

This page left intentionally blank

*Angels in the Qur'ān: An Examination of Their Portrayal in the Light of  
Late Antique, Jewish and Christian Beliefs about Heavenly Beings*

Rachel Claire Dryden  
Lucy Cavendish College

November 2021

This Thesis is Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

*This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.*

Rachel Claire Dryden

*Angels in the Qur'ān: An Examination of Their Portrayal in the Light of Late Antique, Jewish and Christian Beliefs about Heavenly Beings*

## Abstract

This thesis aims to outline how angels are portrayed in the Qur'ān, and to examine the extent to which their portrayal remains the same as, or differs from, late antique, Jewish and Christian beliefs about them. The central role angels appear to play in the Qur'ān suggests their presence there is neither incidental, nor accidental. Although angels are undoubtedly pre-qur'ānic figures, their portrayal in the Qur'ān does not suggest the unconscious borrowing of established models of such heavenly beings. Having undergone a significant amount of development prior to the Qur'ān's reinterpretation of them, they continued to develop further within that text. The qur'ānic portrayal of angels thus reflects beliefs about them leading up to the qur'ānic period, as well as continuing discussions about their natures and roles throughout it. Later Islamic beliefs about angels, such as the interpretation of the *rūḥ*, "spirit," in Q *al-Shu'arā* 26:193, as the angel *Jibrīl* (Gabriel), who brought the revelation of the Qur'ān (on the basis of Q *al-Baqara* 2:97), have, until now, remained largely unquestioned by scholars. As a consequence, post-qur'ānic exegesis is often still the background against which the qur'ānic data on angels continues to be read, to a certain extent obscuring what the text itself has to say about them.

By examining the terms the Qur'ān uses to refer to angels, the activities with which they are most frequently associated, and the details of the roles they play, this thesis examines the qur'ānic data both on its own merit, as well as in its broader late antique context. Further analysis of qur'ānic narratives in which angels feature, as well as other figures intimately connected to them, such as *shayāṭīn*, "devils," *jinn*, and the *rūḥ al-quḍus*, "Holy Spirit," establishes their place within the qur'ānic worldview more clearly.

This approach allows, not only for a reevaluation of how the qur'ānic *Urgemeinde* understood angels, but also how this understanding related to wider debates concerning them,

and thus how the Qur'ān interacted with other confessional groups, who may have interpreted monotheism, and thus the nature of various intermediary beings, in different ways. It therefore contributes to a view of the Qur'ān as an active participant in religious dialogues, rather than merely as a passive receptacle, and thus as constituting a valuable source for understanding late antiquity more generally.

## **Preface**

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except my MPhil dissertation (Oxon, 2016), on which this thesis expands.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Faculty of Divinity Degree Committee.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank my supervisors and all those who have taught me over the years.

The librarians at the Faculty of Divinity Library, Cambridge, for always going above and beyond the call of duty.

My parents, for their unwavering support and encouragement on what has ended up being a rather longer journey than anticipated—we got there in the end.

## Contents

1	Introduction .....	2
1.1	Scope and Purpose .....	2
1.2	Aims and Objectives .....	6
1.3	Methodology .....	6
1.4	Historical Background .....	9
1.5	Angels in the Hebrew Bible and Early Jewish Literature .....	11
1.6	Angels in the New Testament .....	20
1.7	Angels in Late Antiquity .....	25
1.8	Structure .....	30
2	Angels in the Qur'ān: Comparative Analysis of Terminology .....	32
2.1	Analysis and Discussion of the Terms <i>malak</i> , "Angel," and <i>malā'ika</i> , "Angels" .....	32
2.2	Other Nominal Terms for Angels .....	40
2.2.1	<i>ḡayf</i> , "Guests" .....	43
2.2.2	<i>rasūl/rusul</i> ; <i>mursal(ūn)</i> , "Messenger(s)" .....	44
2.2.3	<i>qawm munkarūn</i> , "A Strange, Odd, or Foreign People" .....	46
2.2.4	<i>jund min al-samā'</i> / <i>junūd al-samāwāt/junūd rabbika</i> , "Host(s)/Force(s)" .....	49
2.2.5	<i>rūḥ</i> "Spirit" .....	52
2.2.6	<i>bashar</i> , "Humans" .....	54
2.2.7	<i>ḡafizūn</i> , "Guardians" .....	56
2.2.8	Summary .....	57
3	Verbal Roots Designating Angelic Beings .....	65
3.1.1	Descending/Being Sent: <i>n-z-l</i> .....	72
3.1.2	Being Sent: <i>r-s-l</i> .....	76
3.1.3	Talking/Speaking: <i>q-w-l</i> .....	81
3.1.4	Prostrating/Worshipping/Praising/Serving: <i>s-j-d</i> , <i>s-b-ḡ</i> , 'b-d .....	83
3.1.5	Conclusion .....	88
4	Angelic Roles in the Qur'ān .....	90
4.1.1	Angels as Celestial Beings: The Heavenly Host .....	92
4.1.2	Angels as God's Servants .....	96

4.1.3	Angels as Messengers .....	99
4.1.4	Angels as Soldiers.....	106
4.1.5	Angels as Advocates/Intercessors between Man and God .....	111
4.1.6	Guardian Angels.....	117
4.1.7	Angelic Guardians of Heaven and Hell.....	120
4.1.8	Angels as Eschatological Actors .....	124
4.1.9	Angels as Witnesses.....	127
4.1.10	Angels as Teachers.....	131
4.1.11	Summary .....	134
5	Other Aspects of Angels .....	137
5.1.1	Angels and the <i>rūḥ</i> , “Spirit” .....	137
5.1.2	Angels and Devils .....	144
5.1.3	Angels and <i>jinn</i> .....	150
5.1.4	“Fallen” Angels: <i>Iblīs</i> .....	155
5.1.5	Angels as <i>khulafāʾ</i> .....	161
5.1.6	Angels as Objects of Veneration .....	165
5.1.7	Summary .....	172
6	Narratives Involving Angels in the Qurʾān .....	174
6.1	The Three Visitors to Abraham and Lot .....	175
6.2	The Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary .....	189
7	Named Angels in the Qurʾān.....	200
7.1	Gabriel/ <i>Jibrīl</i> and Michael/ <i>Mīkāīl</i> .....	200
7.2	<i>Hārūt</i> and <i>Mārūt</i> .....	205
8	Conclusion .....	215
9	Bibliography.....	226
10	Appendix.....	243
	Table A2.26 References to Angels in the Qurʾān .....	243
	Graph A3.1: Nominal versus Verbal Occurrences of the Root <i>r-s-l</i> .....	244
	Graph A3.2: The Sending of <i>āyāt</i> , throughout the Qurʾānic Corpus .....	245
	Graph A3.3: The Sending of <i>kutub</i> , throughout the Qurʾānic Corpus .....	246
	Graph A3.4: The Sending of <i>tanzīl</i> throughout the Qurʾānic Corpus.....	247
	Table A5.1: <i>Iblīs</i> ’ Refusal to Bow to Adam in the Qurʾān.....	248



Table A5.2 Structure of the Retellings of <i>Iblis</i> ' Refusal to Prostrate in the Qur'ān .....	251
---	-----

## Referencing and Abbreviations

The referencing system employed is the Chicago Turabian Full-Note Bibliography System. The style is that of the *Society of Biblical Literature—Handbook of Style* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). For the extrabiblical, i.e., non-canonical, texts not cited here, other widely accepted abbreviations are employed; where none could be found, these aim to follow the principles laid out in the *SBL Handbook of Style* as closely as possible.

## Presentation of the Statistical Data

In most cases, percentages and numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number for ease of reference.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Scope and Purpose

Given the importance of, and fascination with angels in post-qur'ānic thought, it is perhaps surprising to discover that there are only three passages in the Qur'ān which underline the importance of belief in angels, to the extent of making it a characteristic, if not a prerequisite for acceptance into the community of believers: Q 2:177, 285, and Q *al-Nisā'* 4:136. That failure to acknowledge the importance of angels should be associated with disbelief is perhaps not surprising. And yet, the existence of other celestial beings could be perceived as sitting uncomfortably with Islam's uncompromising monotheism, making it all the stranger that the Qur'ān makes belief in angels a "*sine qua non* of righteousness."<sup>1</sup> In fact, after denying God, rejection of his angels is given as an example of those who have gone far astray (Q 4:136). In the three creedal statements present in the Qur'ān, in which angels are mentioned, they come either second or third, only to belief in God, and always take precedence over scripture, and messengers/prophets.<sup>2</sup> This all points not just to the high esteem in which the qur'ānic *Urgemeinde* must have held angels, but suggests that belief in them was one of the things that marked them out from other confessional groups in the qur'ānic milieu. The Medinan dating of these statements suggests the crystallisation of such beliefs, and a need to define them, by this later stage in the development of a distinct qur'ānic community. Thus, certainly by the Medinan period, angels appear to be key figures in the qur'ānic world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'Angels', in *EI*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Brill Online, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> In contrast, angels appear last (after God, and Jesus Christ), in the only parallel from the Bible (1 Tim 5:21), which takes the form of an oath "διαμαρτυρομαι ενωπιον του θεου και κυριου ιησου χριστου και των εκλεκτων αγγελων" ("in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels," Orthodox Patriarchal Edition). Although it does not go as far as Q 2:177, 285, and Q 4:136, in making belief in angels a requirement of believers, and only refers to εκλεκτων, "chosen/elect," angels, suggesting there could be other groups of angels not mentioned here, it still "attests to great respect for angels on the part of some," Oda Wischmeyer, 'Angels: III New Testament', in *Religion Past and Present—Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

That the Qur'ānic audience was au fait with the concept of an angel can be inferred from the fact that no attempt is made to explain what they are. This is despite the fact that the Qur'ān, like the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, does not recount their creation or origins. Given the root meaning behind *m-l-k*, “to send,” the Arabic words *malak/malā'ika*, “angel(s),” perhaps ought to be synonymous with (a) messenger(s).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this is how al-Ṭabarī understands them, as those who are sent (by God).<sup>4</sup> However, scholars such as Stephen Burge have persuasively argued that in the Qur'ān, a *malak* was a “purely celestial being, [albeit] occasionally entrusted with delivering messages from God to His creations.”<sup>5</sup> This would mean that, at some point, possibly before the advent of the Qur'ān, the root *m-l-k* had become divorced from its original common Semitic meaning of “to send.”<sup>6</sup> The Qur'ān's use of *rasūl* to refer to an angel in the Meccan period but not the Medinan, further shows that, at least initially, a messenger function was not sufficiently intrinsic to the term *malak*, that it could be used to refer to angels acting as messengers without some further qualification or explanation. Patricia Crone interpreted the use of *rusul* in the Meccan periods to refer to an angel, simply as a translation of Hebrew *mal'ākh*/Greek ἄγγελος, concluding that it originally referred to both “an angel and a messenger of the mundane kind,”<sup>7</sup> except, perhaps in a

---

<sup>3</sup> Stephen R. Burge, ‘The Angels in *sūrat al-malā'ika*: Exegeses of Q. 35:1’, *JQS* 10, no. 1 (2008): 52. In fact, the Hebrew Bible rarely uses the term *malak* to refer to an angel without a messenger function, Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 40.

<sup>4</sup> He explains the basic meaning of *mal'ak* as “message,” from either the *maf'al* form of the verb *la'aka* “to send a message,” or the *maf'ul* form of *alaka*, “to send a messenger.” Angels are therefore called *malā'ika*, “those who are sent,” because they are God's messengers, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad B. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad B. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Wilfred Madelung and Alan Jones, trans. J. Cooper, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 207.

<sup>5</sup> Burge, ‘The Angels in *sūrat al-malā'ika*’, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Bowersock locates this disassociation at some indeterminate time in the distant past, in the same way that the original meaning behind ἄγγελος has been lost in modern Greek, Glenn W. Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens de l'antiquité tardive’, *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 24 (2013): 102.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Crone, ‘Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qur'ānic Pagans’, in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, ed. Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas, 146 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 322.

religious context, when it always implied an angelic one.<sup>8</sup> Following this however, the shift from angels sometimes being described as *rusul* in the Meccan periods, to never being described as such in the Medinan, is perhaps best explained if the term *malak* had somehow regained its original root meaning of “one who is sent,” in the Medinan period, rendering a translation obsolete. It is possible that Meccan references to angels as *rusul* continued to serve as sufficient reminders and evidence of their messenger function in Medina, which could explain why this term is not used in Medinan material.<sup>9</sup> However, this raises the question, why angels would be described as *malā’ika*, in connection with a messenger function, in the Meccan period. If the root *m-l-k* only came to imply such a function in the Medinan period, a Meccan audience could not be expected to infer this meaning from the term(s) *malak/malā’ika* alone. Burge’s conclusion is thus both plausible, and has the merit of explaining the discrepancy between angels acting as messengers, but not being defined by this role.

Despite the central role clearly played by angels in the Qur’ān and Islam, as noted by both Burge and Samuel Zwemer,<sup>10</sup> there still “remains a large gap in the scholarly literature on the role of angels in Islam,”<sup>11</sup> in general, and little research exists in which they are the main focus.<sup>12</sup> Apart from Burge’s monograph, which limits its focus to angels in the *ḥadīth*, surveys of angels in the Qur’ān and Islam<sup>13</sup> tend to stem from the period Nicolai Sinai has termed “traditional (i.e. pre-Wansbroughian) Orientalist scholarship.”<sup>14</sup> Contemporary research

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bowersock’s refutation of Crone’s argument, Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 92.

<sup>9</sup> I owe this last comment to a suggestion by Professor Nicolai Sinai.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Zwemer, ‘The Worship of Adam by Angels (with Reference to Hebrew 1:6)’, *Muslim World* 27, no. 2 (April 1937): 115–27.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3, one of very few modern studies of Islamic angels.

<sup>12</sup> Burge, 3.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Walther Eickmann. *Die Angelologie und Dämonologie des Korans im Vergleich zu der Engel- und Geisterlehre der Heiligen Schrift* (Leipzig: Paul Eger, 1908); Paul Eichler. *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran* (n.p., 1928); Zwemer, “The Worship of Adam by Angels.”

<sup>14</sup> Nicolai Sinai, ‘The Qur’ān as Process’, in *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 430.

extends to only a few chapters and articles limited by their scope and length, rather than content or approach.<sup>15</sup> The works of Patricia Crone and Gerald Hawting, in particular, provide firm starting points for such research. Generally speaking, when angels have been studied at all, it has usually been as part of some other event, such as the angels' prostration to Adam, Muhammad's heavenly ascent, or in the context of eschatology.<sup>16</sup> There is no real reason why this should be the case, except perhaps, that angels have simply not been considered interesting enough to merit further attention,<sup>17</sup> a view that has not been limited to Islamic or Qur'ānic studies.<sup>18</sup> Of course, the fact that post-Wansbroughian, Western, academic study of

---

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Leigh N. B. Chipman, 'Adam and the Angels: An Examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources', *Arabica* 49, no. 4 (2002): 429–55; Husain Kassim, 'Nothing Can Be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels: Angels and Angelology in Islam and Islamic Literature', in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings—Origins, Development and Reception*, ed. Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, and Karin Schöpflin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 645–62; Patricia Crone, 'Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God', 315–36; Gerald R. Hawting, 'Has God Sent a Mortal as a Messenger? Messengers and Angels in the Qur'an', in *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2012), 372–89; José Martínez, 'Muhammad y el monacato sirio', *Gerión* 30 (2012): 293–342; Glenn W. Bowersock, 'Les anges païens: 91–104; Aziz Al-Azmeh, 'Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings', in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels: Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, and Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2019), 135–52.

<sup>16</sup> Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Burge, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth-Century Syria* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), xi. The general lack of serious studies on angels in Judaism and Christianity has been noted by Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1; Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1. Muehlberger further points out that prior to her monograph, there had not been a publication on angels in late antique Christianity since Jean Daniélou's *Les anges et leur mission, d'après les pères de l'église* (Paris: Chevetogne 1953), Muehlberger, 6. Michael Mach, *(Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 4, 6), notes several key lacunae in research on Jewish angels: an obsession with the canon, at the expense of later extrabiblical material, which is generally ignored; an exclusive focus on the term *mal'āk*, "angel"; and a lack of comprehensive research on angels in the LXX, including the so-called apocryphal texts, and Hellenistic Jewish writings.

the Qur'ān, independent of Islamic tradition, is still very much in its infancy, means that such a situation is not uncommon.

## 1.2 Aims and Objectives

The noted lack of research on angels in the Qur'ān and Islam undoubtedly constitutes a significant gap in the field of modern, Western, academic research on the Qur'ān. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to address this lacuna by analysing firstly, how the Qur'ān portrays angels, and how this portrayal changes throughout the qur'ānic corpus. Secondly, it will examine how this portrayal relates to the evidence of Jewish and Christian beliefs about angels in late antiquity. It will additionally contribute to efforts to read the Qur'ān in this broader late antique context, rather than in isolation from other monotheistic traditions, as has historically tended to be the case. In other words, while the only monograph dedicated to angels in Islam, Burge's *Angels in Islam*, focuses on the post-qur'ānic development of beliefs about angels, beginning in the medieval period,<sup>19</sup> this project will trace the development of these ideas at the other end of the spectrum, in the pre-qur'ānic, and qur'ānic periods.

## 1.3 Methodology

As noted, this thesis aims to examine the qur'ānic data on angels on its own merit. Post-qur'ānic, Islamic material, such as *ḥadīth* (traditions, or sayings), *tafsīr* (exegesis), etc., are undoubtedly of value for reconstructing the development of early Islamic thought and practice, but they are also clearly products of the later environments in which they were composed. They cannot, therefore, be read as if they were produced in a vacuum, untainted by outside influences. They are, and remain secondary sources for studying the Qur'ān, despite Reynolds' recent lament that "Qur'ānic studies and *tafsīr* studies have gotten all mixed up."<sup>20</sup> This thesis is concerned with the qur'ānic portrayal of angels, not with how the Qur'ān's first audience may

---

<sup>19</sup> Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 5, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'Introduction: Qur'ānic Studies and Its Controversies', in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 17.

have understood, and then further developed that portrayal, however difficult it may sometimes be to distinguish between the two. Despite the fact that such later sources are undoubtedly of value as secondary sources, it will therefore follow Crone's principle of separating primary from secondary sources, even if this has been "so consistently violated for so long in the case of the Qur'ān and the tradition,"<sup>21</sup> and "start by understanding the Qur'ān on the basis of the information supplied by the book itself, as opposed to that of later readers."<sup>22</sup> The limits of any research project also mean that boundaries have to be set; in the same way that Burge states his intention to focus on angels in the *ḥadīth*,<sup>23</sup> this thesis focuses predominantly on material that does not post-date the Qur'ān, with the proviso that many Jewish and Christian traditions are almost certainly older than the manuscripts in which they have been preserved. Thus, for example, the entire Enochic tradition is considered, even though 3 Enoch does not definitively pre-date the Qur'ān, the given date range for its composition and redaction of 450–850 CE means it may be contemporary with it.<sup>24</sup> It also clearly draws on an older Enochic tradition that was known to the Qur'ān, and can, at times, shed light on the development and diffusion of this tradition, within its broader late antique (and maybe qur'ānic), context. Post-qur'ānic, Islamic, exegetical material will be referred to where it helps to explain the possible meanings of particular verses or concepts.

A further point that should be clarified concerns qur'ānic chronology and the use of Nöldeke's tripartite Meccan, and single Medinan period(s). Some scholars are not only sceptical of a chronological re-ordering of the Qur'ān, but completely opposed to it in principle. This is largely because they consider Weil, Nöldeke, and others, to have relied too heavily on the *ṣīrah*, or traditional biography of the life of the Prophet, to provide a chronological framework for arranging the *sūrah*s.<sup>25</sup> Although now more than 150 years old, the basis of the scheme proposed by Gustav Weil, and further developed by Theodor Nöldeke, has been shown by

---

<sup>21</sup> Patricia Crone, 'The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities', *Arabica* 57, no. 2 (2010): 153.

<sup>22</sup> Crone, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> On this see, Philip S. Alexander, 'The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch', *JJS* 28 (1977): 156–80.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'Le problème de la chronologie du coran', *Arabica* 58, no. 6 (2011): 477, 486, 487.



Nicolai Sinai to be a sound, if not perfect, method of dating qur'ānic material.<sup>26</sup> Sinai has defended the so-called Nöldekan chronology against both accusations of circularity, and of uncritically reproducing traditional Islamic historiography.<sup>27</sup> More recently, however, he has voiced doubts about the underlying presumption that qur'ānic *sūrahs* became less poetic and more prosaic over time,<sup>28</sup> and instead proposes ordering them on the basis of increasing mean verse length.<sup>29</sup> The results of this point to a gradual chronological development in style, which is both consistent with Weil and Nöldeke's assumptions, and supported by further stylistic similarities.<sup>30</sup> Although Sinai is critical of Weil and Nöldeke's methodology (or lack of it), on the basis of quantitative analysis, he thus reaches similar conclusions that "the Qur'anic texts can be read as a linear sequence of consecutive proclamations, and that the traditional distinction between a Meccan and a Medinan stage of the Qur'anic proclamations is tenable."<sup>31</sup> However, Sinai himself suggests that the robustness of his approach should be tested by calculating the mean verse length for other systems of verse division besides the *Kūfan* one. He also concludes it is almost certainly the case, that many more *sūrahs* contain insertions that stem from other periods, than those he identifies, which effectively give false mean verse lengths for the *sūrahs* in which they appear.<sup>32</sup> He therefore cautions against reading mean verse length as a rigid indication of chronology.<sup>33</sup> Sinai does not, therefore, present his chronology as an absolute alternative to the Weil-Nöldekan one, or suggest that the latter should be done away with

---

<sup>26</sup> Sinai, 'The Qur'ān as Process', 407, 412, 417.

<sup>27</sup> Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an—A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 132-33.

<sup>29</sup> Sinai, 139.

<sup>30</sup> Sinai, 139–42.

<sup>31</sup> Sinai, 151.

<sup>32</sup> Sinai, 133–34.

<sup>33</sup> Sinai, 143.

completely.<sup>34</sup> Rather, his methodology lays out principles upon which a new understanding of the Qur'ān's chronology could (and perhaps, should), be based. The Weil-Nöldekan scheme is therefore far from obsolete, and, still remains the most widely recognised, accepted, and understood one. It provides a common reference point for scholars of the Qur'ān, even if they are in disagreement with it (or each other). All references to "(qur'ānic) period," "First Meccan," "Early Meccan," "M1, M2," "Meccan I" etc., thus refer to Nöldeke's divisions. This by no means indicates this author's complete agreement with Nöldeke's classification of individual *sūrahs* and should thus be taken as a guide, rather than as absolute labels.

## 1.4 Historical Background

Qur'ānic concepts of angels undoubtedly drew on existing late antique monotheist ideas concerning divine messengers, and heavenly beings, but, as Burge has cautioned, their origins and development are "more complex than some scholars have believed in the past."<sup>35</sup> This is partly because, as noted, most of the extant research on angels in the Qur'ān and early Islam, pre-dates relatively recent discoveries and theories regarding the composition and dating of the qur'ānic text. Recent analysis of Qur'ān fragments constituting a text-type that differs from the so-called 'Uthmānic recension suggest that the consonantal text of the Qur'ān was in fact largely fixed by the mid-seventh century CE.<sup>36</sup> The result of this is that such authors were not privy to these ideas, and generally still inclined to view the Qur'ān as little more than biblical

---

<sup>34</sup> Nor does Sinai indicate exactly when, according to his chronological method, the different stages or periods of the text's stylistic development would begin and end.

