

### Ambiguous and Unambiguous Verses

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## ANGELS

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions; ii. Creed; iii. Attributes of the Angels; iv. Their Functions; v. Their Dislikes; vi. Their Perfection and the Superiority of the Prophets; vii. The Most Prominent Angels; viii. The Prophet's Relationship with the Angels; ix. The Question of Fallen Angels x. Jāhiliyyan and Judeo-Christian Angelology; xi. Heterodox Interpretations; xii. Bibliography.

### Definitions

*Malak*, the Qur'ānic word for “angel” (used both for the individual and the collective), plural *malā'ik(a)*, is a hamza-suppressed derivation of *mal'ak*, itself a hamza-lām substitute form of *ma'lak*, the *maf'al* form of the root verb *ā-l-k*, literally “to chew” (aorist *yalūku*, infinitive nouns *alk* and *ulūk*), the nouns *alūk(a)* and *ma'lūk(a)* signifying “message,” which indicates the aural nature of messengership and, as for *rasūl*, “messenger,” and *nabī* in the sense of “bringer of news,” presupposes the existence of a tremendous unseen but communicative sender (Farāhīdī, *sub m-l-k*; Ibn Manzūr, *sub ā-l-k*; Bayḍawī, *sub Q 2:30*).

Angels are explicitly mentioned 88 times in the Qur'ān, 73 of which in the (mostly definite) plural form (*malā'ika*), 13 times in the singular, and twice in the dual—besides other-named mentions such as:

- *al-ālīn*, the supernal ones (Q 38:75);
- *ḍayf Ibrāhīm*, Ibrāhīm's guests (Q 15:51; 41:24), the three archangels Jibrīl, Mikā'il, and Isrāfil, or a group of ten or more including them (Qurṭubī, *sub Q 51:24*; Jalālayn, *sub Q 15:51*);
- *ḥāfiz*, *ḥafāza*, guardian(s) (Q 86:4; 6:61);
- *jund* and *junūd*, combatants (Q 9:26, 40; 33:9; 36:28; 48:4, 7; 74:31);
- *kirāmin barara*, noble righteous ones (Q 80:16); *kirāman kātibīn*, noble scribes (Q 82:11);

- *al-mala' al-a'lā*, the Highest Assembly (Q 37:8, 38:69);
- *mu'aqqibāt*, shifts succeeding one another in their attendance of each human being (Q 13:11);
- *al-musabbihūn*, the lauders (Q 37:167);
- *al-Rūḥ*, the Spirit (see section viii below);
- *raqībun 'alīd*, Ready Observer (Q 50:18);
- *rusulunā*, Our (i.e., Allah's) messengers (Q 6:61, 7:37, 10:21, 11:69, 11:77, 29:31-33);
- *safara*, scribes (Q 80:15);
- *al-ṣāffīn*, those who stand in ranks for prayer in a lofty self-description spoken by the angels: *And there is none of us but has his known station, and, lo! we are they that stand in ranks, and, lo! we are they that glorify* (Q 37:164-166, cf. Q 89:22);
- *al-sakīna*, tranquility (Q 2:248; 9:26, 40; 48:26) as made explicit in the hadiths from al-Bukhārī and Muslim cited by al-Qurṭubī (*sub Q 2:248*);
- *al-zabāniya*, those that push, that is, the angels of punishment (Q 96:18)
- and, according to the Jalālayn, the list of action-specific names opening Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt:

*By those that pluck out vehemently (al-nāzi'āti gharqan)! and those that draw out violently (al-nāshī'āti nashṭan)! and those that swim serenely (al-sābiḥāti sabḥan)! and by those that outstrip suddenly (al-sābiqāti sabqan)! and by those that implement commands (al-mudabbirāti amran)!*

Q 79:1-5

They are also known as *ahl al-samā'* or the Dwellers of Heaven (in Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, Aḥmad, Mālik; and Dārimī, *Sunan*), and their elite are known as *al-mala' al-a'lā* as already mentioned, *al-rafiq al-a'lā* or the Highest Company (Bukhārī, Maghāzī, maraḍ al-Nabī wa-wafātuh; Muslim, Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba, faḍl 'Ā'isha), and *al-nadiyyu al-a'lā* or the Highest Council (Abū Dāwūd, Adab, mā yuqālu 'inda al-nawm).

Angels—upon them peace—are magnificent supernal creatures that implement the Divine will, “spirits subsisting in subtle bodies of light, able to take on various forms by Divine permission, and not to be described as male or female,” as defined by the late *ḥāfiz* of Aleppo 'Abd Allah b. Muḥammad Najīb Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī (1343-1422/1924-2002) in his treatise *al-Īmān bil-malā'ika* (, p. 19), which he appears to have based and built upon the same-titled work of another Aleppian scholar, Aḥmad 'Izz al-Dīn al-Bayānūnī (1913-1975), who gave