where God is in charge and nothing is ever in disarray. God is a God of order (1 Cor.14:33, 40). As the physical world is orderly arranged so is the spiritual world. The Bible makes clear distinctions between order and ranks, of office and honour. God in His infinite wisdom and love for order created a hierarchy of angels for service and worship. The names and designations given angels reflect their rank and work. Angels are called a heavenly "host," a term signifying soldiers ready to serve at the Divine command (cf. Dan. 7:10); "principalities," "dominions" and "thrones" are terms that designate administrative functions.

The early Christian church stuck to the Biblical givens on angels, even St. Augustine confessed that he didn't know how the hierarchy of angels was ordered. But others did develop elaborate and precise schemes. The Celestial Hierarchy of the Pseudo-Dionysius drew on references to the names of angelic "choirs" found in the Old Testament and in the epistles of Paul, and fixed the order of hierarchy of angels as, in descending order: Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; Dominations, Virtues and Powers; and Principalities, Archangels and Angels. Only the last two groups had direct contact with human beings. The nine orders are grouped into three choirs, of three orders each. Even though most of the ranks are mentioned in the Bible, the arranging of the so-called nine-fold orders is a neoplatonic business. We have no Biblical warrant for it.

The mysterious six-winged seraphim, or burning ones, appear to Isaiah in a vision which was a revelation from God (Isa.6). These seraphim are personal, spiritual beings with face, feet and hands, who can use human language and understand moral concepts. Their ministry relates directly to God and to His heavenly throne as they are positioned above the throne, waiting upon Him as His attendants. But even the seraphim could not look directly at the blazing glory of the holy God on the heavenly throne. As a sign of reverence and awe each seraph covered his face with two of his wings. The seraphim praised God with pure lips; but this Isaiah could not do. He said, "I am a man of unclean lips." (6:5) At God's bidding one of the seraphim flew to the prophet and touched his mouth and his guilt was taken away and his sin atoned for. (6:7) Hence the seraphim reveal God's grace and mercy.

The Bible does not record any activity of angels on behalf of man until after his fall into sin. The first appearance is the cherubim. Immediately after the fall God began His rescue operation, His gracious intervention in the life of man and the world. The cherubim are servants in God's

wonderful plan of salvation. We must remember that angels exist for God and His glory. They are His messengers. It is difficult to imagine what cherubim are like. The four- winged cherubim are perhaps of slightly lesser rank than the seraphim. They are the guardians of the throne of God. (Ps.99:1) They already appear in Genesis. After the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden God placed on its east side a cherubim with "a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life." (Gen. 3:24) The cherubim had to protect man, the sinner, against himself. At the gate of paradise they represent God's law, which Adam and Eve had disobeyed. In Exodus two cherubims of hammered gold had to be put on the ark of the covenant (25:18f. ) In 1 King 6 and 2 Chronicles 3, in the accounts of the building of the temple, the cherubim were carved on the walls. Solomon also ordered a pair of sculptured cherubim for the Most Holy Place. The cherubim in the tabernacle and temple symbolize God's presence (Ps. 80:1) In the tabernacle and temple they reveal the mystery and wonder of God's mercy; the Holy God and sinful man are reconciled through the atoning sacrifices offered, foreshadowing the perfect sacrifice of God's own Son. Tabernacle and Temple are the meeting places of God and the forgiven sinner.

Michael and Gabriel are the chiefs of the angels. Both are the highest emissaries of God. Their appearances and actions show how frequently heaven interacted with earth. Michael, whose name means "who is like the Lord" is described as "one of the chief princes", "the great prince who has charge of your people, and more briefly "your prince" (Dan.10:13;10:21;12:1) Michael is therefore regarded as the patron-angel of the Jews. The book of Daniel portrays a vivid picture of the war being waged between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world, not only on earth but also in the spiritual world (cf. Eph.6:12). Jude 9 records Micheal's mysterious struggle with the devil, the prince of darkness. Michael is the mighty one who fights for God's people. He rides out with the might of the Lord of host to crush Satan. Revelation 12:7ff describe how Michael and his angels overcame the devil and his demonic hosts and chased them out of heaven. Michael prevails in the battle. What an encouragement for God's people! Evil does not have the final word. The ultimate victory belongs to the Lord! Gabriel means "God's hero" or "mighty one" or "God is great." Dr. Abraham Kuyper believes that he is one of the seven angels in Revelation 8:2, who stand before God, and who were given seven trumpets. Although the Bible does not call Gabriel an archangel he is considered as one because of his importance in God's work of redemption. He is referred to more frequently than Michael. We read in Daniel 8:16 that Daniel heard a human voice call out, "Gabriel tell the man the meaning of the vision". And in Daniel 9:21 we are told that Gabriel came to Daniel while he was still in prayer. And Gabriel had lengthy conversations with the prophet, while his messages to Zechariah and the virgin Mary were brief.

## **The Angel of the Lord.**

### **Number Seven**

After His resurrection the Lord appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus. They did not recognize Him and wondered about the events which had taken place in Jerusalem. And to enlighten them Jesus explained "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets. . . what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27) He traced through Scripture the promises of His coming and the events prophesied and fulfilled in Him. He showed that already in Old Testament times "He came to that which was His own." (John 1:11) He frequently appeared as the Angel of the Lord, the sent one by the Father. He came to Israel and protected Israel's future so that in the fullness of time He could come to this earth in the flesh to become Saviour of the world. He loved His people and was gracious to them: the people of whom Isaiah would say, "In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed." (63:9)

The most frequently mentioned angel in the Old Testament is the Angel of the Lord. Long ago the conviction arose that the Angel of the Lord is none other than the Eternal Word which the apostle John proclaims in his Gospel. The Angel of the Lord is the prefiguration of the Son of God, a temporary preincarnation of the second person of the Trinity. Some call him the Incarnation Angel because of His unique relation to Jesus Christ: a special messenger of God unlike all the other angels. The Angel of the Lord uses the "I am" formula Jesus used. He says to Hagar "I will so increase your descendants. . . "(Gen. 16:10).

In Genesis 22:16 He says, "I swear by myself." When the Angel of the Lord encountered Moses, the place of His appearance was recognized as "holy ground". And He acts and speaks in the same way as God Himself acts and speaks and is even identified with God. In Exodus 3:6 this identification with God is abundantly evident, "I am the God of your father. . . ". In Exodus 23:20ff. God promised to send an angel before His people to lead them to the promised-land; they are commanded to obey him and not to rebel against him, "for he will forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him." Thus the Angel of the Lord can forgive sin, which God only can do, because God's character, attributes, and His authority are in the angel. After Manoah had seen the Angel of the Lord he said to his wife "We are doomed to die! We have seen God!" (Judges 13:22). All these Biblical examples show that a clear distinction is made between an ordinary angel and the Angel of the Lord.

The appearances of the Angel of the Lord foreshadow the coming of the Lord in the flesh. They ring in the Advent. The bridegroom could not wait

to come in the flesh. His heart, filled with love, went out to His bride.  
Before He took upon Himself flesh and blood He appeared. Before He  
dwelt among us He was seen many times. Before His birth in Bethlehem,  
He became an angel to announce to us, " See I am coming to you!"

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