<sup>35</sup> Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, 'San'a' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'an', *Der Islam* 87, no. 1/2 (2012): 18.

plagiarism.<sup>37</sup> The way in which the Qur'ān “recasts,” older themes and narratives, is, however, now appreciated as an important technique, which it employs to communicate its message in a manner that its audience would have understood and found relatable.<sup>38</sup> The premodern, Western view of the Qur'ān, and/or its author, as confused, mistaken, or simply mendacious, thus no longer stands up on closer inspection.<sup>39</sup>

Such an investigation of how the qur'ānic portrayal of angels relates to late antique Jewish and Christian ideas about them, requires the assimilation of knowledge from a vast body of material spanning several millennia, and encompassing a wide range of languages and traditions. Ancient Near Eastern material is undoubtedly of value to the study of angels because the Hebrew Bible itself reworks material from other ancient Near Eastern traditions—even the rabbis credited the the Babylonians with the practice of naming angels.<sup>40</sup> A systematic survey of such material, would, however, vastly exceed the scope of this thesis, and for this reason is not included as a separate category. This is not to ignore the fact that, thanks to the Bible's use of

---

<sup>37</sup> I refer here to the publications cited in footnote 13, e.g., comments such as “Diese Änderung dürfte Muhammed selbst angebracht haben,” Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, 82; “die Ideen Mohammeds über...,” Eickmann, *Die Angelologie und Dämonologie des Korans*, 1; “Mohammed was confused...,” Zwemer, ‘The Worship of Adam by Angels’, 126. Although they relate to the topic at hand, such comments are typical more generally, of a pre-Wansbroughian approach to the Qur'ān, which viewed it as a deliberate, planned composition, with one distinct author. With the canonical, biblical text seen as the original benchmark for biblical material, the Qur'ān's divergence from this tradition was attributed to either ignorance or arrogance. The extent to which the Qur'ān both interacts with extrabiblical material (much of the most relevant of which was only discovered in the twentieth century in any case), and reinterprets the broader biblical tradition, was poorly understood, and rarely appreciated. On this, see also the thoughts of Gabriel Said Reynolds, ‘The Crisis of Qur'ānic Studies’, in *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, by Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2010), 35.

<sup>38</sup> A view expressed by e.g., Angelika Neuwirth, ‘The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism’, in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx, and Angelika Neuwirth (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 505.

<sup>39</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, ‘Reading the Qur'ān as Homily: The Case of Sarah's Laughter’, in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 586, is another scholar who expresses this sentiment.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., y. Roš Haš. 1:2; Gen. Rab. 48:2.

ancient Near Eastern traditions, they often enjoyed an afterlife that, in some cases, continues to the present. A brief sketch of the development of Jewish and Christian beliefs about angels, will, however, help to establish the historical background against which qur'ānic ideas about angels emerged.

## 1.5 Angels in the Hebrew Bible and Early Jewish Literature

Intermediary beings, whether deities themselves or not, were key figures in the pre-biblical, ancient Near East, principally tasked with transmitting messages between gods, or between gods and human beings.<sup>41</sup> This background could explain why the writers of the Hebrew Bible consistently “assume the existence of beings superior to man in knowledge and power, but subordinate to (and apparently creatures of), the one God.”<sup>42</sup> This is despite the fact that the creation narrative in Genesis omits any mention of the creation of *mal'ākîm*, “angels,”<sup>43</sup> and the

---

<sup>41</sup> Angelika Berlejung, ‘Angels and Angel-Like Beings: Ancient Near East’, in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (De Gruyter Online: de Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Bernard J. Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’, in *EJ*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (USA: Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Jubilees 2:2 and 5:2 assign the creation of the angels to the first day, although this was subsequently reinterpreted in order to avoid the risk of God being seen as requiring assistance in completing the remainder of creation, Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1951), 104. The Talmud and midrash thus usually settle for either the second, or fifth day of creation, e.g., R. Johanan and R. Ḥainina, Gen. Rab. 1:3, Arthur Marmorstein, ‘Angels and Angelology: Fallen Angels’, in *EJ*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2007). Early Islamic tradition places the creation of the angels on Wednesday, followed by the *jinn* on Thursday, and Adam on Friday, al-Ṭabarī reporting the view of al-Rabī' b. Anas, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:209, 220. Eichler notes that according to Q 11:7, God's throne existed before the waters were created, and since the throne is carried by angels they must have been created before God's main six-day long programme of creation. On the basis of Q 41:9-12, however, he concludes that they were in fact created within the six days because these verses detail how the heavens and the earth were completed only in the last two days of creation, the heavens/sky being smoke before this point, Paul Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, 20–21.

term is actually more frequently applied to human messengers.<sup>44</sup> The use of the same term to refer to both heavenly and human messengers has resulted in several passages where it is not immediately clear, which of the two is in fact intended (e.g., Mal 3:1; Eccl 5:6).<sup>45</sup>

The first appearance of an angel in the Hebrew Bible is in Genesis 16:7, in this case, a *mal'āk yhwh*, the/an “angel of the Lord.”<sup>46</sup> The reference to the cherub with the flaming sword being placed at the entrance to the garden in Genesis 3:24 is not included here, since cherubim, seraphim, and orphanim constitute different categories of heavenly beings from *mal'ākîm*, “angels”: they do not function in the same way, play the same roles, nor are they able to move between the heavenly and earthly spheres as *mal'ākîm*, “angels,” frequently, and necessarily, do. Barring the brief references to Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāl*, which, may in themselves point to an understanding of these two (named) angels as archangels (see Section 1.7 and footnotes 152 and 153), or as otherwise somehow superior to (ordinary) *mal'ā'ika*, “angels,” the Qur'ān shows no interest in, or concern to establish an angelic hierarchy, or differentiate between *mal'ā'ika*. The concept of cherubim, or other types of angelic heavenly beings, is therefore absent from the Qur'ān, and the study of them is not relevant to this examination of

---

<sup>44</sup> Donata Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur und ihre theologische Relevanz: am Beispiel von Ezechiel, Sacharja, Daniel und Erstem Henoch* (Aachen: Shaker, 1998), 27; S.A. Meier, ‘Angel I.’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 46. E.g., in 1 Sam 11:3, 4, human messengers are sent to Saul; in 1 Kings 19:2, Jezebel sends a human messenger to Elijah; Haggai calls himself a “*mal'ak 'ēlôhîm*,” (Hag 1:13), not because he claims to be an angel, but “apparently to stress the thought that God’s emissary to man is a prophet, not a supernatural being,” Bamberger, “Angels and Angelology: Bible.” This term is retained in the Syr. translation.

<sup>45</sup> Meier, ‘Angel I.’

<sup>46</sup> For an overview of this figure, and how it differs from plain *mal'ākîm*, see S. A. Meier, ‘Angel of Yahweh’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 53–59.

*malā'ika*.<sup>47</sup> Anonymous, or unnamed *mal'ākîm*, “angels,” first appear in Genesis 19:1, when two of the three *'ānāšîm*, “men,” who had visited Abraham in Genesis 18:2, are suddenly referred to as *mal'ākîm* upon arrival in Sodom. Humans described as *mal'ākîm* do not appear until Genesis 32:3, 6, when Jacob sends messengers to Esau.<sup>48</sup>

The Hebrew Bible contains few references to the character and physical make-up of angels, perhaps because it was thought to be clear what angels looked like, or not considered particularly interesting.<sup>49</sup> From what the text does tell us, we can ascertain that they are stronger and more knowledgeable than men (e.g., 2 Sam 14:20; Ps 103:20). Daniel 10:5–6, describes seeing an angel made of fire and bronze. At this stage in the development of the Jewish canon (mid-second-century BCE), angels are not, however, described as having wings, or

---

<sup>47</sup> Eichler explains references by post-qur'ānic Islamic scholars to a class of angels termed *karūbiyyūn* as evidence of the continuing interaction between the Hebrew Bible and the early Islamic community in the post-qur'ānic period. He further notes that the description of what appear to be angels as *muqarrabūn*, “those who are near,” [God] in Q 4:172, Q 83:21, and Q 3:45, could be a linguistic play on the name “cherubim.” However, he rules this out on the grounds that the term is also applied to humans and so cannot refer to a class of angel, but rather, when it does refer to angels, it refers to those angels, who carry God's throne, Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> An exception to this is the Peshitta (late third-century CE), which refers to the human messengers here (Peshitta, Gen 32:4, 7), in 2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 5, and 16, and 1 Sam 11:4, as *'izgada'*, but follows the Hebrew Bible's use of *mal'ākîm* (Syr. *mala'ka'*), on other occasions: e.g., 1 Kings 19:2; 2 Chr 36:15; Isa 44:26; Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7; Ps 104:4. Similarly, the Gə'əz Bible (fifth to seventh century CE, the edition consulted here was comprised of Dillman's Octateuch (1853–55) and Ludolf's Psalter (1701)), uses *hawārayā(t)*, “messenger(s), envoy(s),” in Gen 32:3, 6 (Gə'əz, Gen 32:4, 7), 2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 5 (there is no noun in verse 16 in the Gə'əz), but *malā'əkt* in Isa 44:26; Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7; Ps 104:4 (Gə'əz, Ps 103:5); and *nabiyāt*, “prophets,” and *lā'əkān*, “messengers,” in 2 Chr. 36:15–16 (Gə'əz, 2 Chr 36:21–22). Note also the New Testament's similar occasional application of ἄγγελος/ἄγγελοι (Syr. *malakā/malākhīa*), to human messengers: Jas 2:25 (Gk); Luke 7:24 (Gk), 9:52 (Gk., Syr.). Curiously, the Coptic (from the third century CE), does not in any of these, but does in the following: Mark 1:2 and Matt 11:10. Horner's 1911 *Coptic Sahidic New Testament* and J. Warren Wells' [A New Edition of the New Testament in Sahidic Coptic](#) (2000–2008) and [The Sahidica Manuscripts](#) (2009), were the versions available at the time of writing. The rabbis differentiated between heavenly messengers (*mal'ākîm*), and human ones (*šəliḥîm*, from the verbal root š-l-ḥ, “to send”), Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 29–30.

flying, except perhaps, in Daniel 9:21.<sup>50</sup> The depiction of *mal'ākîm* is confused however, by the reference in several passages,<sup>51</sup> to the *bēn* (hā)'ēlôhîm/'elyôn/'ēlîm, literally the “sons of gods,” who are also understood to be angelic figures, although scholars remain divided.<sup>52</sup> Different versions of Deuteronomy 32:8 refer to either the *bny 'lôhîm/bny 'lwhym*, the “sons/children of god(s),” (Qumran)<sup>53</sup> the *bānê yisrā'ēl* (MT)/*bnay 'israil/israel* (Peshitta), the “sons/children of Israel,” and the ἄγγέλων Θεοῦ, the “angels of God,” (LXX).<sup>54</sup> It has been suggested that these were originally minor gods, one of whom may have been YHWH himself, and thus represent a vestige of pre-Israelite polytheism.<sup>55</sup> On the basis of Canaanite models, several scholars view the *bny 'lyhm* (MT)/οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ (LXX)/οἱ ἄγγελοι (Cod. Alex.), “sons of God,” in

---

<sup>50</sup> In the ancient Near East, only particular types of angel-like beings, the anthropomorphic minor deities termed “genies,” were conceived of as having wings, so wings, and/or the ability to fly, may only have gradually become attributes associated with angels in general, which would, or could, explain the absence of any reference to this in Daniel, Berlejung, ‘Angels and Angel-Like Beings: Ancient Near East’.

<sup>51</sup> Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; Gen 6:2, 4; Deut 32:8; Ps 29:1, 82:6, 89:7.

<sup>52</sup> M. Delcor, ‘Le mythe de la chute des anges et de l’origine des géants comme explication du mal dans le monde dans l’apocalyptique juive’, *RHR* 190, no. 1 (July) (1976): 5.

<sup>53</sup> DSS 4Q37/4QDt<sup>l</sup>, XII, 14, the only Dead Sea Scroll that could be verified as including Deuteronomy 32:8, despite various references to slight variations in other scrolls, e.g., Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 5; Randall C. Gleason, ‘Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1-2’, *NTS* 49, no. 1 (2003): 99; Michael S. Heiser, ‘Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God’, *BSac* 158 (2001): 52–53; Patrick W. Skehan, ‘A Fragment of the “Song of Moses” (Deut. 32) from Qumran’, *BASOR* 136 (December 1954): 12. Donald W. Parry and Andrew C. Skinner, ‘4Q37’, in *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library Biblical Texts*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Andrew C. Skinner (Brill Online, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> The situation is further confused by the fact that some LXX manuscripts also refer to the ἄγγελοι τοῦ Θεοῦ, “the angels of God,” the υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, or the υἱὼν Θεοῦ, “the sons of God,” Delcor, ‘Le mythe de la chute des anges’, 6; Heiser, ‘Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God.’, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Barker, *The Great Angel*, 6. Barker further distinguishes between the Sons of El Elyon/El/Elohim, who, according to her, are “clearly heavenly beings, and ... those called sons of Yahweh or the Holy One who are human,” Barker, 4. Delcor, however, interprets the LXX translation as a reaction to the originally divine *bēn 'ēlôhîm*, “sons of gods,” with the translator of the LXX at pains to avoid any hint of polytheism, Delcor, ‘Le mythe de la chute des anges,’ 6-7.

Genesis 6:1–4 as members of the divine court, who can thus be understood as angels.<sup>56</sup> Christian Robin draws a parallel between the use of this phrase in Ugaritic (*bn il/ilm*), with that in the Bible, concluding that it was a metaphor that could refer both to minor deities, and all supernatural beings, whose nature placed them between man and God.<sup>57</sup> He further notes, that the use of filial descriptions to describe such relationships was not at all unusual.<sup>58</sup> By the last centuries BCE, however, the “sons/children,” appear to have no longer been considered divine but understood as angels, “a lesser order of heavenly beings at the one God’s beck and call.”<sup>59</sup> This helps explain the LXX’s use of ἄγγελοι in this construct. Second Temple Jewish, and early Christian traditions would greatly expand upon these enigmatic verses and interpret these “sons,” as having fallen into disgrace following their descent to earth, marriage with the daughters of men, and subsequent siring of hybrid giant offspring.<sup>60</sup> Regardless of whether they were originally divine beings or not, there is no doubt that these “sons,” were envisaged as heavenly beings of some kind, who surrounded YHWH, in the same way an army might a king.<sup>61</sup> Rabbinic material would develop this concept of the heavenly court, allowing angels to participate in making decisions God had previously made alone.<sup>62</sup> For example, God is said to have consulted the angels regarding his plan to create man, a project they decried. Even though

---

<sup>56</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 190; Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 29.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the Ugaritic usage and meaning, see also, S. B. Parker, ‘Sons of (the) God(s)’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 794–96.

<sup>58</sup> Christian J. Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels d’apparence humaine dans l’arabie antique’, in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels: Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, and Hans-Peter Pökel, (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2019), 103.

<sup>59</sup> Parker, ‘Sons of (the) God(s)’, 798.

<sup>60</sup> Notably, the Enochic tradition, parts of which are now known to date from the fourth century BCE, but which continued to influence texts and writers for the next millennium. Cf. e.g., Jub. 4:22, 5:1ff; Jude 1:6; Justin Martyr, *2 Apol.* 5

<sup>61</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorsstellung*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 41.



he did not listen to them, and went ahead with the creation, subsequent traditions cite angelic involvement in determining the number of limbs humans were assigned, for example.<sup>63</sup>

Angels clearly had multiple functions in the Hebrew Bible including forming the heavenly host (e.g., Ps 103:20; Isa 6:2–3; Dan 7:10), and as members of a divine council, a concept that was quite common in the ancient Mediterranean,<sup>64</sup> although some believe this idea only became an established part of Jewish belief in the third century CE.<sup>65</sup> A king also requires an army, and the distinctive warlike character of the *mal'ākîm* is clear in references to this heavenly court.<sup>66</sup> They are also tasked with protecting people,<sup>67</sup> as well as acting as God's messengers.<sup>68</sup> That angels were originally primarily messengers, however, can be inferred from the fact that the root “*l'-k*,” has the meaning (in all Semitic languages), “to send,” as well as the designation of human messengers by the same term in the Bible, as mentioned.<sup>69</sup> It was only in postbiblical Hebrew, from the fall of the second temple to around 200 CE, that the Hebrew term *mal'āk* came to refer exclusively to a superhuman messenger.<sup>70</sup>

Many nineteenth and early twentieth-century biblical scholars viewed the postexilic development of a more consistent angelology in the Bible, as being due to the direct influence

---

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Gen. Rab. 12:1, Schäfer, 41.

<sup>64</sup> Aubrey E. Buster, ‘Hosts, Host of Heaven’, in *Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception*, ed. C. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Marmorstein, ‘Fallen Angels’.

<sup>66</sup> E.g., Num 22:23, 31; Josh 5:14–15; 1 Chr 21:16, 27, 30; 2 Chr 32:31.

<sup>67</sup> E.g., Job 33:23–6; Gen 19:9–17, 24:40; Exod 14:9, 23:20, 23, 32:34, 33:2; Num 20:16; Ps 34:7, 91:11; Isa 63:9; Dan 3:28, 6:22, 10:13, 21, 12:1.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., Gen 18:9, 14, 19:2–5; Judg 13:3, 6, 8, 9; 1 Sam 9:8, 10; Dan 10:11; 2 Chr 36:15–16.

<sup>69</sup> E.g., Gen 32:3, 6; 1 Sam 11:3, 4; 1 Kings 19:2; 2 Kings 1:3, 16; Hag 1:3; Mal. 2:7, even though there are no extant examples of the verbal usage in Hebrew, Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 39; Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 121. This has led some scholars to conclude that the noun must therefore be a loanword from another Semitic language, although it could also simply be a “relic of a once more generative root that otherwise disappeared in Hebrew,” which also has the root *š-l-ḥ*, that has the same basic meaning as *l'-k*, at its disposal, Meier, ‘Angel I’. See also the discussion of this in footnote 49.

<sup>70</sup> Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

of Babylonian religion.<sup>71</sup> Some influence is clear, but this view is somewhat simplistic, and no longer given serious consideration by scholars.<sup>72</sup> Angels feature in the pre-exilic books of the Hebrew Bible, although the Jerusalem Talmud attributes the naming and development of angelic hierarchies to exilic influence.<sup>73</sup> Despite this, the prophetic books (750–450 BCE) are generally conspicuous by their distinct lack of interest in, or concern with angels.<sup>74</sup> The Book of Job (sixth–fourth centuries BCE), demonstrates a new perspective, with angels now described as *qedošim*, “holy ones,” a substantive that is almost exclusively used to refer to heavenly beings in the Bible.<sup>75</sup> These can be inferred as acting as intercessors (Job 5.1; 33:23; cf. Dan 4:13), but preexilic prophecy (722–586 BCE), contains just two references: Hosea’s description of the man who wrestled Jacob as an angel (Hos 12:4),<sup>76</sup> and Isaiah’s first vision of winged seraphim, which, even if they are not the same as *mal’ākîm*, as discussed, at least hints at the existence of heavenly beings like them (Isa 6:2, 6).<sup>77</sup>

Exilic references to angels include theophanies (Ezek 1:8–11); descriptions of their eschatological functions (Ezek 9:1ff; 10:1ff), and the first appearance of an angelic teacher-guide (Ezek 40–48). This figure, who would come to epitomise postexilic Jewish texts,<sup>78</sup> reappears in Zechariah, where he explains the meaning of various symbolic dreamlike visions.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> E.g., Alexander Kohut, *Ueber die jüdische Angelologie und Daemonologie in ihrer Abhängigkeit vom Parsismus* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866), takes such an approach.

<sup>72</sup> Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> R. M. M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in Their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 14, e.g., y Roš Haš. 1:2, 56d; Gen. Rab. 48:2, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

<sup>75</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 145.

<sup>76</sup> Given that Eusebius (260/5–339 CE) records Demetrius (d. 232 CE) as referring to Jacob wrestling with an ἄγγελον τοῦ Θεοῦ, “an angel of God,” (*Praep. Ev.* 9.21.1–19), the identification of Jacob’s opponent as an angel, despite being described as a “man,” would appear to be quite ancient, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 52.

<sup>77</sup> Although Isaiah 63:9 mentions an angel, it probably correctly reads as per the LXX “No messenger or angel; it was his presence that saved them.” As such this is figurative, and does not describe the appearance of an actual angel, Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

<sup>78</sup> I.e., from 538 BCE onwards. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., Zech 1:9, 14; 2:1–7; 3;1; 4:1–5; 5:5–10; 6:4–5.

The *mal'āk yhw*, “angel of the Lord,” also makes several appearances here (Zech 1:12–13; 3:1ff), although it is not clear that he is a manifestation of God. We cannot therefore, really speak of angelology in either exilic or postexilic scripture, and it is only in Daniel, which presents many new features in relation to angels—namely that prophets either receive prophecies directly from an angel, or that an angel is required to interpret revelations (e.g., Dan 7:1–10:5)—that a distinct change can be said to begin.<sup>80</sup> Although this shift to indirect revelation begins in Zechariah, in Daniel revelation is transmitted exclusively through an angelic intermediary.<sup>81</sup>

The postexilic period saw a noticeable increase in both references to, and in the remit of angels and—despite its clear contradiction to the biblical account—by the Second Temple period, angels were understood as having participated in the giving of the Law at Sinai.<sup>82</sup> In the LXX of Deuteronomy 33:2, angels are explicitly described as accompanying God on his descent to Sinai. This is not a one-off (mis)reading: in their role as messengers, the presence and participation of angels was “inferred frequently in Biblical narratives not mentioning it, thus expanding the idea of angels as intermediaries between God and man.”<sup>83</sup> Such contact between angels and men often required the former to transform, at least outwardly, into the latter. That angels could and did appear in the guise of men, and were not immediately recognised as angelic beings, is frequently attested throughout the Hebrew Bible where “‘man’ (‘yš) [sic] is a

---

<sup>80</sup> Bamberger ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

<sup>81</sup> Bamberger; Sam Meier, ‘Angels and Angel-Like Beings: II Hebrew Bible/Old Testament’, in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> E.g., Jub 1:27–2:1; Jos., *A.J.*, 15.136; cf. Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2, Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 194; Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 43–46, the latter of which lists numerous rabbinic examples. In the New Testament, this idea is used to show that the Law is inferior because it was only brought by angels, who are inferior to Jesus/God (e.g., Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2), Joshua Gutman, ‘Angels and Angelology: Apocrypha’, in *EJ*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, 194.

common designation for an angel (of the Lord).<sup>84</sup> The three angels who visit Abraham and Lot are described as *ʾānāšîm*, “men,” not *malʾākîm*;<sup>85</sup> Jacob wrestles with a man who is also called *ʾēlôhîm*, “God” (Gen 32:24, 28, 30), and yet later, a *malʾāk* (Hos 12:4); Joshua fails to recognise that his visitor is an angel because he looks like a man (Josh 5:13); Samson’s birth is announced by an angel in the form of a man;<sup>86</sup> and the six armed men in Ezekiel’s vision are understood to be angels (Ezek 9:2). Zechariah also uses the term “man” to refer to angelic beings (Zech 1:8, 10; 2:1), who are subsequently referred to as such;<sup>87</sup> and an angel who is subsequently identified as Gabriel appears to Daniel in the form of a man.<sup>88</sup> The result of this is that it is sometimes “uncertain whether a human or superhuman messenger is meant,” when an angel is described as a “man.”<sup>89</sup>

The application of personal names to angels is perhaps the most notable characteristic of postexilic concepts of angels.<sup>90</sup> Despite this, the Hebrew Bible knows of only two named angels: *gabrîʾēl* (Gabriel) and *mîkāʾēl* (Michael), both of whom appear in the Hebrew sections of Daniel, which is the only book of the Hebrew Bible that allows any angels to develop distinct personalities.<sup>91</sup> Michael is portrayed as the guardian angel of Israel, and is to some extent subservient to Gabriel, who is afforded the role of *angelus interpres*, an angelic function which, as noted, first appears in the books of Ezekiel (40–48), and Zechariah (1:9–6:5).<sup>92</sup> Although the angel in Zechariah is not named, and there is no suggestion it is Gabriel, who, by virtue of being named, attains a personality not previously afforded angels, “for the first time in the Bible the

---

<sup>84</sup> E.g., Gen 19:1–22, 32:23; Ezek 9:1; Zach 1:8; Dan 8:15, 9:21, 12:6, Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>85</sup> Gen 18:2, 16, 22, 19:5, 8, 10–12, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Judg 13:3, 6, 8–11, 13, 15–18, 20–21.

<sup>87</sup> Zech 1:9, 11–14, 19, 2:3.

<sup>88</sup> Dan 3:25, 9:21, 10:5, 12:7.

<sup>89</sup> Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

<sup>90</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 8.

<sup>91</sup> E.g., Dan 8:16, 9:21, 10:13, 21, 12:1, Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Manfred Görg, ‘Angels: II Old Testament’, in *Religion Past and Present—Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

angels in Zechariah appear to be acquiring an independent life on their own.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, from the time of Zechariah onwards, prophets speak almost exclusively with angels, and not with God himself.<sup>94</sup> This is generally understood as a “clear expansion of the angel concept in which God’s acts and revelations are now increasingly transferred to angels the more God’s transcendence is emphasised.”<sup>95</sup> It is true that the God of Israel became more distant in the postexilic period, but angels were not invented to fill the void this created.<sup>96</sup> Rather, as YHWH was elevated to the same position as, and fused with the figure of *’ēlôhîm*,<sup>97</sup> the “sons of God,” took on some of his functions, at the same time as the independent development of the concept of an angelic missionary, resulting in increased interest in angels. Postexilic angelology is therefore not solely the “product of a growing hypostatization of the inner spirit or breath of God.”<sup>98</sup>

## 1.6 Angels in the New Testament

Although humans are described as ἄγγελοι, “angels,” in the New Testament, the application of this term to mortal messengers is rare.<sup>99</sup> The concept of an ἄγγελος as a divine messenger, is clearly a concept with which all New Testament authors appear to have been familiar.<sup>100</sup> The writers of the New Testament adopted both biblical and extrabiblical beliefs about angels,

---

<sup>93</sup> Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

<sup>94</sup> W Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im spathellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tubingen: n.p., 1926), 320.

<sup>95</sup> Klaus Hermann, ‘Angels: IX Judaism’, in *Religion Past and Present—Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>96</sup> Barker, *The Great Angel*, 70.

<sup>97</sup> Barker, 70.

<sup>98</sup> John Levison, ‘The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism’, *SBLSP* 34 (1995): 493.

<sup>99</sup> Luke 7:24 (Gk.), 9:52 (Gk., Syr.); Jas 2:25 (Gk.). Cf. Matt 11:10 (Gk., Syr., Copt., Lat.); Mk 1:2 (Gk., Syr., Copt., Lat.), Camilla Hélena von Heijne, ‘Angels’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Jesus’ identification of John the Baptist as God’s ἄγγελος constitutes a rare exception (Matt 11:10; cf. Mark 1:2).

<sup>100</sup> Wischmeyer, ‘Angels: III New Testament’.

resulting in both some coherence with, as well as divergences from, earlier concepts.<sup>101</sup> As in the Hebrew Bible, the only angels with personal names in the New Testament are Gabriel (Γαβριήλ: Luke 1:19, 26), and Michael (Μιχαήλ: Rev 12:7; Jude 9). Matthew 1:18 can be added to these references as “it was common in the early Church to harmonize Matthew with Luke’s birth narrative and to conclude that Gabriel is referred to in both.”<sup>102</sup> Michael is further termed an ἀρχάγγελος, “chief angel” (1 Thess 4:16; Jude 1:9), but there is no elaboration on the meaning of this title. With the exception of Gabriel and Michael, angels in the New Testament are nameless individuals. They have no soteriological role, and their theological significance is limited to the narratives in which they appear, such as the resurrection, annunciation, and birth of Jesus,<sup>103</sup> the temptation (Matt 4:11), and at Gethsemane (Luke 22:43).<sup>104</sup> Otherwise, they are largely replaced by the (Holy) Spirit, “the finality of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and the presence of the Spirit render[ing] superfluous any discussion of angels as God’s aids and messengers.”<sup>105</sup> The, or, an ἀγγελος κυριου, an “angel of the Lord” or του Θεου, “of God,” makes a number of appearances in the New Testament<sup>106</sup> but is not clearly seen as one particular angel.<sup>107</sup> Angels in the New Testament are generally identified by the one in whose name they are sent, i.e. God, and as such, are themselves anonymous.<sup>108</sup>

In addition to the characteristics mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, namely that of greater strength and knowledge than man (Matt 24:36; 2 Pet 2:11, but not omniscience,

---

<sup>101</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 9.

<sup>102</sup> Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 195.

<sup>103</sup> E.g., Matt 1:18, 2:13; Luke 1:11, 26, 2:9.

<sup>104</sup> Wischmeyer, ‘Angels: III New Testament’.

<sup>105</sup> Wischmeyer.

<sup>106</sup> Matt 1:20, 24, 2:13, 19, 28:2; Luke 1:11, 2:9; Acts 5:19, 8:26, 12:23, 27:23; Gal 4:14.

<sup>107</sup> Volkmar Hirth, *Gottes Boten im Alten Testament: die alttestamentliche Malak-Vorstellung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Malak-Jahwe-Problems*, 1978 ed. (Frankfurt: Lang, 1975), 30.

<sup>108</sup> William Graham Macdonald, ‘Christology and the Angel of the Lord’, in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by His Former Students*, ed. Merrill Chapin Tenney and Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 331–32.

Matt 24:36; Col 1:15–17), angels are further described in the New Testament as spirits with no physical bodies (Heb 1:14; cf. Luke 24:37–39), and yet depicted as wearing clothes (Mark 16:5).<sup>109</sup> They are often described as being dazzling white, either because of their clothing, or simply blazing gloriously in appearance,<sup>110</sup> which echoes the description of the angel that appears to Daniel in 10:6. The essential characteristics of angels in the New Testament are that of invisibility (Col 1:16), and immortality;<sup>111</sup> they also speak their own language, a conspicuously new characteristic (1 Cor 13:1).<sup>112</sup> Although they do not have a definitive gender (Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35–36), they always appear as men rather than women.<sup>113</sup> Unlike men, however, they are not descended from a common ancestor (Luke 20:34–36), and therefore neither marry nor reproduce (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25).<sup>114</sup> Although the angel of fire and bronze seen by John in Revelation 1:14–15 is reminiscent of that in Daniel 10:5–6, the latter recognizes him as YHWH, and the former as Jesus. Despite all this, the nature and missions of angels do not undergo significant development in the New Testament, which largely shares the same view of them as that developed in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Heijne, ‘Angels’.

<sup>110</sup> E.g., Matt 28:3; Luke 24:4; John 20:12; Rev 10:1, 18:1.

<sup>111</sup> E.g., Luke 20:36; Matt 24:36; Col 1:15–17; cf. Gen. Rab. 5:2, 8:11, 14:3; ‘Abot R. Nat. [A] 37.109, [B] 43.120.

<sup>112</sup> Wischmeyer, ‘Angels: III New Testament’. This latter characteristic stands in stark contrast to rabbinic traditions whereby language (usually Hebrew, as the “holy tongue”), was something men and angels had in common, and one of the things that differentiated them from animals, e.g., b. Hag. 16a; Gen. Rab. 8:11, 14:3, Willem F Smelik, *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14, 15, 42–43, 97, 501. There were conflicting opinions as to whether or not angels could understand Aramaic (e.g., b. Sot. 33a–b; b. Shab. 12b; Sipre Deut. 343), but this is clearly different from having their own language, Smelik, 34, 80, 126–37; Joseph Yahalom, ‘Angels Do Not Understand Aramaic: On the Literary Use of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic in Late Antiquity’, *JJS* 47, no. 1 (1996): 33–34.

<sup>113</sup> E.g., Mark 16:5; Luke 24:2–5; Acts 1:10–11; cf. Rev 21:17.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. b. Hag. 16a; Gen. Rab. 8:11.

<sup>115</sup> Concepción Gonzalo Rubio, *La angelología en la literatura rabínica y sefardí* (Barcelona: Ameller, 1977), 85.

Angels likewise perform a variety of roles in the New Testament, notably as guides (e.g., Matt 13:39, 41–42, 49; Luke 16:22), the heavenly host,<sup>116</sup> and as messengers.<sup>117</sup> The tradition that the law was given by angels at Sinai finds support in the text, but is contrasted with the gospel, which has now been superseded by the Word.<sup>118</sup> The New Testament writers also clearly reject the worship of angels:<sup>119</sup> Paul’s condemnation of angel cults in Galatia (Gal 1:8), and Colossae (Col 2:16, 18), suggests some early followers of the New Testament religion there either continued, or began to venerate angels. This practice would later come to be seen as incompatible with monotheistic, albeit Trinitarian, beliefs.<sup>120</sup> In fact, alongside the seemingly declining importance of angels, or outright rejection of them, angelomorphic, and high Christological beliefs expanded. This is particularly evident in Luke-Acts, demonstrating that an interest in angels and angelic figures was not necessarily considered a threat to monotheism by all groups in the earliest Christian period.<sup>121</sup> Jesus’ second postresurrection appearance in Acts at the conversion of Paul, which is recounted three times (Acts 9:3–19; 22:6–21; 26:12–23), is one example of this trend. Although Jesus is not depicted as an angel here, he is certainly portrayed as having angelic qualities and characteristics.<sup>122</sup> The bright light and Paul’s falling to the ground are reminiscent of an encounter with an angel.<sup>123</sup> Revelation is

---

<sup>116</sup> E.g., Heb 12:22; cf. Rev 4:4–11, 5:8–14, 7:11–12.

<sup>117</sup> E.g., Mark 16:5–7; Matt 1:20–21, 2:13–14, 19–20, 28:1–7; Luke 1:11–20, 26–38, 2:8–15, 24:1–7; Acts 1:10–11, 10:3–7; Rev 14:6–7, 22:16.

<sup>118</sup> E.g., Gal. 3:19–25; Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2–3, Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine. The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicea, Volume 1: The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, ed. and trans. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 127. See also footnote 83 above. Despite this, Hebrews 2:3, appears to affirm angelic involvement in the mediation of the law, Randall C. Gleason, ‘Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2’, *NTS* 49, no. 1 (2003): 91. For some Syriac Christians, however, God’s transcendence meant not only that divine revelation could only be transmitted, but also that it could only be interpreted correctly, by angelic beings (e.g., 2 Bar. 59:12; Ps.-Dion., CH 180B–181A), Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 25, 49.

<sup>119</sup> E.g., Gal 1:8; Col 2:16, 18; Rev 19:10, 22:8–9.

<sup>120</sup> Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine*, 187.

<sup>121</sup> Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 225.

<sup>122</sup> Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 56.

<sup>123</sup> Fletcher-Louis, 55.



more explicit in its prohibition of angelic veneration (Rev 19:10; 22:8–9), and yet angelomorphic aspects of Christ’s presentation in Revelation<sup>124</sup> do not prevent him from becoming a legitimate object of worship.<sup>125</sup> On the basis of this, Stuckenbruck concludes that a view of Jesus as an angel figure must have been part of both the writer’s and readers’ *Vorstellungswelt*, so “we should therefore not be surprised if in Luke-Acts there is a similar combination of angelomorphic characteristics with a higher-than-angelic Christology.”<sup>126</sup>

Despite such angelomorphic tendencies in some parts of the New Testament, Hebrews in particular, is vehement in its denial that Christ’s nature was angelic (Heb 1:4–14; 2:2–17). It places him above the angels, just as man is beneath them, suggesting a desire to correct what it considered erroneous beliefs about angels (and Christ), held by some of its readers, such as, that he was, or became a superangel.<sup>127</sup> From the evidence of Hebrews, angel Christology can thus be safely dismissed from the New Testament.<sup>128</sup> Its incompatibility with the development of the Homoousian Doctrine, which would lead to Trinitarian orthodoxy at the first Council of Nicea in 325 CE, led to it largely dying out by the late fourth century CE.<sup>129</sup> The New Testament can thus be said to present Christ as supra-angelic, but not as a superangel.<sup>130</sup> Since it is angelology and not Christology that interests us here, however, we will not delve further into what is a complex subject in itself.

---

<sup>124</sup> E.g., Rev 1:12–17, 14:14–16.

<sup>125</sup> Loren T. Stuckenbruck, ‘An Angelic Refusal of Worship: The Tradition and Its Function in the Apocalypse of John’, *SBLSP* 33 (1994): 691.

<sup>126</sup> Fletcher-Louis, *Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, 56–57.

<sup>127</sup> Gleason, ‘Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1-2’, 90.

<sup>128</sup> Macdonald, ‘Christology and the Angel of the Lord’, 325.

<sup>129</sup> Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 109. With the notable exception of the Ebionites, for whom Christology was essentially a form of prophetology, which Corbin considers inseparable in prophetic religion, H  nri Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monoth  isme* (Paris: Herne, 1981), 141, 161.

<sup>130</sup> Macdonald, ‘Christology and the Angel of the Lord’, 335.

In contrast to biblical and rabbinic material, it is in relation to events at the end of time that angels play their biggest roles in the New Testament.<sup>131</sup> This is most evident in the Book of Revelation (e.g., 12:7, 20:1–3), where Michael and his angels are depicted as fighting and defeating the dragon (Satan), and his angels. The four apocalyptic horsemen of Revelation 6:1–8, are also understood to be angels, while another angel appears in the role of an *angelus interpres*, inviting John to observe the judgment of the “great prostitute” (Babylon), and explaining the meaning of the strange creatures and events he witnesses (Rev 17:1–15). The discomfort caused by the tension between angels and Jesus, was perhaps negated by the need for the former in executing eschatological events. By placing them in a distant, future context, the threat they posed was at least postponed, if not diminished altogether.

## 1.7 Angels in Late Antiquity

Although extrabiblical literature can hardly be considered a homogenous body of material, it is in such late antique sources that we see an explosion of interest in angels. This is particularly the case in the so-called apocalyptic writings, in which “speculation regarding numbers, names and functions of the angelic hosts reached new heights.”<sup>132</sup> Heavenly beings began to operate in a greater range of events than before, and were assigned attributes, which were either

---

<sup>131</sup> E.g., Matt 13:41–43, 49, 16:27, 24:30–31, 25:31, 41; Mark 8:38, 13:27; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess 1:7; Rev 7:1–3, 8:1–13, 9:1, 13, 15, 10:1, 11:15, 12:7, 14:6–7, 17–20, 16:1–21, 19:6–7, 20:1–3, Wischmeyer, ‘Angels: III New Testament’; Michael S. Heiser, ‘Angels and Angel-Like Beings: IV New Testament’, in *Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception* ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

<sup>132</sup> Gleason, ‘Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2’, 101–2. The problems associated with the use, definition, and general application of the term “apocalyptic,” which some scholars now consider misleading, are noted, for a discussion of the issues, see e.g., Robert L. Webb, “‘Apocalyptic’: Observations on a Slippery Term”, *JNES* 49, no. 2: Qumran and Apocalyptic: The “End of Days” in Ancient Judaism and the Dead Sea Scrolls (April 1990): 115–26; Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, trans. William J. Short, vol. 20, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 13–27; John J. Collins, ‘Prophecy, Apocalypse and Eschatology: Reflections on the Proposals of Lester Grabbe’, in *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and Their Relationships*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 44–53.

absent, or merely implied in canonical biblical texts.<sup>133</sup> This new-found interest in angels was perhaps partly due to the void created by the end of direct prophecy, which was to a certain extent conveniently filled by angelic beings, if not completely. In the Hebrew Bible, the existence of angels and the roles they had to play in the biblical world is presented as a given. With the exception of the *mal'āk yhwh*, “angel of the Lord,” they were mainly anonymous, mediatory figures, whose existence was largely, but not entirely, necessitated by the increasing transcendence of God.<sup>134</sup> A change occurred in the late Hellenistic period (c.197–31 BCE), when a view of angels as individuals developed, and personal names continued to be applied to them as a matter of course.<sup>135</sup> Angels also increasingly began to identify themselves as such, and/or by these new personal names.<sup>136</sup> Rather than functional “angel of X” designations, a veritable plethora of angels are named, and tasked with roles that go far beyond that of simple messengers. It is thus in extrabiblical material that angels cease to be vague and impersonal, becoming “more prominent, [and] carrying increasing theological significance.”<sup>137</sup> Partly as a result of this increase in autonomy, angels were seen to take on responsibility for certain actions, which would potentially have cast God in a negative light, leading to him becoming yet further distanced from the world.<sup>138</sup> Angels are thus assigned a range of new and further tasks and roles: in an eschatological context, as prosecutors and judges, as protectors of the righteous, and as teachers and guides.<sup>139</sup>

Although Gabriel gradually appears to have superseded Michael as the angel par excellence, as in the Hebrew Bible, Michael usually continued to be cast as the guardian angel

---

<sup>133</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 21; Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 242.

<sup>134</sup> Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums*, 320.

<sup>135</sup> Bousset, 321.

<sup>136</sup> E.g., Tobit 12:15; T. Levi 5:6; Apoc. Zeph. 6:15; Luke 1:19; 2 En. 72:5 [J/A]; T. Ab. 7:11 [A], 7:1 [B]; Apoc. Ab. 10:8; Herm. Sim. 9.23 (100.5), 9.24 (101.4), 9.27 (104.3), 9.33 (110.1); Herm. Mand. 12.4 (47.7), 12.6 (49.1); T. Jac. 2:5; Ques. Ezra 24 [A].

<sup>137</sup> Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 13.

<sup>138</sup> Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums*, 321.

<sup>139</sup> Hermann, ‘Angels: IX Judaism’.

of Israel in extrabiblical material. He also appears in lists of four,<sup>140</sup> or seven archangels, that appear in several texts.<sup>141</sup> He is furthermore identified as the “glorious angel” by the Shepherd of Hermas (possibly second-century CE; Herm. Sim. 3.69.3 (52.3)). It is in extrabiblical material that Gabriel in particular, is often portrayed as God’s messenger to man.<sup>142</sup> The growing significance of Gabriel, can be seen in a number of texts, such as the *Epistle of the Apostles* (before 147/148 CE), which has survived completely only in Gəʿəz (originally from the late fourth/early fifth-century CE, and partly in Coptic (late fourth/early fifth-century CE), and Latin (fifth/sixth-century CE), translations. In it, Christ assumes the form of the angel Gabriel, forms himself in the Virgin Mary,<sup>143</sup> and implies he will return as an angel (the Coptic expressly says as Gabriel), after his resurrection (Ep. Apos. 3–14).<sup>144</sup> The *Sibylline Oracle* (c.first-century CE), describes the Word as appearing to Mary as Gabriel (Sib. Or. VIII.456–61).<sup>145</sup> The Ethiopic version of the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* implies that the Beloved One (as opposed to Isaiah), having transformed into an angel, descended on Mary’s womb, before becoming the infant Jesus (Mart. Ascen. Isa. 11:2–22, cf. 3:3–18).<sup>146</sup> Ideas such as this may have formed part of broader angel Christological beliefs held by groups such as the Ebionites and Elkasites, if they

---

<sup>140</sup> E.g., 1 En. 9:1, 40:9, 54:6; 1QM 9, 14; 2 En. 40:2.9–10, 71:7–13; Sib. Or. 2:215, usually these are Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and either Uriel, Phanuel, or Sariel.

<sup>141</sup> E.g., 1 En. 20:1–7, where these are Uriel (who is mentioned in the previous chapter), Sariel/Suriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraquel, and Gabriel. A group of seven angels is also mentioned in several texts (e.g., Tob. 12:15; 1 En. 90:21; cf. T. Levi 8:2), but they are not all named. Although texts such as these did not circulate in the extant forms (or languages), in which they have been preserved, in the Arabian Peninsular, they were likely translated from, or informed by Christian Arabic recensions (textual or oral), which may have been in circulation at the time of the nascent Islamic community.

<sup>142</sup> J. Pedersen, ‘*Djabrāʾīl*’, in *El*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012), e.g., Gen. Rab. 48; 78.

<sup>143</sup> Joseph Barbel, *Christos Angelos, die Anschauung von Christus als Bote und Engel in der gelehrten und volkstümlichen Literatur des christlichen Altertums: zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ursprungs und der Fortdauer des Arianismus* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1964), 236–38.

<sup>144</sup> Barbel, 237.

<sup>145</sup> Barker, *The Great Angel*, 206.

<sup>146</sup> Jonathan Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 72, 75.

existed.<sup>147</sup> Such Jewish Christians may have seen both the Son and the Holy Spirit, as angelomorphic beings, and Christ as a “new manifestation of the Angel of Israel.”<sup>148</sup>

Besides Gabriel and Michael, Raphael bears the distinction of being the only other named angel to be included in a work, which is still regarded as canonical by many Christians, if not Jews: Tobit. In this text, he has a double messenger function, being sent both by God to Tobit and by Tobit to Media. As his name suggests, Raphael heals Tobit’s blindness (Tob 3:17), but only reveals his identity later (12:15). He is also named as one of the four angels of the throne in the *Sibylline Oracle* (2:215), and 1 Enoch (20:3; 40:8–10). The latter text lists many named angels, and describes their individual responsibilities in great detail (e.g., 1 En. 6:7–8 (watchers); 20:1–17; 40:9; 69:2–15 (watchers); 82:13–17, 20), a motif that is developed further in later literature.<sup>149</sup> These named angels occupied a position elevated above ordinary angels, and are assigned specific roles. Termed ἀρχάγγελοι, “chief angels,” the term does not appear in the LXX, only in Greek pseudepigrapha and the New Testament.<sup>150</sup> The actual title ἀρχάγγελος, “chief angel,” is more frequently applied to an individual, named angel alone, than groups of

---

<sup>147</sup> One key proponent of the existence of such defined groups in the context of qur’ānic studies is Patricia Crone, who argues that seven doctrines, which are central to the Qur’ān, can only be explained by the presence of Jewish Christians in the qur’ānic milieu, rather than mainstream Christians. Given that Jewish Christians are recorded as having been present in Egypt in the seventh century CE, she does not think it improbable that they were also in Arabia at the same time, Patricia Crone, ‘Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One)’ *JNES* 74, no. 2 (2015): 228–29.

<sup>148</sup> Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine*, 127; Charles A. Gieschen, ‘The Angel of the Prophetic Spirit: Interpreting the Revelatory Experiences of the Shepherd of Hermas in Light of Mandate XI’ *SBLSP*, 33 (1994): 801; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, trans. Brian McNeil (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 53.

<sup>149</sup> E.g., 3 En. 14:4, 17:1–7, 18:16–24, 19:1–2, 20:1–2, 22:1, 11–12, 16, 25:1, 5, 26:8, 27:1–3, 44:2–3, cf. 48D:1–2, 5; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 6:1–2.

<sup>150</sup> 1 Thess 4:16; Jude 1:9, J.W. van Henton, ‘Archangel’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 80.

named ones.<sup>151</sup> References to generic, or collective, archangels appear to be much less common.<sup>152</sup>

As to the physical make-up and functions of angels, from the evidence of various texts,<sup>153</sup> we know that angels were thought to have had wings and to have been created from fire.<sup>154</sup> Saint Ephrem refers to angels in whom God “mingled fire and spirit” (specifically Michael and Gabriel),<sup>155</sup> and several texts state that angels were in fact half fire, half water.<sup>156</sup>

The chief function of angels in extrabiblical literature, can perhaps be said to be that of teachers, or guides: with the transmission of secret, or divine, knowledge by a heavenly

---

<sup>151</sup> E.g., Michael: 1 En. 71:3; Apoc. Mos. 3:2, 13:2, 22:1, 3, Preface to 29, 37:4, 6, 38:1, 40:1, 43:1–2; LAE 25:2, 29:1, 45:1, 49:3, 51:2; 2 En. [J] 22:6f, 33:10f, 72:5; 3 Bar. 10:1, 11:4, 6, 8, 12:4; T. Ab. [A] 1:4, 6, 4:4, 5:2, 7, 8:8, 10:1, 14:10, 15:14, 16:7, 20:10, [B] 2:2, 4:9; 4 Bar. 9:5; T. Sol. 1:6; T. Isaac 6:28, 14:7; Apoc. Sedr. 14:1; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 1:3, 4:24; Dokieli: T. Ab. [A] 10:1; Uriel: 1 En. 79:6; Pr. Jos. *frag.* C, A:4; 2 En. [J] 22:10, [A] 22:10; T. Ab. [A] 13:11; T. Sol. 2:4, 5, 7; Death: T. Ab. [A] 16:6; Azazel: T. Sol. 7:7; Gabriel: Sib. Or. 8:460; 2 En. [J] 21:3, [A] 71:11, 28, 72:1, 5; Remiel: 4 Ez. 5:36; Satan 2 En. [J] 29:4; Sariel: Lad. Jac. 3:3; Israel: Pr. Jos. *frag.* A:7; Raphael: Gk. Apoc. Ezra 1:4.

<sup>152</sup> E.g., T. Levi 3:5; Lad. Jac. 6:6; Apos. Cons. 7.35.11, 8.12.14, 81, 83; 2 En. [J] 19:3, 20:1, 22:10, [A] 20:1; Odes Sol. 4:8; 3 Bar. 10:1; T. Sol. 2:4; Hist. Rech. 16:1a; Apoc. El. (C) 1:6; 2 Bar. 59:11; T. Ad. 4:2.

<sup>153</sup> E.g., 1 En. 61:1; 2 En. 1:4, 3:1, 11:4, 16:7, 21:1; Apoc. Ab. 18:6; Gk. Apoc. Bar. 7:5.

<sup>154</sup> E.g., 2 En. 19:3, 29:1–3; 2 Bar. 21:6, cf. 59:11; Gen. Rab. 78:1; b. Hag. 14a; Pesiq. Rab Kah. *pis.* 2:6; Songs Rab. 3:11; Exod. Rab. 15:6; Deut. Rab. 11:4; Num. Rab. 21:16. The pseudo-Cyprianic text, *The Threefold Fruit of the Christian Life*, describes seven angels as having been created from fire, *Fruit*, 216–19; Barker, *The Great Angel*, 203. According to b. Hag 16a, and the *Sefer HaRazim* 4.47–49, angels can fly, Rebecca Lesses, ‘Speaking with Angels: Jewish and Greco-Egyptian Revelatory Adjurations’, *HThR* 89, no. 1 (1996): 51–52.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1953), 27.

<sup>156</sup> E.g., y. Roš Haš. 2:5; Pesiq. Rab Kah 1:1.; Song Rab. 3.11, 1; Deut. Rab. 5:12, Marmorstein, ‘Fallen Angels’, 156.

creature, “an essential feature of the genre apocalypse.”<sup>157</sup> The classic example of this is 1 Enoch (e.g., 1 En. 93:2), while revelation is transmitted entirely through angels in Jubilees, which presents itself as having been written by them.<sup>158</sup> They also play key roles in eschatological events,<sup>159</sup> although these common trends do not mean that a “standard” view of angels developed;<sup>160</sup> consistency was not even guaranteed within the same work, but this does not appear to have diminished interest in them.<sup>161</sup>

## 1.8 Structure

Having established the background against which qur’ānic references to angels developed and should be read, the qur’ānic data will now be examined in light of this context.

**Chapter 2** will analyse the use of nominal terms used to refer to angels in the Qur’ān, both *malak/malā’ika*, and other terms, namely *ḍayf*, “guests,” *rasūl/rusul*, “messenger(s),” *qawm munkarūn*, “a strange, odd, or foreign people,” *jund/junūd min a(l)-samā’/samāwāt* or *min rabbika*, “host(s)/forces of heaven or of your lord,” *rūḥ* “spirit,” *bashar*, “humans,” and *ḥāfiẓūn*, “guardians.”

---

<sup>157</sup> E.g., Jub. 12:27, 32:21–24; T. Reu. 5:3; T. Levi 2:6–4:1, 5:5–6; T. Jud. 15:5; 1 En. 7:1–8:1, 3; 9:1, 6, 10:8, 13:2 (all describing the illicit teaching transmitted by the watchers), 33:4, 40:2, 8, 43:3, 46:2–8, 52:3–9, 59:2–3, 60:9–11, 64:1–2 (watchers), 65:11 (watchers), 68:1, 69:1, 4–6, 8, 12–13, 15 (watchers), 71:3–4, 72:1, 74:2, 75:3, 76:4, 78:10, 79:2–3, 6, 80:1, 82:7, 89:1, 93:2; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 9:21; T. Job 3:2–4:1; 4 Ezra 2:44–48, 4:3–4, 26, 36, 5:15, 20, 32, 37, 6:20, 30, 33, 7:49, 76, 78, 90, 104, 10:30–33, 37, 38, 12:10, 12, 35–39, 13:21; Apoc. Ab. 14:8, 17:4–5; 3 Bar. [Gk./Slav.] 1:4, 6, 2:6, 4:3–7:2, 8:3–9:7, [Gk.] 8, [Gk./Slav.] 10:4–9, 11:2–4, 8–9, 12:2–3, [Gk.] 5, [Gk./Slav.] 14:2, [Slav.] 16:5–6; Apoc. Ad. 3:1; Vis. Ezra 41, 44, 46, 52, 54; 3 En. 5:9 (watchers), 41:1–3, 42:1–2, 43:1–2, 44:1–4, 45:1–2, 46:1–2, 47:1–3, 48A:1–2 (all by Enoch as the angel Metatron, hence included here), 48C:9, Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1–36, 72–108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 73, 310.

<sup>158</sup> Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 10, 14.

<sup>159</sup> See the extrabiblical references listed in footnotes 451–456.

<sup>160</sup> Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 9.

<sup>161</sup> Harold Kuhn, ‘The Angelology of the Non-canonical Jewish Apocalypses’, *JBL* 67 (1948): 219.

**Chapter 3** will present an overview of verbal roots associated with angels, which occur in this context at least three times, and then analyse the four most common of these in detail: *n-z-l*, “descending/being sent (from heaven),” *r-s-l*, “being sent (by God),” *q-w-l*, “talking/speaking,” and *s-j-d*, *s-b-ḥ*, and *‘-b-d*, “prostrating/worshipping/praising/serving,” to build up a picture of the main activities angels can be found doing in the Qur’ān.

**Chapter 4** will examine the different roles identified as being performed by angels in the Qur’ān—i.e. as the heavenly host, God’s servants, messengers, soldiers, advocates/intercessors between men and God, guardian angels, angels of death (guardians of heaven and hell), eschatological actors, witnesses, and teachers—and the extent to which the presentation and remit of these roles remains the same as, or differs from, that found in (extra)biblical literature.<sup>162</sup>

**Chapter 5** will consider a number of miscellaneous aspects of angelic activity and related figures, such as the *rūḥ al-qudus*, “holy spirit,” *shayāṭīn*, “demons/devils,” *al-Shayṭān*, “the devil,” *jinn*, *Iblīs*, angels as *khulāfa’*, “successors, heirs” and, allegedly, as objects of veneration.

**Chapter 6** will analyse the role(s) of angels in narratives in the Qur’ān. These are the (angelic) visitations to Abraham and Lot (**Section 6.1**), culminating in the destruction of Lot’s people (Q *Hūd* 11:69–81, and Q *Ḥijr* 15:51–77), and the annunciations (**Section 6.2**) to Zechariah (Q *Āl-‘Imrān* 3:38–41), and Mary (Q 3:42–48; Q *Maryam* 19:16–19). The presence of narratives involving angels in the Qur’ān, which may have been familiar to some of its audience, and which appear in multiple religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions, is particularly helpful in assessing the qur’ānic presentation of angels in relation to earlier, and contemporary traditions because it provides a context in which to conduct such analysis.

**Chapter 7** looks at references to named angels in the Qur’ān, two of whom are known to us from (extra)biblical literature (Gabriel/*Jibrīl* Q 2:97–98; Q *al-Taḥrīm* 66:4, cf. Q 3:39, 45, and Q 19:17, 19, and Michael/*Mīkāil* Q 2:98—**Section 7.1**), and two whose origins may lie in Indo-Iranian mythology (*Hārūt* and *Mārūt*: Q 2:102—**Section 7.2**).

---

<sup>162</sup> Here, and throughout, the terms “biblical,” and “extrabiblical,” are both applied broadly, and yet still allow for the Qur’ān’s distinctiveness within the wider late antique tradition.



## 2 Angels in the Qur'ān: Comparative Analysis of Terminology

### 2.1 Analysis and Discussion of the Terms *malak*, “Angel,” and *malā'ika*, “Angels”

As noted, like the Bible, the Qur'ān never explains what a *malak*, “angel” (pl. *malā'ika*), is. Furthermore, the frequency with which the terms *malak* and *malā'ika* are used suggests an expected familiarity on the part of the audience with the concept.<sup>163</sup> Whether that be a winged, divinely endorsed ambassador, or a representative of God's presence on earth, the implication is that “Muhammad's audience was obviously familiar with it,” and that it must, therefore, have already been a feature of the pre-qur'ānic Arabian landscape.<sup>164</sup> That angels (*malā'ika*) are pre-qur'ānic is undisputed and yet—despite clear parallels in the terminology used to describe them, some of the roles they play, and narratives in which they appear in the Qur'ān, with those of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and extrabiblical literature—it is not the case that they were simply lifted wholesale from these texts, and redeployed in a qur'ānic context.<sup>165</sup> Rather, they appear to have undergone multiple stages of development, both prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān, and concomitant with it. The explosion of interest in angelic beings in late antique, Jewish and Christian literature testifies to the broad interest and concern with them in the immediately pre-qur'ānic period, and throughout its transmission.<sup>166</sup> The interpretation of, and need to interpret the natures and roles of, angels undoubtedly fed into their portrayal in the Qur'ān. The result of this is that the concept of an angel appears to have become a more clearly defined one before the revelation of the Qur'ān to the nascent qur'ānic community. Following this, qur'ānic angels continued to undergo a process of intra-qur'ānic

---

<sup>163</sup> D. B. Macdonald and W. Madelung, ‘Malā'ika’, in *EI*, ed. P. Pearman et al. (Brill Online, 2015).

<sup>164</sup> Macdonald and Madelung. This hypothesis is further supported by the appearance of the term in the epigraphic record, Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 122, 124; Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 102. Note also that the presumption that its audience would also know what an angel was, is also made in the Hebrew Bible, where the first appearance of an angel, a *malāk yhwh*, an “angel of the Lord,” occurs in Genesis 16:7, but is nowhere explained, as discussed in Section 1.5, see also footnote 44.

<sup>165</sup> Although the improbability of textual transmission within the qur'ānic milieu underlines the need for a robust model of (oral) transmission, which must have been in place.

<sup>166</sup> Gleason, ‘Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2’, 101–2.

development, further distancing them from their (extra)biblical counterparts.

In biblical Hebrew, the root, *l'-k*, means “to send,” with the associated noun, *mal'āk*, in the *maqṭal* form, “identifying the vehicle or tool by which the action of the verb is accomplished,” i.e. a messenger.<sup>167</sup> However, in the Hebrew Bible, when referring to the one who is sent, “the messenger is ... not necessarily understood to be angelic,” and has no innate connection with the heavenly world.<sup>168</sup> This is demonstrated by the description in the Hebrew Bible of human messengers as *mal'ākîm*, as discussed in Section 1.5 (see also footnote 49). In this, it parallels the usage of *ml'ak* in Ugarit, the earliest attested use of the root *l'-k*, which is also used to refer both to human messengers between kings, and heavenly ones between gods.<sup>169</sup> When the term *mal'āk/mal'ākîm* was translated into Greek in the LXX, ἄγγελος/ἄγγελοι, was usually used for messengers, both angelic and human, as it had been in the Greek and Hellenistic world. Towards the end of this period, the use of ἄγγελος to refer to a generic messenger became increasingly rare, and in Greek, Early Jewish, and Christian texts, it became the “most common designation of an otherworldly being who mediates between God and humans.”<sup>170</sup> In texts in other Semitic languages, the originally Hebrew *mal'āk/mal'ākîm* was also no longer tied to its original meaning of “messenger,” and became the “word of choice to designate all supernatural beings who do God’s work,”<sup>171</sup> as is the case in its Syriac and Gəʿəz manifestations.<sup>172</sup> This view of an angel as a creature of heavenly origin, with the ability to act

---

<sup>167</sup> Meier, ‘Angel I.’, 45.

<sup>168</sup> Burge, ‘The Angels in *sūrat al-malā'ika*’, 52; Hirth, *Gottes Boten im Alten Testament*, 24.

<sup>169</sup> Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 40.

<sup>170</sup> J.W. van Henton, ‘Angel II’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 50.

<sup>171</sup> Meier, ‘Angel I.’, 50.

<sup>172</sup> Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 93. Human messengers are described as ἄγγελος/ἄγγελοι, *Syr. malakā/malākhīa*, and/or *Eth. mal'āk/mal'āk* in a number of (canonical) biblical passages as discussed in footnote 49, and in e.g., Judt 1:11, 3:1; 1 Macc 1:44, 7:10; cf. Jos., LAB 14, 451, Vi. 89, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, trans., ‘ἄγγελος’, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 7.

as a messenger, but not defined by it, appears to be one shared by the Qur'ān.<sup>173</sup> Latin, on the other hand, for reasons that are unclear, generally made a distinction between the two from the outset with *angelus/angeli* referring to angelic messengers and *nuntius/nuntii* to human ones.<sup>174</sup> It was thus only with the *Vetus Latina*, *Vulgata*, and subsequent vernacular translations of the Bible, that terms derived from Hebrew and Greek were usually used to refer exclusively to non-human messengers.

A comparison of references to human messengers as *mal'āk/mal'ākîm* in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, and/or as ἄγγελος/ἄγγελοι in the LXX<sup>175</sup> with the Latin texts from the *Vetus Latina* Database<sup>176</sup> and the *Vulgata*, revealed only seven instances where these terms are translated as *angelus/angeli*, even when they appear to refer to non-angelic messengers:<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Bowersock, 'Les anges païens', 93.

<sup>174</sup> Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 39.

<sup>175</sup> Gen 32:3, 6; Num 20:14, 21:21, 22:5, 24:12; Deut 2:26; Josh 6:17, 25, 7:22; Judg 6:35, 7:24, 9:31; 11:12–14, 17, 19; 1 Sam 6:21, 11:3, 4, 7, 9, 16:19; 19:11, 14–16, 20–21, 23:27, 25:14, 42; 2 Sam 2:5, 3:12, 14, 26, 5:11, 11:4, 19, 22, 23, 25, 12:27; 1 Kgs 19:2, 20:2, 5, 9, 22:13; 2 Kgs 1:2, 5, 16, 5:10, 6:32, 7:15, 9:18, 10:8, 14:8, 16:7, 17:4, 19:9, 14, 23; 1 Chr 14:1, 19:2, 16; 2 Chr 18:12, 35:21, 36:15–16; Neh 6:3; Job 1:14; Isa 14:32, 18:2, 30:4, 33:7, 37:9, 14, 42:19, 44:26; Jer 27:3; Ezek 17:15, 23:16, 40, 30:9; Nah 2:13; Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7, 3:1; Jdt. 1:11, 3:1; 1 Macc. 1:44; 1 Esdr. 1:48.

<sup>176</sup> <https://about.brepolis.net/vetus-latina-database/>

<sup>177</sup> These findings stand in contrast to affirmations of the *Vulgata*'s consistent use of *nuntius/nuntii* when referring to human messengers, Meier, 'Angel I.', 46.

these were Isaiah 18:2,<sup>178</sup> 33:7;<sup>179</sup> Ezekiel 30:9;<sup>180</sup> Haggai 1:13;<sup>181</sup> Malachi 2:7,<sup>182</sup> 3:1,<sup>183</sup> and

---

<sup>178</sup> For which the only Latin text available was the Vulgata. Marta Høyland Lavik, *A People Tall and Smooth-Skinned: The Rhetoric of Isaiah 18* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 69, concludes that the *mal'ākîm*/ἄγγελοι here most likely refer to human messengers, as do *šîrîm*/ἀποστέλλων, “envoys,” and notes the same contrast between two different types of *human* messengers is drawn in Proverbs 13:17 (MT). The LXX translators have read *mal'āk* as *melek*, “king,” and correspondingly contrast a wicked *king* (βασιλεὺς), with a faithful messenger (ἄγγελος), so the word play is lost.

<sup>179</sup> Surprisingly the *mal'ākê šālôm*/ἄγγελοι...εἰρήνην, “angels/messengers of peace/[who enjoin] peace,” here do not appear to have been the subject of much scholarly attention, but which J. J. M. Roberts, ‘Isaiah 33: An Isaianic Elaboration of the Zion Tradition’, in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 21, concedes could refer to messengers from Jerusalem, which would make them human.

<sup>180</sup> Likewise, the identity of the *mal'ākîm*/ἄγγελοι here has not been the subject of much consideration, but the context clearly echoes Isaiah 18:2, and they can thus be understood as human messengers, G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 332. However, the translation *angeli* only appears to be present in a citation from Tyrannius Rufinus (c.344/45–411, *Exposito in symbolum apostolorum*, 13), all other Latin texts available for consultation used *nuntius/nuntii*. The divine impulse behind the sending of these messengers in both the references from Isaiah and Ezekiel, could account for their continued description as *angeli*.

<sup>181</sup> Here, the *mal'āk yhw̄h*/ἄγγελος κυρίου (Itala frag. Sang, published in Alban Dold, *Konstanzer altlateinische Propheten- und Evangelienbruchstücke mit Glossen: nebst zugehörigen Prophetentexten aus Zürich und St. Gallen*, (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1923), 277), appears to be a description, or assertion of Haggai’s role as a prophetic messenger, Martin Hallaschka, *Haggai und Sacharja 1–8: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 36. Crucially, Haggai is not an “angel of the Lord,” which would ordinarily be intended by the title *mal'āk yhw̄h*/ἄγγελος κυρίου, applied to him here.

<sup>182</sup> This describes a priest as a *mal'āk yhw̄h šabā'ôt*/ἄγγελος κυρίου παντοκράτορος, a “messenger/angel of the Lord of Hosts/almighty.” According to Elie Assis, ‘The Reproach of the Priests (Malachi 1:6–2:9) within Malachi’s Conception of Covenant’, in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles*, ed. Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 273, 276, 278–79, 282–85, this can refer “to a prophet as well as a priest,” although the latter are first assigned this role here. Note that, on at least one occasion, the LXX translates *nābî'*, “prophet,” as ἄγγελος, “angel/messenger,” (Ps 151:4; cf. 11Q5 XXVIII, 8), demonstrating that the understanding of the roles and natures of angels/messengers, prophets, and priests, may have been more fluid than is otherwise thought, Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 49.

1 Esdras 1:48–49 (Lat. 3 Esdras 1:50–51).<sup>184</sup> There are also two instances where the Greek ἄγγελος/ἄγγελοι was retained by the Latin translators of the New Testament: Matthew 11:10, and Mark 1:2.<sup>185</sup> Even if the original authors of these passages understood the figures they referred to as *mal'ākîm*/ἄγγελοι as human, rather than angelic, does this mean that the

---

<sup>183</sup> According to Anthony R. Petterson, 'The Identity of "The Messenger of the Covenant" in Malachi 3:1—Lexical and Rhetorical Analyses', *BBR* 29, no. 3 (October 2019): 279, a significant minority of scholars, including Petterson himself, see *mal'ākî*/τὸν ἄγγελόν μου, "my messenger," and *mal'āk habrît*/ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς διαθήκης, "the messenger of the covenant," as one and the same ideal priestly/prophetic figure, "such as Elijah, or a figure having features of prophet, priest, and guardian angel," while the majority view the latter "as a distinct figure—a priest, the angel of the Lord, or a guardian angel." Petterson concludes there are no grounds for viewing the "messenger of the covenant," as an angelic figure, noting that Malachi's name itself means "my messenger," and that "prophets are the predominant messenger figures," in the Hebrew Bible, Petterson, 289. In contrast, after summarising the different viewpoints, and noting that the terms *mal'āk*/*mal'ākîm* can refer to kings, prophets, and priests, S. D. Snyman, 'Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27, no. 3 (2006): 1042–43, concludes that "the messenger is not an angel but a human figure," in the form of the prophet Malachi, while the "messenger of the covenant," is angelic/divine, and refers to either YHWH, or his angel. Mignon R. Jacobs, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 273, thinks it "most likely the messenger is a priest or prophet sent in anticipation of Yahweh's coming," while the "messenger of the covenant," refers to YHWH, partly because "the presence of a third figure seems unlikely in this context," and the *waw* conjunction, "introduces the appositive that further identifies the Lord," Jacobs, 275. The use of *angelus* in Latin could, however, be at least partly explained by the interpretation of Malachi 3:1, as referring to the coming of John the Baptist, or of Jesus himself, by the Gospel writers (e.g., Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27), demonstrating that a high Christological understanding of the messengers here could have been part of the worldview of the Latin translators, see Petterson, 'The Identity of "The Messenger of the Covenant" in Malachi 3:1', 291–92, for a summary. This identification of John the Baptist as one of God's ἄγγελοι was also made by Origen, who quotes Mark 1:2 in his *Comm. Jo.* 1.14, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 113.

<sup>184</sup> Vulgata, Itala Cod. Colb., originally published by D. Petri Sabatier, ed., *Biblorum sacrorum latinae versiones antiquae seu vetus italica* (France: apud Franciscum Didot, 1751), 1043. The unnamed messenger sent by God is probably Jeremiah, and thus clearly human; representative of all the human messengers (and prophets) who have been continuously rejected by the people of Judah, Michael F. Bird, *1 Esdras: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Vaticanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 123–24.

<sup>185</sup> The term is retained in both Coptic and Syriac, and in both passages refers to John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for Christ.

translators of the Bible into Latin did likewise? Given that even non-Christian authors writing in Greek had already begun to use ἄγγελος/ἄγγελοι to refer specifically to celestial figures by the second century CE, this initially seems surprising.<sup>186</sup> And yet Augustine refers to Christ, the prophets, John the Baptist, and Paul as angels, on the basis that they are messengers (from God).<sup>187</sup> At least one other early church father refers to angels, in the sense of celestial beings, as both *nuntii* and *angeli*, in the same paragraph.<sup>188</sup> This suggests that the two terms were perhaps not as fixed as has been thought, by the time the first Latin translations of the Bible were made. A survey of all early Latin Christian references to Isaiah 18:2, 33:7; Ezekiel 30:9; Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7, 3:1, 1 Esdras 1:48–49 (Lat. 3 Esdras 1:50–51), Matthew 11:10, and Mark 1:2, would ascertain this more conclusively.

Even though the Qur’ān clearly intends to refer to a specific, known, entity with the term *malak*, which Bowersock states never had any meaning other than “angel,”<sup>189</sup> it also uses a range of other terms to refer to such beings. As the clearest, and most obvious term(s), the nouns *malak* and *malā’ika*, “angel(s),” will be examined first. These appear eighty-eight times in thirty-seven different *sūrah*s.

Table 2.1 (below) shows, that just under 10 percent of these references are from the earliest Meccan period, around a third from the middle and later Meccan periods respectively, and just over a third from the Medinan period.

---

<sup>186</sup> Cline Rangar, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Trin.* 3.10; *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 24.7; *Civ.* 15.23; *Gal.* 3:14, *Serm.* 37:19, Frederick Van Fleteren, ‘Angels’, in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>188</sup> Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.7.4, 1.7.9, Rangar, *Ancient Angels*, 29.

<sup>189</sup> Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 93.

**Table 2.1**      *References to malak/malā'ika in the Qur'ān*

Period	Total References	%	No. of <i>sūrahs</i> with References	%	No. of Verses with References	%	Frequency of References per <i>sūrah</i>
<b>M1</b>	8	9	7	19	8	9	1
<b>M2</b>	25	28	11	30	25	28	2
<b>M3</b>	24	28	11	30	24	28	2
<b>MED</b>	31	35	8	21	31	35	4
<b>Total</b>	88	100	37	100	88	100	Average = 2.25

As the above table shows, the number of *sūrahs* which contain references to angels *malak* and *malā'ika* remains fairly stable throughout the different periods of the Qur'ān's transmission, that is, from the first revelations received in Mecca, to the establishment of the religio-polity in the nearby settlement of Medina following the *hijra* migration (c.622 CE), until Muhammad's reported death in 632 CE. The number of references, however, increases significantly between the first and middle Meccan periods, during which time it more than trebles, and then again slightly between then and the Medinan period (a further increase of nearly 25 percent). More than a third of all references occur in the Medinan period, which is also noticeable for having a much higher average frequency of references to *malak/malā'ika* per *sūrah*, for those *sūrahs* that contain references to *malak/malā'ika*, than earlier material. This is, in part, due to Medinan *sūrahs* being, generally, much longer than Meccan ones. However, we can also posit, that while angels were mentioned in passing in the earliest Meccan period, by the Medinan period, the Qur'ān had more to say about them. Perhaps by this later stage they had become more important, or the information the Qur'ān had to impart about them was more detailed or urgent. This could be due to the need to clarify the nature of angels in the face of conflicting views, or opposing claims about them. Such questions cannot be answered definitively, but, as will be shown, a number of factors suggest this could be the case. The application of the term *malak/malā'ika* to angels, regardless of which role they perform, as well as the predominance of this term by the Medinan period, points to a crystallisation of the concept of a *malak* as a defined, otherworldly being. This, in itself, raises the possibility of conflict with those whose understanding of a *malak* was not as fixed, and/or as clearly demarcated from other beings, namely deities, demons, and *jinn*.

Following Nöldeke's chronology, in Medinan *sūrahs*, with the exception of the references to the two angels, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* (see Section 7.2), through the use of the dual form (Q 2:102), and to angels in general, or as a collective (Q 66:6; Q al-Muddaththir 74:31<sup>190</sup>), references to angels are otherwise always definite and plural. In Meccan *sūrahs*, on the other

---

<sup>190</sup> The latter of which Nöldeke considered a Medinan addition to an early Meccan *sūrah*, Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1860), 71.



hand, the term occasionally appears in the singular indefinite,<sup>191</sup> plural indefinite,<sup>192</sup> twice in the singular definite (Q *al-Ḥāqqah* 69:17; Q *al-Fajr* 89:22, early Meccan), and once in the dual (Q *al-Aʿrāf* 7:20, late Meccan). Barring four exceptions, Meccan references to *malāʾika* have a polemical flavour to them, in comparison with Medinan ones, either admonishing the audience for their lack of belief regarding angels, or recording the Unbelievers' demands for an angelic, as opposed to a human, messenger. These are Q *Yūsuf* 12:31 (late Meccan), in which Joseph's beauty is compared to that of an angel; Q *al-Najm* 53:26,<sup>193</sup> where the angels' intercession is said to be to no avail—advocacy between God and Man, without God's permission,<sup>194</sup> evidently being considered a form of *shirk*, "association," of another being with the Godhead, leading to idolatry, by the Medinan period—and Q 69:17, and Q 89:22 (early Meccan), which are eschatological descriptions. The only reference to a specific angel, through the use of the singular definite form of the noun, is to the *malak al-mawt*, "the angel of death," in Q *al-Sajdah* 32:11 (middle Meccan).<sup>195</sup>

## 2.2 Other Nominal Terms for Angels

The presence of angels is further implied by different terminology, not including personal names, in a further thirty-four verses in fifteen *sūrahs*. These are *ḍayf*, "guests," *rasūl/rusul*, "messenger(s)," *qawm munkarūn*, "a strange or foreign people," *jund min al-samāʾ/junūd min al-samāwāt*, "host(s) of (the) heaven(s)," *junūd (rabbika)*, "the forces (of your Lord)," *rūḥ*,

<sup>191</sup> Q 6:8, 50; Q 11:12, 31; Q 12:31, late Meccan; Q 17:95; Q 25:7, middle Meccan; Q 53:26, early Meccan.

<sup>192</sup> Q 23:24; Q 43:60, middle Meccan; Q 41:14, late Meccan.

<sup>193</sup> According to Nöldeke, this was potentially an undated insertion to an early Meccan *sūrah*, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 81.

<sup>194</sup> E.g., Q 2:255 stresses the necessity of God's permission for intercession to have any efficacy.

<sup>195</sup> The reference in Q 16:33, is grammatically definite and can only be inferred from the context. In post-qur'ānic angelology, however, this angel, identified by some early Islamic scholars as Azrael (e.g., ibn Kathīr; al-Qurṭubī), was responsible for taking the souls of men at the time of their death, aided by other angels, who are termed *ḥafiz(ūn)/ḥafazah* "guardians" (Q 82:10–11; Q 86:4/Q 6:61), and *rusul*, "messengers" (Q 6:61; Q 7:38, ibn Kathīr; al-Ṭabarī; al-Qurṭubī), Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

*“spirit,” bashar, “humans,” and ḥāfiẓīna, “guardians.”* Some of the *sūrahs* which employ these terms also refer to a *malak*, and/or *malā’ika*, but only one appears in Medinan material (see Table 2.2 below). Angels are also clearly the subject of ongoing discourse in many of the verses either side of such references, but the verses in question do not use any term to refer to them, mainly because these cover their direct, or reported speech. Verses in which angels are not referred to by any term will, however, be examined when discussing their roles and actions (Chapters 3 and 4).

**Table 2.2**      *References to Angels in the Qur’ān Other than malak/malā’ika*

Term	References	Period	No. of sūrahs	No. of Verses	Frequency per sūrah
<b>ḍayf</b>	Q 51:24 <sup>196</sup>	M1	1	1	1
	Q 15:51, 68; Q 54:37	M2	2	3	1.5
	Q 11:78	M3	1	1	1
	-	MED	-	-	-
<b>rasūl/rusul OR mursal(ūn)</b>	Q 51:31; <sup>197</sup> Q 77:11	M1	2	2	1
	Q 15:57, 61; Q 19:19; Q 26:160; Q 36:13, 14, 16, 20, 30; Q 38:14; Q 43:80	M2	6	11	2
	Q 6:61; Q 7:37; Q 10:21; <sup>198</sup> Q 11:69, 77, 81; Q 29:31, 33; Q 35:1	M3	6	9	1.5
	-	MED	-	-	-
<b>qawm munkarūn</b>	Q 51:25	M1	1	1	1
	Q 15:62	M2	1	1	1
	-	M3	-	-	-
	-	MED	-	-	-
<b>jund min al-samā’ OR junūd al-samāwāt OR junūd (rabbika)</b>	-	M1	-	-	-
	Q 36:28	M2	1	1	1
	-	M3	-	-	-
	Q 48:4,7; Q 74:31 <sup>199</sup>	MED	2	3	1.5
<b>rūḥ</b>	-	M1	-	-	-
	Q 19:17, 19	M2	1	1	1
	-	M3	-	-	-
	-	MED	-	-	-
<b>bashar</b>	-	M1			
	Q 36:15	M2	1	1	1
	-	M3			
	-	MED			
<b>ḥāfiẓīna</b>	Q 82:10	M1	1	1	1
	-	M2			
	Q 6:61	M3	1	1	1
	-	MED			

<sup>196</sup> Nöldeke considered this verse onwards to be a later addition to the sūrah, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 105.

<sup>197</sup> See footnote 197 above.

<sup>198</sup> The reference could plausibly be to human *rusul*, but it is not entirely clear from the context, whether angels are in fact intended here. However, this is the interpretation favoured by early Islamic exegetes, e.g., al-Maḥallī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Zamakhsharī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>199</sup> According to Nöldeke, this was a Medinan insertion to an otherwise Early Meccan *surah*, and hence included here, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 71. See footnote 226.

### 2.2.1 *ḡayf*, “Guests”

As a noun, the term *ḡayf* only appears in reference to the angelic visitors to Abraham and Lot (Q 11:78; Q 15:51, 68; Q 51:24; see Section 6.1 on this narrative), whose identity is initially unclear to Abraham, although not necessarily to the audience, who, it is presumed, have some prior knowledge of the narrative at hand.<sup>200</sup> The root *ḡ-y-f* otherwise only occurs in Q *al-Kahf* 18:77 (middle Meccan), in reference to the hospitality that is refused Moses and the Israelites. The infrequent occurrence of this term makes it hard to draw any conclusions about its usage, other than to note that it does not appear in Medinan material in any instance.

Although the Hebrew Bible clearly stresses the need to treat visitors fairly, and frowns on those who omit to fulfil their duties in this respect,<sup>201</sup> it does not describe Abraham’s (or Lot’s) visitors as guests. The situation is, however, slightly different in at least one postbiblical version of the story, in which Sarah not only identifies the men as angels (ἄγγελοι), but more specifically as the same ones who were her and Abraham’s guests at Mamre (T. Ab. [A] 6:4, [B] 6:10). The fact that the visitors are also described specifically as guests in the Qur’ān suggests that the dynamic between hosts and guests is central to the qur’ānic understanding of the narrative, and the respective characters involved. Abraham’s success in fulfilling his obligations as the former, serves to cast him in an even more positive light, as the perfect host, in-line with the consistent qur’ānic portrayal of Abraham as the original and quintessential believer, or Muslim.<sup>202</sup> This

---

<sup>200</sup> Owing to the similarities with the story in Genesis 18:1–19:29, in which the visitors are also not referred to consistently as angels, it is clear that these are the characters (i.e., angelic visitors), intended, even though they appear to Abraham and Lot in human form.

<sup>201</sup> E.g., Job 31:32; Exod 22:21, 23:9; Lev 19:10, 33, 34, 23:22, 25:35; Deut 10:18, 19, 14:29, 23:7, 24:14, 17, 19, 20, 21, 26:12, 13, 27:19; Ps 94:6; 2 Sam 12:4; Ps 146:9; Isa 16:4; Ezek 22:7, Jer 7:6, 22:3, 29; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5. The situation is similar in extrabiblical material, where the provision of hospitality is consistently set out as both an honourable act and an important duty, e.g., T. Zeb. 6:5–7; Sib. Or. 2:104, 7: 85–86; T. Job 10:1–4; T. Jac. 2:23–24; Vis. Ezra 30–31.

<sup>202</sup> E.g., Q 2:124, 130, 132, 135; Q 3:33, 67, 95; Q 4:125, 163; Q 6:74, 161; Q 9:114; Q 11:75; Q 12:38; Q 14:35; Q 16:120, 123; Q 19:41; Q 21:51; Q 22:78; Q 29:16; Q 37:83, 109; Q 38:45; Q 43:26; Q 53:37; Q 57:26; Q 60:4. In the intertestamental literature, Abraham’s hospitality is cited as evidence of his righteousness, e.g., T. Ab [A] 1:1–3, 3:6–9, 4:1–6; [B] 2:2–6, 12:13, 3:5–8, 4:10, 5:2.

narrative is examined in more detail in Section 6.1.

### 2.2.2 *rasūl/rusul; mursal(ūn), “Messenger(s)”*

The terms *rasūl/rusul/mursal(ūn)*, appear 367 times in the qur’ānic corpus. The overwhelming majority of occurrences (94 percent) would appear to indicate human messengers.<sup>203</sup> In contrast to angelic *rusul/mursalūn*, who are never described as such in the Medinan period, references to human ones increase exponentially throughout the Qur’ān. A full analysis of angelic *rusul/mursalūn* versus human ones cannot be undertaken here, but it appears that with the exception of Q 19:19<sup>204</sup> (middle Meccan), angelic messengers are only ever referred to in the plural. Unlike human *rusul*, angelic messengers do *not* bring *āyāt/bayyināt*, “signs/proofs,” a *kitāb/qur’ān*, “a book, scripture,” *tanzīl*, “revelation,” *wahy*, “revelation,” or *hudā*,

---

<sup>203</sup> As would also appear to be the case with pre-Islamic references to *rs<sup>1</sup>l*, which occurs three times in an inscription dated 548 CE, Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 123.

<sup>204</sup> Despite the reference to *rūḥanā*, “our spirit,” rather than a *malak*, in Q 19:17, owing to the clear parallels with Luke 1:26–38, verse 19 can be read as referring to an angelic messenger. See Sections 2.2.5 and 6.2.

“guidance.”<sup>205</sup> Instead, they are tasked with delivering a(n) (often, personal) message, record men’s deeds, and facilitate the movement of men’s souls away from earth upon their deaths (Q *al-An‘ām* 6:61; 7:37; see Section 4.1.7). On two occasions (Q 19:19; 11:81, late Meccan), angelic *rusul* are described as, or describe themselves as a *rasūl*, or *rusul rabbiki/a*, “(a/the) messenger(s) of your Lord” but never as a *rasūl* or *rusul (‘ind) allāh*, “(a/the) messenger(s) of/from God,” which would appear to be reserved for human *rusul*,<sup>206</sup> not including the

---

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Q 2:97, 101, 129, 151, 253; Q 3:49, 81, 86, 101, 164, 183, 184; Q 4:61, 115, 136, 164, 165; Q 5:15, 19, 32, 67, 70, 75, 83, 92, 99, 104, 109; Q 6:124, 130; Q 7:35, 43, 53, 101, 157; Q 8:20, 24, 41; Q 9:33, 59, 65, 70, 86; Q 10:13, 74; Q 13:38; Q 14:49, 11; Q 16:35; Q 17:94; Q 18:106; Q 20:47, 134; Q 21:25; Q 23:32; Q 24:54; Q 25:30; Q 28:47, 59; Q 29:18; Q 30:9, 47; Q 33:22; Q 35:25; Q 39:71; Q 40:22, 50, 70, 78, 83; Q 42:51; Q 43:29, 46; Q 44:13; Q 46:9; Q 47:32; Q 48:26, 28; Q 57:25, 27; Q 58:5; Q 61:69; Q 62:2; Q 64:6, 8, 12; Q 65:11; Q 69:40; Q 72:23; Q 81:19; Q 98:2. Upon initial examination, Q 36:13–25 appears to constitute an awkward exception to this ‘rule,’ as the *rusul* explain they have been sent to *balāgh al-mubīn* “convey a clear [message],” (v. 17) and the people accuse them, of being *illā bashar mithlunā*, “only men like us,” (v. 15). However, the sudden appearance of a man from the outskirts of the city, who exhorts the inhabitants to follow them (v. 20), suggests the city in question is the same as that in which Lot resides. This would make the *rusul* angelic, rather than human. Simon Loynes concludes that these verses constitute a retelling of Genesis 19, in which the figures *are* described as angels, and that therefore the *rusul* here can be understood as messenger angels, not prophets/human *rusul*. Otherwise, this would be the only example of a prophet/messenger bringing anything down from heaven/God, Simon P. Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur’an: A Semantic Study of the Roots n-z-l and w-h-y* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 27–28. The subsequent insistence that two messengers were strengthened by a third (v. 14), also points to a conscious rejection of the biblical claim that only two of the three messengers, who were initially sent to Abraham, continued on to Sodom and Lot. In line with this, as is discussed in more detail in Section 6.1, the Qur’ān is consistent in referring to a plurality of visitors to both Abraham and Lot. Admittedly, this does not completely resolve the slight discrepancy represented by Q 36:13–25, which is further complicated by the fact that Lot himself is also described as a *rasūl* (Q 26:162; Q 37:133; cf. Q 11:89; Q 38:13; Q 50:12–14, which identify different peoples, including Lot’s, by their (human) *rusul*). In some references to the story, in which no angels (*rusul*, or otherwise), feature, it is thus Lot who is sent to his people.

<sup>206</sup> E.g., Q 2:101; Q 6:124; Q 7:158; Q 9:61, 81, 120; Q 33:21, 53; Q 49:3, 7; Q 63:1, 5, 7; Q 91:13; Q 98:2; in reference to Moses: Q 61:5; Jesus: Q 4:157, 171; Q 61:6; and explicitly to Muhammad: Q 33:40; Q 48:29.

numerous possessive references, e.g., “his/our messenger(s).”<sup>207</sup> In Medinan material, angels are never referred to as *rusul*, even when acting as messengers (see Table 2.2 above). The absence of any references to angels as *rusul* in Medinan material is particularly striking, as references to *rusul* generally rise substantially in material from this period (see Appendix, below). It would appear that the Medinan Qur’ān had a very fixed idea, both of what an angel was (a *malak*, the term almost explicitly used to refer to an angel in Medinan material), and what a *rasūl* was (a human being, who was in no way superhuman).<sup>208</sup> This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the highest use and frequency of references to angels as *rusul* occurs in the middle and later Meccan periods (See Tables 2.2, above and 2.5, below).

### 2.2.3 *qawm munkarūn*, “A Strange, Odd, or Foreign People”

The term *qawm munkarūn*, “a strange, odd, or foreign people,” only appears twice in the Qur’ān, both in the context of the angelic visitations to Abraham (Q *al-Dhāriyāt* 51:25), and Lot (Q 15:62, see Section 6.1). In addition to the context, the qur’ānic recensions in which this term appears include several clues that point to these figures being viewed as angels. The visitors’ abstinence from food (Q 51:27–28), which appears in one other qur’ānic version of the story (Q 11:70), is a known characteristic of angelic beings, both from the Qur’ān (Q *al-Furqān* 25:7), as well as (extra)biblical material.<sup>209</sup> Before visiting Lot, who considers them *qawm munkarūn*, in Q 15:62, the angels attempt to assuage Abraham’s audible fear upon first encountering them

<sup>207</sup> E.g., *rasūlhū/rusulhū*, “his messenger(s)”: Q 2:98, 279, 285; Q 3:101, 179; Q 4:14, 100, 136, 150, 152, 171; Q 5:33, 55, 56; Q 7:158; Q 8:1, 13, 20, 46; Q 9:1, 3, 7, 16, 24, 26, 29, 33, 54, 59, 62, 63, 65, 71, 74, 80, 84, 86, 90, 91, 94, 97, 105, 107; Q 11:59; Q 14:47; Q 24:48, 50, 51, 52, 62; 33:12, 22, 29, 31, 33, 36, 57, 71; Q 48:9, 13, 17, 26, 27, 28; Q 49:1, 14, 15; Q 57:7, 19, 21; Q 57:25, 28; Q 58:4, 5, 13, 20, 22; Q 59:4, 6, 8; Q 61:9, 11; Q 63:8; Q 64:8; Q 65:8; Q 72:23; *rasūlī/rusulī*, “my messenger(s)”: Q 5:12, 111; Q 18:106; Q 58:21; *rasūlnā/rusulnā*, “our messenger(s)”: Q 5:15, 19, 32, 92; Q 10:21, 103; Q 11:69, 77; Q 17:77; Q 23:44; Q 29:31, 33; Q 34:45; Q 40:51, 70, 78; Q 43:45, 80; Q 57:25, 27; Q 64:12; sent by *allāh*: Q 3:164; Q 4:64, 79; Q 10:74; Q 13:38; Q 14:4; Q 16:36; Q 17:15, 94, 95; Q 21:25; Q 22:52; Q 23:32; Q 25:41; Q 30:47; Q 40:34; Q 42:51; Q 62:2; Q 63:1; Q 73:15.

<sup>208</sup> This distinction, and its implications, will be discussed in more detail in the section on verbal roots, Chapter 3.

<sup>209</sup> E.g., Judg 6:21–22, 13:15–16; Tob 12:19; T. Ab [A] 4:9–10. Cf. 1 En. 15:10; T. Ab [A] 4:7, [B] 4:14.

earlier in the same *sūrah* (Q 15:52–53). In Q 11:70 and Q 51:27, Abraham is only afraid of his visitors after he has observed their failure to eat. Although failure to eat food provided by a host would have been viewed as a hostile act generally, it could also have alerted Abraham to the true nature of his visitors, or led him to fear they bore him ill will.<sup>210</sup> Abraham’s fear could thus be triggered by the realisation that he is in the presence of angelic beings, rather than simply being surprised by unexpected, or potentially hostile visitors. Fear, or the expectation of fear, in the presence of an angelic(-like) being is a common, and indeed expected, reaction to encountering angels, in both biblical and extrabiblical traditions.<sup>211</sup> On the basis of these points alone, the *qawm munkarūn* could be viewed as angels even if they were removed from the context of the visitations to Abraham and Lot, as several scholars have recently concluded.<sup>212</sup> The narrative, and why the visitors should be identified as angels will be discussed in more detail in Section 6.1.

---

<sup>210</sup> As e.g., al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī note, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>211</sup>E.g., Gen 21:17; Exod 34:30; Num 22:31–35; Jos 5:13–15; Judg 6:22–23, 13:20–21; Dan 8:17, 10:12, 19; T. Jac. 2:5; 1 En. 15:1, 60:3, 106:4–6, 107:12; Sib. Or. 8:459–61; Apoc. Zeph. 6:8–9; Jos. Asen. 14:8(7)–11(11), 16:13(7); Mark 16:5–8; Matt 1:20, 28:4–5; Luke 1:12–13, 29–30, 2:9–10; Acts 27:24; *Ant.* 19:9; 4 Macc. 4:10; 2 En. [J/A] 1:7–8, 20:1–2; 4 Ez. 6:34, 10:55; T. Ab. [A] 9:5; Apoc. Ab. 10:2–5, 16:2; 3 En. 1:7–8; Hist. Rech. 4:1–7(8), 5:4–6:1, 7:11<sup>a</sup>, Joseph Witztum, ‘Thrice upon a Time: Abraham’s Guests and the Study of Intra-qur’anic Parallels’, in *The Qur’an’s Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins*, ed. Holger Zellentin (London: Routledge, 2019), 281–82; Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 32.

<sup>212</sup>Holger Zellentin, ‘The Synchronic and the Diachronic Qur’ān: *Sūrat yā sīn*, Lot’s People, and the Rabbis’, in *The Making of Religious Texts in Islam: The Fragment and the Whole*, ed. Asma Hilali and Stephen R. Burge (Berlin: Gerlach, 2019), 144; Witztum, ‘Thrice upon a Time’, 281.



The root *n-k-r* appears thirty-seven times in twenty-six *sūrahs*.<sup>213</sup> Including the references here, more than a third are from the late Meccan and Medinan periods each respectively. It describes evil(doing),<sup>214</sup> or forbids it, and contrasts it with good deeds.<sup>215</sup> It is frequently used to describe the denial or rejection of God, and/or of his messengers/message,<sup>216</sup> or even God's ensuing rejection of those guilty of this misdemeanor.<sup>217</sup> On the basis of postbiblical, but pre-Islamic explanations and expansions of the theme, Joseph Witztum concludes that the meaning of the terms *nakirahum/munkarūn*, which appear in Q 11:70; Q 15:62, and Q 51:25, was not originally a negative one in the Qur'ān.<sup>218</sup> He notes that this sense is lacking in pre-Islamic material, most notably in a homily by Jacob of Serugh, who also employs terms derived from the root *n-k-r*: e.g., *mnakrēn*, "foreign."<sup>219</sup> Although the root's meaning fits with it being an expression of the physical forms in which the angels appeared to both Abraham and Lot in Q 51:24, and Q 15:62—like humans, but not ones with whom they were familiar—in *sūrah* 11, Abraham only considers the visitors to be *nakirahum*, "strange," after they fail to eat (v. 70), which Witztum points out "emphasizes strange behavior rather than mere foreignness."<sup>220</sup> Witztum concludes that this shift in the location of the motif of foreignness, in the story as it appears in *sūrah* 11, suggests that it probably originally occurred at the point at which Abraham first encountered the angels (as per Q 51:24). At this initial

---

<sup>213</sup> Q 51:25 being part of an undated later addition to an otherwise early Meccan *sūrah* (v.24ff, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 83); Q 15:62; Q 18:74, 87; Q 21:50; Q 23:69; Q 27:41; Q 54:6, and Q 67:18 being middle Meccan; Q 11:70, Q 12:58; Q 13:36; Q 16:22, 83, 90; Q 29:29; Q 31:17, 19; Q 34:45; Q 35:27; Q 40:81, and Q 42:47 being late Meccan, although Nöldeke notes some consider verse 42 onwards, or even the whole of *sūrah* 16 to be Medinan, Nöldeke, 111; Q 22:44, 72 being late Meccan parts of an otherwise Medinan *sūrah*, Nöldeke, 158; Q 7:157, and Q 29:45 being Medinan additions to otherwise late Meccan *sūrahs*, Nöldeke, 116, 118; Q 3:104, 110, 114; Q 9:67, 71, 112; Q 22:41; Q 24:21; Q 58:2, and Q 65:8 being Medinan; Q 5:79 being largely Medinan.

<sup>214</sup> E.g., Q 5:79; Q 9:67; Q 18:74; Q 24:21; Q 29:29.

<sup>215</sup> E.g., Q 3:104, 110, 114; Q 7:157; Q 9:71, 112; Q 16:90; Q 22:41; Q 29:45; Q 31:17.

<sup>216</sup> Form IV: e.g., Q 13:36; Q 16:22, 83; Q 21:50; Q 22:72; Q 23:69; Q 40:81; Q 42:47.

<sup>217</sup> E.g., Q 22:44; Q 34:45; Q 35:26; Q 67:18.

<sup>218</sup> Witztum, 'Thrice upon a Time', 285.

<sup>219</sup> Witztum, 285.

<sup>220</sup> Witztum, 283.

stage, it had not yet acquired a negative meaning, but the otherwise negative connotations the term has in the Qur'ān perhaps influenced its subsequent usage in Q 15:62 and Q 11:70.<sup>221</sup>

Unlike the Bible, at no point does the Qur'ān refer to either Abraham's or Lot's visitors as *mal'āika*, and, in contrast to Abraham, Lot views his visitors negatively from the outset as *qawm munkarūn*, "a strange/foreign people" (Q 15:62). Despite this, the reason he gives as to why the people of Sodom should leave them alone (Q 11:78), is founded on his relationship to them as their host, which he does by referring to them as his *ḡayf*, "guests" (see Section 2.2.1). This leaves the question open as to whether Lot, by this stage, had come to recognise his visitors' true identities, or was merely acting in-line with cultural dictates that required him to extend his protection to all visitors. However, the latter explanation does not fit with his failure to offer the visitors any hospitality upon first encountering them, when he presumably saw them simply as *qawm munkarūn*, and yet was distressed at their arrival (Q 11:77;<sup>222</sup> Q *al-'Ankabūt* 29:33).

#### 2.2.4 *jund min al-samā'/junūd al-samāwāt/junūd rabbika*, "Host(s)/Force(s)"

These constructs only appear four times in the entire qur'ānic corpus: The two Medinan (Q *al-Fath* 48:4, 7), references are to the "hosts/forces of the heavens *and earth*," so we can surely read angels into these all-encompassing expressions of God's overlordship over all forces in the heavens, and on the earth.<sup>223</sup> The single reference, which appears in an early Meccan *sūrah*, but which Nöldeke considered a Medinan insertion:<sup>224</sup> Q 74:31, to the "hosts/forces of your Lord," is less universal, but the reference to angels (*malā'ika*), guarding hellfire earlier in the same verse, means the *junūd*, "hosts/forces," could logically refer back to them, as it appears that nobody (except God), knows the number or extent of either. A number of early

---

<sup>221</sup> Witztum, 285–86.

<sup>222</sup> As e.g., al-Rāzī concludes, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>223</sup> See also Q 13:15; Q 16:48; Q 17:44; Q 22:18, and Q 24:41, which refer to all "beings/things," in the heavens and the earth, and which must indirectly include angels but less explicitly so. Al-Ṭabrisī understands the *junūd* in Q 48:7 as prophets, Nasr.

<sup>224</sup> Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 71.

Islamic scholars also interpreted the *junūd* here as angels.<sup>225</sup> The middle Meccan reference to the “host/force from heaven” (Q *Yā Sin* 36:28), potentially points more directly to angelic beings. The allusion to the destruction of Sodom (verses 13–29, see Section 6.1), and the use of the verbal root *n-z-l* (on which see Section 3.1.1), to describe the manner in which they would have been sent down, further suggests the reference is to angels. As is discussed in more detail in Section 6.1, despite not referring to them as *malā’ika*, the Qur’ān clearly wishes to make the angelic nature of Abraham’s and Lot’s guests an unequivocal part of this narrative.

However, as discussed (see footnote 206), Q 36:13–25 represents an anomaly to this trend, because it does not highlight the messengers’ angelic natures—e.g., by portraying them as abstaining from food—and angelic *rusul* are otherwise not sent to *balāgh al-mubīn* “convey a clear [message],” as they are in Q 36:17. The townspeople furthermore accuse them of being nothing *illā bashar mithlunā*, “only men like us,” in verse 15, suggesting they are not, in fact angelic *rusul*, or at least not perceived as such. Leaving this aside, Q 36:13–25 does seem to stress that the destruction of Sodom was *not* due to *angelic* intervention.<sup>226</sup> Rather, the destruction was brought about by a *ṣayḥat wāḥidah*, “a single shout,” (v. 29), presumably upon God’s command—although he could have sent down (angelic) forces from heaven, their assistance was not required.<sup>227</sup> Thus, the *jund min al-samā’*, “host/force of/from heaven,” can definitively be seen as describing angels in Q 36:28 too. The only other occasions when the root

---

<sup>225</sup> E.g., al-Baghawī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Ṭabarī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>226</sup> Although the use of the first-person plural in Q 29:34 could be construed as a continuation of the angels’ speech in the previous verses, given the parallels with Genesis 18 and 19, where it is also often not clear whether it is the angels collectively, just one of them, or God, who is speaking, it makes more sense to view this verse as either God talking through the angels, or as a shift to the *plural majestis*. Thus, it is God, and not the angels, who are going to bring/send down punishment on the people of Lot. Unlike their (extra)biblical counterparts (e.g., Gen 19:3; 2 Sam 24:16; Isa 37:36; 2 Kgs 19:35; 1 En. 10:4–6, 9, 12, 15–16, 20, 13:1–2, 20:4, 40:7, 54:2, 6, 55:3, 56:1, 63:1, 66:1, 88:1–3; Ascen. Isa. 1:5; Apoc. Zeph. B, 1–2; 2 En .10:3 [J/A]; 3 Bar. 16:2 [Slav.], 16:2–3 [Gk.]; 2 Bar. 66:7–8; T. Adam 4:6; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 4:22; 3 En. 44:2–3), qur’ānic angels would not appear to be authorised or endowed with the power to enact such things. Cf. Q 36:29, where the destruction is brought about by a *ṣayḥat wāḥida*, a “single shout,” suggesting divine, rather than angelic, orchestrated destruction.

<sup>227</sup> A view favoured by some medieval exegetes, such as ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

*j-n-d* appears to refer to heavenly (or at least, not earthly), creatures, are in Q 26:95 (middle Meccan), and Q *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:39 (later Meccan), where the reference is to *Iblīs*' hosts, or entourage, sometimes said to be composed solely of *jinn*,<sup>228</sup> sometimes to also include men;<sup>229</sup> and Q *al-Naml* 27:17, 18, and 37 (middle Meccan), where it describes Solomon's hosts of *jinn*, men, and birds.<sup>230</sup> In all qur'ānic contexts, the sense is almost exclusively militant, rather than liturgical, i.e. God's "hosts," praising him. This would appear to stand in contrast to (extra)biblical material, where the former is mainly indicated or implied by the use of the title "lord/God of hosts," an epithet that has no counterpart in the Qur'ān.<sup>231</sup>

As noted, the phrase *junūd al-samāwāt wa-al-'arḍ*, "hosts/forces of the heavens and earth," has the distinction of being the only term besides *malak/malā'ika*, used to refer to angels in Medinan material (see Table 2.5). The use of this term could be due to the fact that the actions of the *junūd* extended beyond the remit of *malak/malā'ika*, and/or because the

---

<sup>228</sup> E.g., Al-Qurṭubī, Nasr.

<sup>229</sup> E.g., al-Ṭabarī, Nasr.

<sup>230</sup> E.g., Q 37:173 (middle Meccan), Q 9:26, 40, and Q 33:9 (Medinan), refer to God's (presumably) heavenly forces through the use of the root *j-n-d*, but whether or not these are angels is unclear, hence why they have not been included in the above. More often, nouns derived from the root *j-n-d* refer to human forces, such as those of Pharaoh (Q 85:11, early Meccan; Q 20:78; Q 44:24, middle Meccan; Q 10:90; Q 28:6, 8, 39, 40, late Meccan; Q 51:40, an undated later addition to an otherwise early Meccan *sūrah*, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 83); the Unbelievers (Q 19:75; Q 36:75; Q 38:11; Q 67:20, middle Meccan, often as opposed to those of God); indeterminate forces attacking the Believers (Q 33:9, Medinan), and those of the *Thamūd* (Q 85:11, early Meccan).

<sup>231</sup> Although the use of this title is not limited to military contexts in the Hebrew Bible (Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 101), in which the titles *yhwh/ʾēlōhē ʿābāʾôt* appear most often in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Psalms, Zechariah, and Malachi, while the New Testament includes only isolated occurrences: Rom 9:29 and Jas 5:4. In both New Testament references, the Greek κύριος/κυρίου σαβαώθ, is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew *ʿābāʾôt*. A brief survey of extrabiblical material revealed relatively few occurrences of this title, e.g., 3 En. 40:2 (Hebrew); as noted by O.S. Wintermute ("Apocalypse of Zephaniah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 503), "[i]n the pre-exilic period this expression identified Yahweh as the God of the Armies (Hosts) of Israel, but by the time of the Exile "the Hosts" were identified with heavenly beings," which would also appear to be the case in the Qur'ān. For more discussion of the liturgical aspect of angelic activity, see Sections 3.1.4 and 4.1.1. For their military role, see Section 4.1.4.

latter were envisaged as being (mainly) based in heaven. Medinan references describe active angelic support in the present and the *junūd* thus necessarily operate within the earthly sphere. References to the Believers being granted victory (Q 48:1), favoured, guided (Q 48:2), helped by God (Q 48:3), and increased in faith (Q 48:4), while the *munāfiqūn*, “hypocrites,” and *mushrikūn*, “associators, idolaters,” are to be punished, cursed, subject to God’s wrath, and destined for hell (Q 48:6), suggests both practical, and spiritual support, in the Believers’ earthly battles with the Unbelievers.<sup>232</sup> It fits with what David Marshall has identified as a shift in the Medinan period, whereby the punishment of Unbelievers is no longer deferred to a future eschatological end but also enacted in the present, by the Believers themselves.<sup>233</sup> The otherwise total preference in the Medinan period for the term *malak* suggests a crystallisation of the concept of an angel as a heavenly messenger, and a desire, or need, to distinguish them from human (earthly) ones, as the term *rasūl* is now only applied to the latter.

#### 2.2.5 *rūḥ* “Spirit”

Despite the basic structural and narrative parallels with Luke 1:26–38, where Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, that the use of the term *rūḥ* “spirit,” in *sūrah* 19 refers to an angel, is by no means clear; not least because the two figures are distinct in Luke. In the only other description of the annunciation (Q 3:42, 45, Medinan), a plurality of angels speak to Mary, while the *rūḥ*, “spirit,” from Q 19:17 credits himself with a plausibly angelic mission in Q 19:19: that of being a/the *rasūl rabbiki*, “a/the messenger of your Lord.” However, in contrast to Luke, which distinguishes between the roles of the messenger (Gabriel), and agent (the Holy Spirit), of Jesus’ conception, Q *al-Anbiyā’* 21:91 (middle Meccan), and Q 66:12 (Medinan), appear to assign both

---

<sup>232</sup> Although medieval Islamic scholars read verse 1 as referring either to the conquest of Mecca (e.g., al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī), or the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (e.g., ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī). Al-Ṭabarī reads the *junūd* in verse 4 as helpers whom God sends down to support the Believers against their enemies, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>233</sup> David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 152–85.

roles to the latter.<sup>234</sup> This narrative is analysed in detail in Section 6.2.

In addition to the references above, the term *rūḥ* appears a further nineteen times in eighteen *sūrahs*. It otherwise refers to the spirit:

- standing with the angels before God (Q *al-Naba'* 78:38, early Meccan);
- descending along with the angels with God's permission,<sup>235</sup>
- or being sent down upon whom God wills;<sup>236</sup>
- ascending along with the angels to God (Q *al-Ma'ārij* 70:4, early Meccan);
- potentially bringing the revelation of the Qur'ān;<sup>237</sup>
- the creation of Adam;<sup>238</sup>
- as being from the *amr* of the Lord, the meaning of which is unclear<sup>239</sup> (Q *al-Isrā'* 17:85, middle Meccan);
- strengthening Jesus,<sup>240</sup>
- or men (Q *al-Mujādilah* 58:22, Medinan),

---

<sup>234</sup> Q 21:91 and Q 66:12 describe God (implied), breathing (*n-f-kh*), his *rūḥ* into Mary, suggesting it is through his *rūḥ* that she conceived, rather than that this *rūḥ* simply told her she would bear a son, a view held by e.g., ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī. Several scholars also interpret the *rūḥ* in Q 19:19 as the agent of Jesus' conception, and not just as the messenger, who announced his birth (e.g., al-Bayḍāwī, al-Rāzī, and al-Zamakhsharī), Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>235</sup> Q 97:4, thought by some to be a later addition to an otherwise early Meccan *sūrah* (e.g., Régis Blachère, *Le coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947), 81).

<sup>236</sup> Q 16:2; Q 40:15; Q 42:52, late Meccan.

<sup>237</sup> Q 26:193, middle Meccan; Q 16:102, late Meccan.

<sup>238</sup> Q 15:29; Q 38:72, middle Meccan; Q 32:9, later Meccan.

<sup>239</sup> This is variously translated as *purpose, matter, question, case, plan, decision, duty, affair, order, decision, command, authority, deed, governance, judgment, decree, precautions, tale, story, case, task, accord, bidding, commission, state, conduct, situation, purpose* and *errand*, almost always in connection with God. In Q 17:85, the implication is that the *rūḥ* is subservient to God, only descending upon his command, as in Q 40:15. However, in Q 97:4, in which the *rūḥ* descends along with the angels, it cannot have this meaning, but rather, refers to the tasks they carry out after having descended.

<sup>240</sup> Q 2:87, 253; Q 5:110, Medinan.

- or describing Jesus himself (Q 4:171, Medinan).

From this, it is clear that *rūḥ*, “spirit,” is not an interchangeable term for an angel, in the sense of a *malak*.<sup>241</sup> The use of this term in Q 19:17 reflects both the creative power involved in Jesus’ conception, which can only stem from God, as well as angelomorphic Christological beliefs, concerning the identity and nature of the agent of Jesus’ conception. This is discussed in more detail in Section 6.2. The relationship between the *rūḥ* and angels is examined in Section 5.1.1.

### 2.2.6 *bashar*, “Humans”

Although term *bashar*, “humans,” is used to refer to figures, who, it can be inferred, are angelic in nature, as in Q 36:15, it is mainly used in the context of the dismissal of a (human) messenger’s authority by his opponents, on the grounds of his evident mortality.<sup>242</sup> These opponents often contrast those, whom they regard as mere humans, with those who *have* received revelation.<sup>243</sup> Humans are furthermore negatively compared with heavenly beings,<sup>244</sup> and/or with something that has a clear divine, or heavenly, origin.<sup>245</sup> That angels could and did

---

<sup>241</sup> Although some scholars read Q 78:38 (e.g., ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī), Q 97:4 (e.g., ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabarī), Q 40:15 (e.g., al-Ṭabrisī), Q 42:52 (e.g., al-Qurṭubī), Q 70:4 (e.g., ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Ṭabarī), Q 26:193 (e.g., al-Ṭabarī), Q 16:102 (e.g., al-Rāzī), Q 17:85 (e.g., al-Zamakhsharī), Q 2:87 (e.g., ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī), Q 58:22 (e.g., al-Qurṭubī), as referring to the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, Nasr, *The Study Quran*. See Sections 5.1.1 and 7.1 for more discussion of this.

<sup>242</sup> E.g., Q 11:27; Q 14:10; Q 23:24, 33, 34, 47; Q 26:154, 186; Q 54:24; Q 74:25; cf. Q 6:91; Q 16:103; Q 17:93, 4; Q 18:110; Q 41:6.

<sup>243</sup> Such as *rusul*, “messengers,” Q 14:11; Q 17:94; Q 64:6.

<sup>244</sup> I.e., *malā’ika*, Q 12:31; Q 23:24; cf. Q 23:33, where human nature is implicitly contrasted with angelic, *vis-à-vis* eating and drinking (or not).

<sup>245</sup> Such as *tanzīl*, “revelation,” or something that is sent down (*n-z-l*), or inspired (*w-ḥ-y*), by God: Q 6:91; Q 18:110; Q 36:15; Q 41:6; a *kitāb*, “a book/scripture”: Q 17:93; *hudā*, “guidance”: Q 17:94; or an *āya*, “a sign”: Q 26:154. The description of the *rūḥ* in Q 19:17, as appearing to Mary, *basharān*, “as a man,” is not included here, as it alludes to a temporary physical metamorphosis, and is clearly not an interchangeable term for an angel or (the) Spirit.

appear in the guise of men, and were not immediately recognised as such, is frequently attested throughout the Hebrew Bible, where angels are frequently referred to as men.<sup>246</sup> This possible ambiguity continued in the intertestamental, and postbiblical periods, where the belief that angels could “temporarily acquire human form when appearing on earth” was also a common feature of many extrabiblical texts.<sup>247</sup> In the New Testament, despite angels being described as πνεύματα, “spirits,” (e.g., Heb 1:7), they are also said to wear clothes, and/or appear as (young) men.<sup>248</sup> Jesus points out that since he has “flesh and bones,” he cannot be a spirit (Luke 24:37–39).<sup>249</sup> Any lingering doubts the disciples may have had about Jesus’ postresurrection nature are conclusively allayed when he eats a piece of fish in their presence (Luke 24:41–43), implying that “eating is generally a human activity, not one in which incorporeal beings partake.”<sup>250</sup> Luke is, however, the only New Testament writer who appears to have accepted the widespread tradition, that angels did not, and could not, eat.<sup>251</sup> In including this anecdote, Luke presumably intended to assert Christ’s humanity, on the grounds that he was neither an angel, nor a spirit.<sup>252</sup> The exceptions to angels eating constituted by Genesis 18:5, and 19:3, consequently caused significant theological discomfort, as is discussed in more detail in Section 6.1.

The Qur’ān accepts and stresses a number of common beliefs about angels’ characteristics and natures: they are neither female, nor God’s offspring (Q 17:40;

---

<sup>246</sup> See footnote 85.

<sup>247</sup> Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 83. E.g., Tob 5:4–17; T. Levi 8:2; 1 En. 17:1; Tg. Neof.; Jos. Asen. 14:1(2), 3(4), 8(7)–9(9); Gen. Rab. 77:2; Pr. Jos. frag. A, 1; 2 En. 1:4 [J]/[A]; 4 Ezra 2:42–8, 13:22–26; T. Ab. [A] 2:2–4; 3:5; 5:3–4; 6:1–6; [B] 4:2; 5:5; Apoc. Ab. 10:4; T. Isaac 2:3, 10; Tg. Onq. Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:5, 8, 10, 12, 16; Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 19:5, 8, 10, 12, 16, 32:25, 37:15; Tg.-Neo. Gen. 18:16, 22, 19:5, 8, 10, 12, 16; cf. Herm., where the angel appears as a shepherd.

<sup>248</sup> E.g., Matt 28:3; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; John 20:12; Acts 1:10, 10:30).

<sup>249</sup> Heijne, ‘Angels’.

<sup>250</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 181, 192. Cf. the stress that Mary and Jesus ate food in Q 5:75, the implication being that they were therefore fully human.

<sup>251</sup> E.g., Judg 6:21–2, 13:15–16; Tob 12:19; Gen. Rab. 48:11–24; T. Ab. [A] 4:9–10.

<sup>252</sup> John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1974), 93.



Q *al-Ṣaffāt* 37:150; Q *al-Zukhruf* 43:19), although it does not follow that they are male, rather they have no gender, and thus no need, or ability to reproduce.<sup>253</sup> Unlike humans they neither need to, nor can, eat and drink (Q 11:69–70; Q 25:7; Q 51:27–28), but they can take on the appearance of humans (Q 6:9; Q 19:17). In describing angels as men, the Qur’ān is therefore following a long tradition whereby angels could temporarily appear (usually, but not always, on earth), as human beings, but without taking on any other normal characteristics associated with men. If anything, the Qur’ān interprets the tradition more strictly, as it does not allow for any exceptions to these rules.

### 2.2.7 ḥafizūn, “Guardians”

Although neither of the references in this category refer directly to angels, Q 6:61 goes on to describe God’s *rusul*, “messengers,” *taking* (w-f-y) people at the time of their deaths, which appears to mean that they facilitate the movement of people’s souls between the earthly and celestial spheres. This task is usually assigned to *malā’ika*,<sup>254</sup> and once to *rusul* (Q 7:37, late Meccan), but seemingly never to non-angelic *rusul*. We would also not expect human *rusul* to be able to move between the earthly and heavenly spheres, presumably a necessary skill in this context, so we can be confident that it is angels who are referred to here. Q *al-Infīṭār* 82:10, again refers to *ḥāfizīn* “guardians,” and the *sūrah* goes on to describe their activities or tasks, namely *writing* (Q 82:11), and *knowing* (Q 82:12), which sounds very much like the image of the

---

<sup>253</sup> As per Gen. Rab. 8, 11, which explains that angels do not procreate because they were created in the image and likeness of God. Man constitutes an exception to this rule, having some of the attributes of both higher (i.e., angels), and lower (i.e., animals), beings. The assertion, in Q 13:38, that *rusul* have been appointed wives and children, is another reason why angelic and human *rusul* are not alike, Mounir Arbach and Mohammed Maraqtan, ‘Notes on the Root L’K “to Send” and the Term Ml’k “Messenger” in the Ancient South Arabian Inscriptions’, *Semitica et Classica* 11 (2018): 253.

<sup>254</sup> E.g., Q 16:28, 32; Q 32:11, late Meccan; Q 4:97; Q 8:50; Q 47:27, Medinan.

angelic instructor-teacher common in so-called “apocalyptic” texts.<sup>255</sup> The roles of “guardians” and “teachers” will be discussed in more detail in the sections on angelic roles (Sections 4.1.6 and 4.1.10).

### 2.2.8 Summary

The above analysis has shown that there was a considerable increase in the use of terms other than *malak/malā’ika* to refer to angels between the early and middle Meccan periods (rising from 5, to 17 percent of all angelic references, see Table 2.3, below).

---

<sup>255</sup> E.g., Dan 7:16, 8:16–19, 9:21–22, 10:14; 1 En. 1:2, 21:5, 25:1, 52:3–5, 68:1, 71:3–4, 72:1, 74:2, 75:3, 79:1–6, 80:1, 81:1, 82:7, 93:2; Ascen. Isa. 7:4–5; 2 En. 22:11 [J]/[A], 23:3–4 [J]/[A]; 4 Ezra 4:3–4, 5:32, 7:49, 10:33; 3 Bar. 1:4, 10:1 [SL]/[G]; Hist. Rech. 1:3; Herm e.g., Vis. 5.5 (25.5), Man. 6:1.1 (35.1), Para. 5.3.2 (56.2), 5.4.2 (57.2), Para. 9.3.4 (90.4).

**Table 2.3**      *Number and Percentages of References to Angels in the Qur'ān Other Than malak/malā'ika*

Period	<i>Sūrahs</i> containing references other than <i>malak/malā'ika</i>	% of all <i>sūrahs</i> which refer to angels	Verses containing references other than <i>malak/malā'ika</i>	% of <u>all</u> verses which refer to angels	Frequency of references other than <i>malak/malā'ika</i> per <i>sūrah</i> by period
<b>M1</b>	3	5	3	2	1
<b>M2</b>	10	17	17	14	1.7
<b>M3</b>	8	13	13	11	1.6
<b>MED</b>	2	3	3	2	1.5
<b>Total</b>	23	38	36	29	Average = 1.5

This goes hand in hand with a similar increase over the same periods, in the number of references to angels in general (rising from 9 to 34 percent of all references, see Table 2.4 below). See also Table 2.5, which compares references to *malak/malā'ika* and angels referred to by other terms.

**Table 2.4**      *References to Angels in The Qur'ān*

Period	<i>Sūrahs</i> containing references to angels	% of <i>sūrahs</i> containing references to angels	Verses containing references to angels	% of verses containing references to angels	Average frequency of all angelic references per <i>sūrah</i>
<b>M1</b>	10	17	11	9	1
<b>M2</b>	21	35	42	34	2
<b>M3</b>	19	32	37	30	2
<b>MED</b>	10	17	34	27	3.4
<b>Total</b>	60	100	124	100	Average = 1.2

By the late Meccan period, however, the percentage of all references to angels decreases slightly, to around a third, and then remains fairly consistent into the Medinan period. The use of terms other than *malak/malā'ika* in the late Meccan period (see Table 2.3) decreases by about 20 percent compared to the middle Meccan period (down from 14 to 11 percent). This is not matched by a corresponding increase in references to *malak/malā'ika*, which remain fairly stable at around a third in each of these periods (see Table 2.1). By the Medinan period, the overall percentage of *sūrahs* containing references to angels again decreases to levels consistent with the early Meccan period (17 percent, Table 2.4). And yet, Medinan material exhibits the highest average frequency, both of references to angels by terms other than *malak/malā'ika* per *sūrah* (four, which is four times that of material from the earliest Meccan period), and of all references (3.4, more than three times that of material from the earliest Meccan period, see Tables 2.1 and 2.4). The Medinan *sūrahs* also have a frequency of references to angels by terms other than *malak/malā'ika* that is only marginally lower than levels in both the earliest and middle Meccan periods (see Table 2.3). In contrast to the earliest Meccan period, a preference for the term(s) *malak/malā'ika* to describe angels can be detected, with only 2 percent of all angelic references falling into this category, and being Medinan (as opposed to a high of 14 percent in the middle Meccan period, see Table 2.3). This is paralleled by a corresponding preference for the terms *malak/malā'ika* (35 percent of all such references, see Table 2.1). A chronological decrease in the variety of terms used to refer to angels can also be seen, particularly a sudden drop in the Medinan period, which correlates with the increased preference for the term *malak/malā'ika* at this point, as discussed below (see Table 2.5). It should be stressed, however, that some references are so few in number, it is hard to draw any firm conclusions regarding their usage.

**Table 2.5**     *References Other Than malak/malā'ika to Angels as Percentages of All Such Terms by Period*

Term	<i>ḍayf</i>		<i>r-s-l</i>		<i>qawm</i>		<i>jund/junūd</i>		<i>rūḥ</i>		<i>bashar</i>		<i>ḥafizūn</i>	
Period	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>	<i>SŪRAHS</i>	<i>VERSES</i>
<b>M1</b>	25	25	25	25	25	25							25	25
<b>M2</b>	15	15	46	55	8	5	8	5	8	10	8	5		
<b>M3</b>	17	11	71	88									17	11
<b>MED</b>							15	15						
<b>Total %</b>	15	14	44	54	7	5	12	11	4	6	4	3	7	5

Table 2.5 shows that the term other than *malak/malā'ika*, that appears most often is *rusul*, “messenger,” accounting for around half of all references other than those that use *malak/malā'ika*. This also shows that the use of the term *rusul* was at its peak in the middle and late Meccan periods, rising from around half, to more than two thirds of references in those periods respectively, before suddenly disappearing in the Medinan period. In contrast, the late Meccan period was also characterised by a big decrease in the range of terms used to refer to angels. As was discussed in Section 2.2.4, it is striking that only one term besides *malak/malā'ika* appears in material from the Medinan period: *jund/junūd min al-samā'/samāwāt* “the host(s)/force(s) of heaven,” and the Medinan references clearly echo the Meccan ones.

It has already been shown that although angels could be referred to as *rusul*, the role they played was very different from that of human *rusul* like Noah or Muhammad, who made it clear they were not angels, even if this is what their audiences expected.<sup>256</sup> While a full discussion of human versus angelic *rusul* cannot be undertaken here, the distinction appears to be two-fold: first, in terms of nature (*mortal* versus *angelic*; *physical* versus *spiritual*), and second, in terms of purpose and remit (“simple” *messengers* versus *teachers*). Angelic *rusul* are not only able to, but must generally travel between the heavenly and earthly spheres, in order to transmit a message, they bring with them. In contrast, human *rusul* remain within the earthly sphere, where they receive the message, or revelation, they have been tasked with delivering.<sup>257</sup> The message of an angelic *rasūl* is simply that, while that of human *rusul*, is more

---

<sup>256</sup> E.g., Q 6:8, 50, 158; Q 11:12, 31; Q 15:7; Q 23:24; Q 25:7, 21; Q 41:14; Q 43:53. Such an expectation would be both logical and reasonable given the background of Gen 18–19, and Luke 1–2, for example. See also footnotes 45 and 100, and Section 2.2.2.

<sup>257</sup> There are numerous examples where something, usually (implied) revelation, a book, or scripture (but not “signs,” as this term does not always refer to revelation, scripture, or a book), is sent down, sent, or given to individuals by God: e.g., Q 2:4, 53, 213; Q 3:7; Q 4:105, 113, 136; Q 5:46, 48, 67; Q 6:19, 89, 91, 154; Q 7:144; Q 10:2, 94, 109; Q 11:110; Q 12:3; Q 13:1; Q 14:1; Q 16:64, 89; Q 17:2, 102; Q 18:1, 27; Q 19:30; Q 20:2; Q 21:7, 48; Q 23:49; Q 25:1, 32, 35; Q 28:43; Q 29:45, 47, 51; Q 32:23; Q 33:2; Q 34:6; Q 35:31; Q 38:29; Q 39:2, 41; Q 40:53; Q 41:45; Q 42:7, 52; Q 43:43; Q 46:9; Q 47:2; Q 53:10; Q 57:25, 27; Q 76:23.

akin to teaching and constitutes scripture, or a book.<sup>258</sup> This is never the case with the “message” brought by an angelic *rasūl*. Human *rusul* are also often described as *nabbiyūn*, “prophets,” although the former appear “to be somewhat more elevated,” than the latter, whether or not the Qur’ān really distinguishes between the two, remains the subject of debate.<sup>259</sup> Crucially, the term is never applied to angels, the nature of which would prevent them from being prophets, who are all descended from Adam (e.g., Q 29:27; Q *al-Ḥadīd* 57:26). The post-qur’ānic understanding of a *rasūl* as receiving the message he brought, via the mediation of an angel, would also make it difficult for an angelic *rasūl* to be the same as a human one.<sup>260</sup> The difference between human and angelic *rusul* is thus not simply a case of two different figures playing the same role but of two different roles altogether. Although the

---

<sup>258</sup> E.g., Q 2:53, 87, 101, 129, 151, 213; Q 3:3, 7, 48, 81, 164, 184; Q 4:105, 113, 136; Q 5:15, 44, 48, 110; Q 6:91, 92, 154; Q 7:2; Q 11:17, 110; Q 13:1, 36; Q 14:1; Q 16:44, 64, 89; Q 17:2, 55; Q 18:1, 27; Q 19:12, 30; Q 23:49; Q 25:35; Q 28:43, 49; Q 28:86; Q 29:45, 47, 51; Q 32:23; Q 35:25, 31; Q 38:29; Q 39:2, 41; Q 40:53, 70; Q 41:45; Q 42:15, 52; Q 46:4, 12; Q 53:36; Q 57:25; Q 62:2; Q 87:19; Q 98:2.

<sup>259</sup> Uri Rubin, ‘Prophets and Prophethood’, in *EQ*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2004); A. H. Mathias Zahniser, ‘Messenger’, in *EQ*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington DC: Brill, 2003). E.g., many historical figures are described as both *rusul* and *nabbiyūn*, e.g., Noah Q 7:61; Q 9:70; Q 10:74; Q 14:9; Q 25:37; Q 26:107; Q 40:5, and Q 4:163; Q 6:83–89; Q 19:58; Q 33:7; Q 57:26–7; Abraham Q 9:70; Q 57:26–27, and Q 2:136; Q 3:84; Q 4:163; Q 6:83–89; Q 19:41, 49, 58; Q 29:27; Q 33:7; Q 57:27; Lot Q 7:101 (although this could refer to the angelic messengers), Q 26:162, and Q 6:83–89; *Isma‘īl* is described as being both a messenger and a prophet in the same verse, Q 19:54, as well as a just a prophet Q 2:136; Q 3:84; Q 6:83–89; and Q 4:163 Joseph Q 12:50; Q 40:34, and Q 6:83–89; Moses Q 2:87, 108, 253; Q 3:84; Q 7:104; Q 20:47, 96; Q 26:16, 27; Q 43:46; Q 44:17, 18; Q 61:5; Q 69:10; Q 73:15–16, and Q 2:136; Q 4:164; Q 6:83–89; Q 33:7, even on one occasion in the same verse: Q 19:51; Aaron Q 20:47; Q 26:16, and Q 4:163; Q 6:83–89; Q 19:53; David Q 2:251–253; and Q 4:163; Q 6:83–89; Q 17:55; and Jesus Q 2:87, 253; Q 3:49; Q 4:157, 171; Q 5:75, 111; Q 57:27; Q 61:6, and Q 3:84; Q 4:163; Q 6:83–89; Q 19:30; Q 33:7. Q 7:157 refers to “the messenger, the unlettered prophet,” while the messenger (by implication Muhammad), is subsequently referred to as a prophet in the same verse on a number of occasions: Q 7:158; Q 9:61; Q 33:40, 53, demonstrating that while messengership did not make one a prophet (the non-biblical messengers in the Qur’ān are *only* referred to as *rusul*: Q 7:75, 77; Q 9:70; Q 11:59; Q 14:9; Q 26:123, 141), and not all prophets are described messengers (although this omission does not amount to a denial), messengership and prophethood, were unequivocally connected in some way.

<sup>260</sup> Rubin, ‘Prophets and Prophethood’.

defining characteristics (and indeed, requirements), of human *rusul* are their human nature and the bringing of a “message” (i.e., revealed scripture),<sup>261</sup> the role of a *rasūl* is not the defining characteristic of an angel, (as was discussed in Section 1.1). If it were, not only would references to angels as *rusul* be superfluous, but the term(s) *malak/malā’ika* would have had to have either retained, or somehow regained the original Semitic root meaning of “one who is sent,” in the Medinan period. Otherwise, Medinan references to *malak/malā’ika* as messengers, would make little sense. The three-fold increase in the number of references to *malak/malā’ika* between the early and middle Meccan periods, which then remains stable into the late Meccan period (see Table 2.1), points to the increasing importance of this term, regardless of the role played by angels. This is, of course, partly due to an overall increase in angelic references in general, but it remains the case that references to *malak/malā’ika* account for the majority of angelic references in all periods, with the high points being in the early Meccan and Medinan periods, rather than only in, or towards the latter (see Table 2.5).

If, as appears to be the case, and following Burge’s hypothesis,<sup>262</sup> by the Medinan period (at the latest), angels were already understood as heavenly beings, who could, but did not automatically, or always act as messengers. This would mean that, at some point prior to this, possibly before the advent of the Qur’ān, the root *m-l-k* had become divorced from its original Semitic root meaning of “to send.”<sup>263</sup> This is in contrast to the Hebrew Bible, where humans are also referred to as *mal’ākīm*,<sup>264</sup> which shows that the biblical understanding of a *mal’āk* was not unequivocally of a heavenly being. From the north-west Semitic root *l’-k*, the noun is generally considered to have entered Arabic through Christian sources such as Gə’əz *mal’ak/malə’ak*, or Syriac *malakā*.<sup>265</sup> The more recent discovery of epigraphic evidence has led a minority to doubt

---

<sup>261</sup> See footnote 258.

<sup>262</sup> Burge, ‘The Angels in *sūrat al-malā’ika*’, 52.

<sup>263</sup> Bowersock locates this disassociation at some indeterminate time in the distant past, in the same way that the original meaning behind ἄγγελος has been lost in modern Greek, Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 102.

<sup>264</sup> See the latter half of footnote 49.

<sup>265</sup> Reynolds, ‘Angels’; Burge, ‘The Angels in *sūrat al-malā’ika*’, 50–52; Arbach and Maraqtan, ‘Notes on the Root L’K “to Send” and the Term Ml’k “Messenger”’, 253.



this however, and to suggest that the term *malak* may in fact be genuinely Arabic.<sup>266</sup> Arbach and Maraqtan conclude that it is possible that the qur'ānic term *malā'ika* was known in North and South Arabia on the eve of Islam, and that it was in fact adopted from Ancient South Arabian.<sup>267</sup> However, although pre-Islamic references to *ml'k/ml'kt/Ml'k<sup>m</sup>* highlight the root meaning “to send,” they do not confer the messenger in question with any heavenly or supernatural qualities. In Christian Gə'əz, however, the use of *mal'ak/malə'ak* to refer to a “divine messenger,” is attested in a citation from Psalm 35:4–5 (*Eth.* 34:4–5), in an inscription, which dates from around 550 CE, even if it is subsequently sometimes also used to refer to human messengers.<sup>268</sup> In Mandaic, it is translated as “spirit.”<sup>269</sup>

In Medinan material, we find five references to *malā'ikatahū*, “his angels,” i.e., God's.<sup>270</sup> With the exception of Q *al-Naḥl* 16:2 (late Meccan), which also refers to angels in this way, God's relationship to them in Mecca is otherwise described as their being *rusulnā*, “our messengers,”<sup>271</sup> *rūḥanā*, “our spirit” (Q 19:17), or *rusul rabbika/rasūl rabbiki*, “the messenger(s) of your Lord” (Q 11:81 and Q 19:19, as discussed). The preference for the terms *malak/malā'ika* to refer angels in the Medinan period, regardless of what role they performed, and the seemingly close(r) connection between them and God, suggests a seismic shift in the understanding of the natures, and missions of both (human) messengers (*rusul*), and angels (*malā'ika*), occurred between the late Meccan and Medinan periods. The examination of verbal roots associated with angels will shed further light on this change (Chapter 3).

---

<sup>266</sup> Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 122, 124; Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 102. This tallies with the explanations of classical Arabic scholars, Arbach and Maraqtan, ‘Notes on the Root L'K “to Send” and the Term Ml'k “Messenger”’, 253.

<sup>267</sup> Arbach and Maraqtan, ‘Notes on the Root L'K “to Send” and the Term Ml'k “Messenger”’, 254.

<sup>268</sup> Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 124; Bowersock, ‘Les anges païens’, 94. This meaning of *ml'k* may also be found in Phoenician and Punic, although it does not exclusively have this meaning, Arbach and Maraqtan, ‘Notes on the Root L'K “to Send” and the Term Ml'k “Messenger”’, 254. On the use of this term in Gə'əz to refer to human messengers, see footnote 49

<sup>269</sup> Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 39.

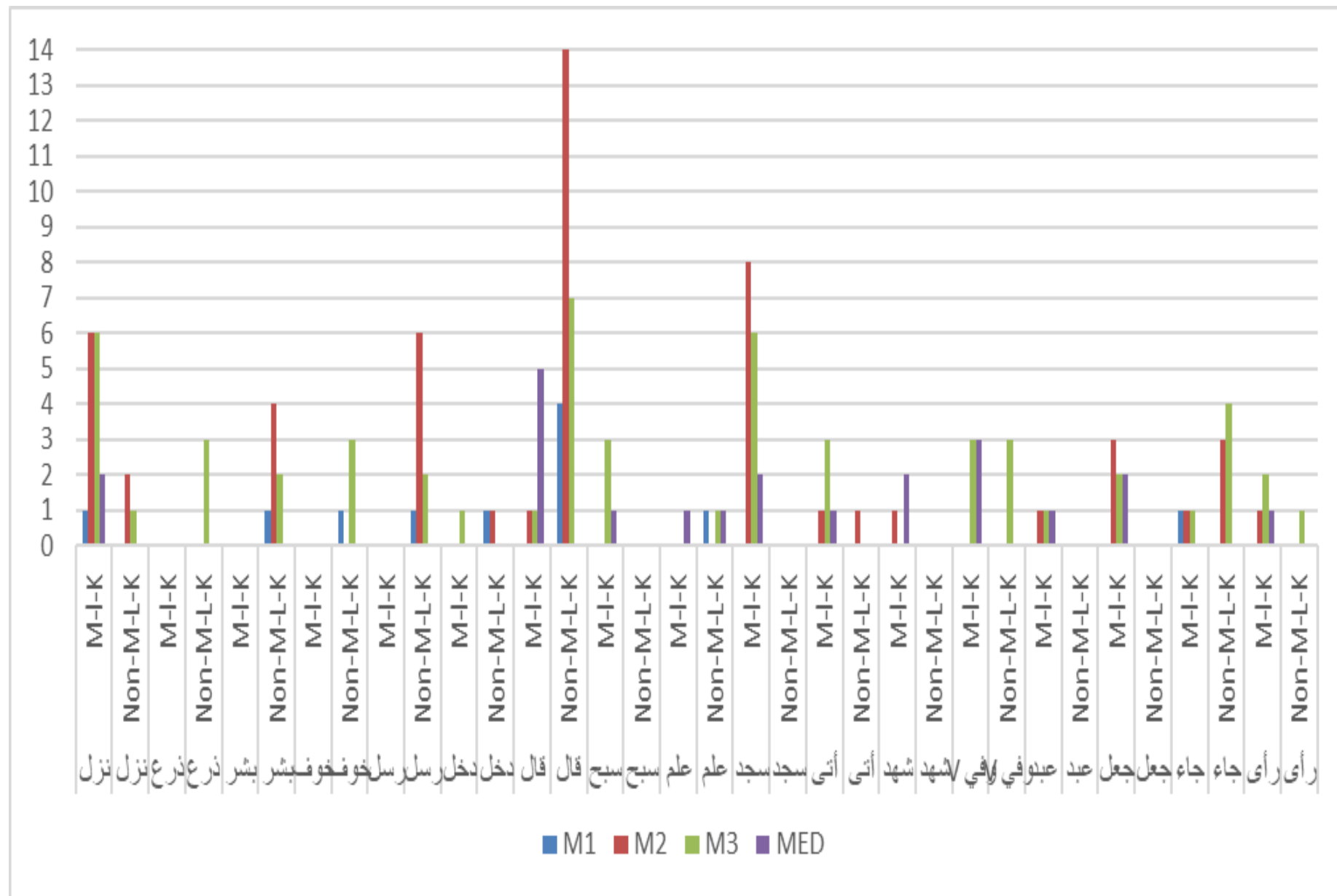
<sup>270</sup> Q 2:98, 285; Q 4:136; Q 33:43, 56.

<sup>271</sup> Q 6:61; Q 7:37; Q 10:21; Q 11:69, 77; Q 29:31, 33; Q 43:80.

### 3 Verbal Roots Designating Angelic Beings

The terminology used to refer to angels, discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, tells us a certain amount about the qur'ānic understanding of them, but it is also important to examine the contexts in which such references to angels appear. The following will therefore analyse the verbal roots used in relation to actions carried out by angels, and compare their usage to that in the rest of the qur'ānic corpus. This will form the basis for a subsequent analysis of angelic roles (Chapter 4). Seventy-two different verbal roots (including some cognates), occurring 208 times were identified, of which Chart 3.1 below shows those occurring three or more times in angelic references. Given that the majority of qur'ānic angelic references stem from the middle and later Meccan periods, it is perhaps not surprising that these periods show the greatest variety in the range of roots used in connection with angels (around 40 percent of all roots surveyed occur in each of these periods). What is surprising, is that this range is maintained into the Medinan period, which exhibits a similar level of variety. However, the roots used differ between periods, with only one (*n-z-l*) occurring across all four qur'ānic periods, accounting for nearly 9 percent of all verbal roots occurring in angelic references, and nearly 14 percent of those occurring three or more times, while five are exclusive to the earliest Meccan period, and sixteen each to the middle, later Meccan, and Medinan periods, as shown by Table 3.1 below.

**Chart 3.1**      *Verbal Roots Occurring Three or More Times in Angelic References by Qur'ānic Period*



**Table 3.1** *Verbal Roots in Angelic References Exclusive to Each Qur'ānic Period*

M1		M2		M3		MED	
شفع <i>š-f-'</i>	to intercede	كذب <i>k-dh-b</i>	to deny	سوا <i>s-w-'</i>	to make s.o. sad	قدس <i>q-d-s</i>	to sanctify (II)
سمو <i>s-m-w</i>	to name	مشي <i>m-sh-y</i>	to walk	ضيق <i>ḍ-y-q</i>	to be straightened, constrained	فعل <i>f-ʿ-l</i>	to do
عرج <i>ʿ-r-j</i>	to ascend	لقي <i>l-q-y</i>	to meet	زرع <i>th-r-ʿ</i>	to feel helpless	علم <i>ʿ-l-m</i>	to teach (II)
قوم <i>q-w-m</i>	to rise	نذر <i>n-th-r</i>	to warn	دخل <i>d-kh-l</i>	to enter	ندو <i>n-d-w</i>	to call
كلم <i>k-l-m</i>	to talk	خلق <i>kh-l-q</i>	to create	حفف <i>ḥ-f-f</i>	to surround	لعن <i>l-ʿ-n</i>	to curse
		قرن <i>q-r-n</i>	to accompany	غفر <i>gh-f-r</i>	to forgive	أمن <i>ʿ-m-n</i>	to believe
		خلف <i>kh-l-f</i>	to succeed (trans.)	هلك <i>h-l-k</i>	to destroy	سوم <i>s-w-m</i>	to make a terrific onslaught
		وهب <i>w-h-b</i>	to grant	حزن <i>ḥ-z-n</i>	to grieve	قرب <i>q-r-b</i>	to approach
		تبع <i>t-b-ʿ</i>	to follow (VIII)	وصل <i>w-ṣ-l</i>	to arrive	بسط <i>b-s-ṭ</i>	to stretch out
		صدق <i>ṣ-d-q</i>	to confirm, be truthful	نكر <i>n-k-r</i>	to be unacquainted with	وحي <i>w-ḥ-y</i>	to inspire, reveal
		عزز <i>ʿ-z-z</i>	to strengthen (II)	وجس <i>w-j-s</i>	to feel apprehension, dread (IV)	ضرب <i>ḍ-r-b</i>	to strike, hit
		بلغ <i>b-l-gh</i>	to reach	عجب <i>ʿ-j-b</i>	to marvel, be amazed	صفو <i>ṣ-f-w</i>	to choose (VIII)
		سال <i>s-ā-l</i>	to ask	نجو <i>n-j-w</i>	to save, rescue	صلو <i>ṣ-l-w</i>	to bless (II)
		هدي <i>h-d-y</i>	to guide, lead	ترك <i>t-r-k</i>	to return	ظهر <i>ẓ-h-r</i>	to support
		مثل <i>m-th-l</i>	to assume, appear as (V)	جول <i>j-w-l</i>	to come	عصي <i>ʿ-ṣ-y</i>	to disobey
		وجل <i>w-j-l</i>	to fear	فرط <i>f-r-ṭ</i>	to fail, neglect (II)	أمر <i>ʿ-m-r</i>	to order

Charts 3.1 (above) and 3.2 (below) show that:

- *malā'ika* are described most often as being “sent down,” (*n-z-l*), predominantly in the middle and later Meccan periods, but also as simply *coming* (*'-t-y*).
- They are frequently described as “prostrating,” or “worshipping,” (*s-j-d*, in the middle Meccan period,<sup>272</sup> accounting for 12 percent of all roots occurring three or more times, but note also *s-b-ḥ* and *'-b-d*).
- They “take,” men’s souls at their deaths (form V of the root *w-f-y* in the later Meccan and Medinan periods).
- They “talk,” (*q-w-l*, accounting for more than 20 percent of roots occurring three or more times), much more so in the Medinan period, but not as much as angels referred to by different terms in other periods.

Angels referred to by terms other than *malak/malā'ika*, are:

- also very vocal (*q-w-l*), mostly when described as *rusul*.
- Also “sent,” but not necessarily from heaven (*r-s-l* occurs more often than *n-z-l*),
- and “come,” (but note the preference for *j-y-'*, rather than *'-t-y*).

The major differences between *malā'ika* and angels referred to by other terms, can thus be summarised as follows:

---

<sup>272</sup> According to Lane, this root means *to prostrate, putting one’s forehead on the ground, in prayer, and thus being lowly, humble, and submissive*, Edward William Lane, ‘سجد’, in *An Arabic English Lexicon Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources (Digitized Text Version)* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968, [1872, 2015]), 1323.

However, my analysis has shown that it has three distinct meanings in the Qur’ān: i. *to prostrate to/worship something*—not explicitly involving bowing; ii. *to prostrate to/worship something*—as part of a prayer ritual, explicitly including ‘plain’ bowing (*r-k-gh*, Medinan only); and iii. *to honour someone by bowing/prostrating before them*—e.g., another human, but not to worship them as (a) God (late Meccan only), thus the application of this root to angels in the middle Meccan period could imply either worship, or simply prostration.

- a *malak* is not the cause for *khawaf*, “fear,” that an angelic *rasūl*, or *ḡayf*, “guest,” often is.
- Only *rusul* and *ḡayf* bring *bushrā*, “good news.”
- As previously discussed, a *malak* is never “sent” (*r-s-l*), and the root does not appear in Medinan angelic references at all.
- *Rusul* talk twice as much as all other angels.
- *Rusul* are also the only type of angels to be denied (*k-dh-b*, which occurs four times), by those to whom they are sent—presumably the presence of a *bona fide malak* is harder to deny or ignore, as demonstrated by the fact that *malā’ika* are never explicitly subject to denial.
- Furthermore, only *malā’ika*, and not angels referred to by other terms, are able, or perhaps required, to worship (God): the roots are *s-j-d*, *s-b-ḥ* and *‘-b-d*.
- *Malā’ika* bear witness (*sh-h-d*), to God’s truth, while angels referred to by other terms, do not, or perhaps, cannot.
- *Malā’ika* are seen (*r-‘-y*), by humans more often than angels referred to by other terms, even if, or perhaps, because, they frequently appear in human form on earth.

Angels do not appear to be particularly knowledgeable (*‘-l-m*), but what knowledge they do have is shared between almost all types of terms used to refer to them. This is in contrast to the situation in the Hebrew Bible, where biblical writers consistently “assume the existence of beings superior to man in knowledge and power.”<sup>273</sup> Their ignorance is demonstrated in the Qur’ān by God’s assertion that he knows what they do not know, when they object to his plan to create Adam, on the grounds that he, or, in some interpretations, his offspring, will make mischief and shed blood (Q 2:30).<sup>274</sup> Otherwise, the angels would have had to have foreknowledge of what Adam/his offspring, neither of whom had been created yet, would do in

---

<sup>273</sup> Bamberger, ‘Angels and Angelology: Bible’.

<sup>274</sup> E.g., as reported by al-Ṭabarī on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ud, and Qatada, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur’ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:210, 224.

the future.<sup>275</sup> Challenged to name the animals, the angels are further forced to admit their knowledge is limited to what God has taught them (Q 2:32).<sup>276</sup> Of course, the presence of angels at the creation of Adam, their foolishness, either in mistaking Adam for God, or inferior knowledge, are motifs that appear in both rabbinic and Christian traditions, with which Zellentin has demonstrated the Qur’ān engages in “trialogical debate,” in its retelling of this narrative.<sup>277</sup>

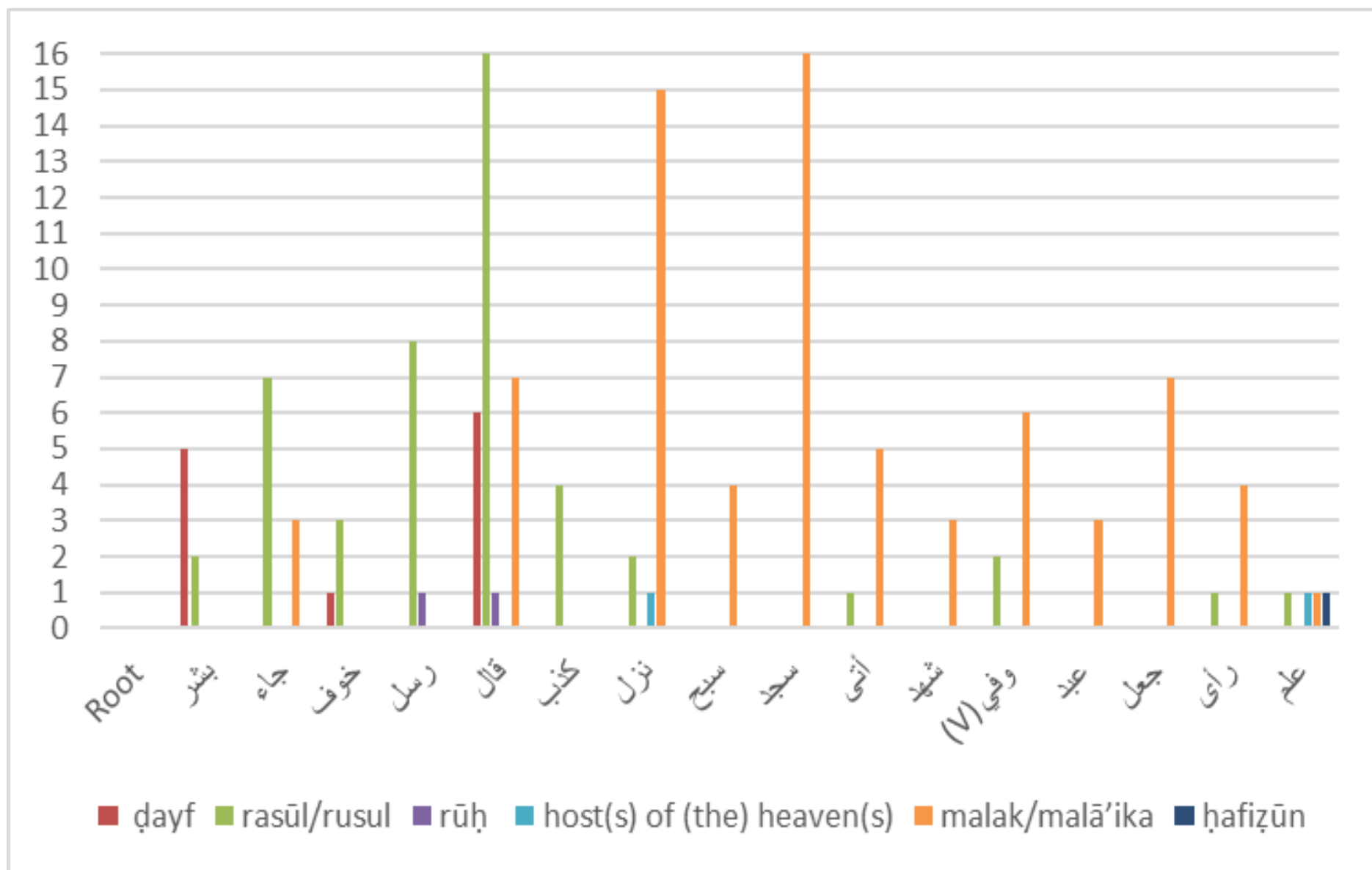
---

<sup>275</sup> Al-Ṭabarī cites various companion traditions, that suggest God may have told the angels Adam would have offspring, who would shed blood, beforehand, Al-Ṭabarī, 1:211, 214, 217, 218. Despite this, the result remains unchanged, that the angels were not as knowledgeable as Adam, and definitely not as much as God.

<sup>276</sup> Sinai, *The Qur’an—A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 166.

<sup>277</sup> E.g., b. Sanh. 38b; Cav. Tr. 2:1–6, 21; Gen. Rab. 8:5, 10, 17:4, Holger Zellentin, ‘Triological Anthropology: The Qur’an on Adam and *Iblis* in View of Christian and Rabbinic Discourse’, in *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur’ānic Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity*, ed. Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin I. Cicek (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), 60–62, 67, 71–72, 117, 119, 124–26, 129.

Chart 3.2 Verbal Roots Occurring Three or More Times in Angelic References in the Qur'ān by Semantic Term





Owing to the limits of space and time, only six roots will be examined in detail. The roots *n-z-l* and *r-s-l* have been chosen because they describe the same basic idea, of “sending,” albeit with subtle differences as to the origin of the object, or thing being sent. Together, they represent the action with which angels are most commonly associated. Although a human attribute, “speaking” (*q-w-l*) is also a key feature of angelic interaction with humans, while *s-j-d*, *s-b-ḥ*, and *ʿ-b-d*, all describe various acts of worship or praise, a logical and key activity for angels to undertake.

### 3.1.1 Descending/Being Sent: *n-z-l*

**Table 3.2** *n-z-l* in Angelic References in the Qur’ān

Verbal Root	<i>malak/malā’ika</i>	Other Terms	Period	%	
				<i>sūrah</i>	Verse
<i>n-z-l</i>	Q 97:4	-	M1	8	6
	Q 15:8; Q 17:95; Q 23:24; Q 25:7, 21, 25	Q 36:15, 28	M2	42	44
	Q 6:8 (x2), 111; Q 16:2; Q 41:14, 30	Q 29:34	M3	33	39
	Q 2:102; Q 3:124	-	MED	17	11

One of the most frequently used verbal roots in the Qur’ān, *n-z-l*, “to send (down),” occurs nearly 300 times in sixty-one different *sūrahs*.<sup>278</sup> The eighteen times it is applied to angels, thus only accounts for a tiny percentage of all occurrences. As the table above shows, in angelic references, *malā’ika* are “sent down,” through the use of *n-z-l*, much more often than angels referred to by other terms, but both are “sent down,” most often in the later and middle Meccan periods respectively. This contrasts slightly with the overall usage of the root *n-z-l* in the Qur’ān, which is highest in the late Meccan (accounting for 34 percent of all occurrences), and Medinan periods (40 percent). The latter represents an increase of nearly 100 percent from

<sup>278</sup> For a detailed analysis of the use of this root in the context of revelation, see Simon P. Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur’an: A Semantic Study of the Roots n-z-l and w-ḥ-y* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), which was published after this thesis had been written.

the middle Meccan period (where it is just 22 percent). In over 90 percent of instances, God is either explicitly named as the agent or implied as such through the use of the passive form.<sup>279</sup>

The root also occurs frequently in polemical exchanges, in which the Unbelievers refute God's message because he has failed to send down an accompanying angel.<sup>280</sup> The expected heavenly origin of both message *and* messenger, clearly served as a dual validation of both its, and their authenticity, and authority. On two occasions, *malā'ika* are described as being "sent down," along with the *rūḥ*, "spirit" (Q 16:2; Q *al-Qadr* 97.4). Otherwise, the only non-angelic things sent/brought down in angelic references are:

- *siḥr*, "magic," (Q 2:102), to the angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* (see Section 7.2)
- *rijz*, "punishment," on the people of Lot (Q 29:34).

Elsewhere in the Qur'ān, the root *n-z-l* refers most often to the "sending down," or "revealing," of a wide range of things, both abstract and concrete, such as:

- *tanzīl*, "revelation,"<sup>281</sup> which is sometimes specifically described as a *kitāb*, "book" or "scripture,"<sup>282</sup> or even the, or a, *qur'ān*, "recitation."<sup>283</sup>
- God's *āyāt*, "signs,"<sup>284</sup>

---

<sup>279</sup> Loynes, 24.

<sup>280</sup> E.g., Q 6:8; Q 17:95; Q 23:24; Q 25:7, 21; Q 36:15; Q 41:14.

<sup>281</sup> Q 17:106; Q 26:192–193, 198, 210, although this is often simply implied: Q 2:4, 23, 41, 90, 91, 97, 136, 170, 285; Q 3:53, 72, 84, 199; Q 4:47, 60, 61, 162, 166; Q 5:44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 59, 64, 66, 67, 68, 81, 83, 104; Q 6:91, 93; Q 7:3; Q 8:41; Q 10:94; Q 11:14; Q 13:1, 19; Q 15:90; Q 16:101, 102; Q 17:105; Q 25:6; Q 29:46; Q 31:21; Q 34:6; Q 36:15; Q 39:55; Q 47:2, 9, 26; Q 67:9.

<sup>282</sup> Q 2:174, 176, 213, 231; Q 3:3, 7; Q 4:105, 113, 136, 140, 153; Q 5:48; Q 6:7, 91, 92, 114, 155, 156, 157; Q 7:2, 196; Q 13:1, 36; Q 14:1; Q 16:64, 89; Q 17:93; Q 18:1; Q 20:2; Q 21:110; Q 29:47, 51; Q 32:2; Q 38:29; Q 39:1, 2, 23, 41; Q 40:2; Q 42:15, 17; Q 44:3; Q 45:2; Q 46:2, 30; Q 57:25.

<sup>283</sup> Q 2:185; Q 5:101; Q 12:2; Q 17:82, 106; Q 20:113; Q 25:32; Q 43:31; Q 59:21; Q 76:23.

<sup>284</sup> Q 2:99; Q 6:37; Q 10:20; Q 13:7, 27; Q 17:102, 105; Q 22:16; Q 24:1, 34, 46; Q 26:4; Q 28:87; Q 29:50; Q 57:9; Q 58:5.

- *furqān*, “criterion” (Q 3:4; 25:1),
- *bayyināt*, “proofs,” (Q 2:159, 185),
- *sūrahs*,<sup>285</sup>
- *ḥadīth* (Q *al-Zumar* 39:23),
- and *dhikr*, “reminders.”<sup>286</sup>
- Something undefined but clearly good,<sup>287</sup>
- *ḥikmah*, “wisdom,”<sup>288</sup>
- *ḥaqq*, “truth” (Q 57:16),
- *hudā*, “guidance” (Q 2:159, 185),
- *nūr*, a (clear) “light.”<sup>289</sup>
- Indeterminate things of heavenly origin,<sup>290</sup> which often overlap with the concept of revelation or scripture, are also *sent down*. For example, the Torah to Moses,<sup>291</sup> and the Gospels to Jesus.<sup>292</sup>

Additionally, God also *sends down* (or not), his:

- *amanah*, “authority,”<sup>293</sup>
- *sakīnah*, “presence,”<sup>294</sup>
- *amanah*, “security” (in the form of sleep, Q 3:154),
- *mīzān*, “balance” (Q 57:25),

---

<sup>285</sup> Q 9:64, 86, 124, 127; Q 24:1; Q 47:20.

<sup>286</sup> Q 15:6, 9; Q 16:44; Q 21:50; Q 38:8; Q 65:10.

<sup>287</sup> Q 2:105; Q 16:30; Q 28:24.

<sup>288</sup> Q 2:231; Q 4:113; Q 13:37.

<sup>289</sup> Q 4:174; Q 7:157; Q 64:8.

<sup>290</sup> Q 34:2; Q 57:4; Q 97:1.

<sup>291</sup> Q 3:3, 65, 93; Q 5:44; Q 6:91, implied.

<sup>292</sup> Q 3:3, 65; Q 5:47.

<sup>293</sup> Q 3:151; Q 6:81; Q 7:33, 71; Q 12:40; Q 22:71; Q 30:35; Q 53:23.

<sup>294</sup> Q 9:26, 40; Q 48:4, 18, 26.

- *amr*, “commandment” (Q *al-Ṭalāq* 65:5, 12),
- and *junūd* (invisible) “forces,” to aid the Messenger and the Believers (Q *al-Tawbah* 9:26; see Sections 2.2.4 and 4.1.4).

All of these things also clearly have a heavenly, or divine origin. Less pleasant things that are *sent down* include:

- punishment (*rijz*, Q 2:59; *‘adhāb*, Q 37:177),
- *ḥudūd*, “limits” (Q 9:97),
- a *nadhīr*, “warner” (Q 25:7),
- the accusation that the Lord has only sent down *asāṭīr*, “fables” (Q 16:24),
- and *shayāṭīn*, “demons/devils,” who descend themselves (Q 26:221–222; see Section 5.1.2).

Many of these things are abstract, but in a few instances the root is also used to describe the sending down of more concrete items from heaven, such as:

- manna,<sup>295</sup>
- a *māidah*, “table,”<sup>296</sup>
- a *libās*, “garment” (Q 7:26),
- *kanzun*, “treasure” (Q 11:12),
- *an‘ām*, “cattle,” presumably referring to their creation (Q 39:6),
- and *ḥadīd*, “iron” (Q 57:25).

In Q *al-Aḥzāb* 33:25, the people of the book are *brought down* (from their fortresses), the only example of the root being used to described something happening within the confines of the

---

<sup>295</sup> Q 2:57; Q 7:160; Q 20:80.

<sup>296</sup> Q 5:112, 114–115.

earthly realm. The second most frequent use of the root is to describe the sending down of rain from heaven,<sup>297</sup> or hail (Q *al-Nūr* 24:43), often termed *rizq*, “provision.”<sup>298</sup>

In Q 53:13, the prophet is understood to have seen God, an angel, or a star descending, whether within the heavenly realm, or from heaven to earth, is unclear. From this we can conclude that the use of the root *n-z-l* signals that what is *sent down* has a definite heavenly or divine origin. The fact that, apart from God, only the *rūḥ al-qudus*, the “Holy Spirit,” (Q 16:102; Q 26:19), *Jibrīl* (Q 2:97), and the angelic *rusul* to Lot (Q 29:33–34), appear to be able to bring anything down, further supports this assessment, as these figures are only indirect agents, acting on God’s behalf.<sup>299</sup> The frequent application of this root to both *malā’ika*, and angels referred to by other terms, thus shows they were considered to be sent from heaven. That the usage of *n-z-l* in relation to angels is highest in the later and middle Meccan periods, when angels were described by a range of terms besides *malā’ika*, suggests it was necessary to confirm, or underline the heavenly origin of such beings, even perhaps of *malā’ika*. By the Medinan period, angels are almost always referred to as *malā’ika*, which by this time, perhaps automatically implied a heavenly origin, reducing the need for a gloss in the form of *n-z-l*.

### 3.1.2 Being Sent: *r-s-l*

**Table 3.3** *r-s-l in Angelic References in the Qur’ān*

Verbal Root	<i>malak/malā’ika</i>	Other Terms	Period	%	
				<i>sūrah</i>	Verse
r-s-l	-	Q 51:32, 33	M1	17	22
	-	Q 15:58; Q 19:17; Q 36:14 (x2), 16	M2	50	56
	-	Q 6:61; Q 11:70	M3	33	22
	-	-	MED	-	-

<sup>297</sup> Q 2:22, 164; Q 6:99; Q 7:57; Q 8:11; Q 10:24; Q 13:7; Q 14:32; Q 15:21, 22; Q 16:10, 65; Q 18:45; Q 20:53; Q 22:5, 63; Q 23:18; Q 25:27, 48; Q 27:60; Q 29:63; Q 30:24, 49; Q 31:10, 34; Q 39:21; Q 40:13; Q 41:39; Q 42:28; Q 43:11; Q 50:9; Q 56:69; Q 78:14.

<sup>298</sup> Q 10:59; Q 40:13; Q 42:27; Q 45:5.

<sup>299</sup> Loynes, *A Semantic Study of the Roots n-z-l and w-ḥ-y*, 29.

As discussed, the most noticeable thing about the root *r-s-l*, which also has the meaning “to send,” is that it does not appear in any Medinan references to angels, or describe *malā’ika* in any period.<sup>300</sup> That more than half of references occur in the middle Meccan period, coincides with a big increase in the use of the term *rusul* to refer to angels between the early and middle Meccan periods, during which time its use doubles (see Table 2.5 in Section 2.2.1). The decline in the use of the verbal form in the late Meccan period, is, however, surprising, as the terms *rasūl/rusul*, “messenger(s),” account for the majority of angelic references in this period (see Table 2.5, as above). This is partly due to a dramatic reduction in the range of terms used to refer to angels in the later Meccan period (down from seven in the middle Meccan period to just four). It should also be noted that a chronologically consistent increase, throughout the Meccan portions of the Qur’ān, in the use of both the nominal and verbal forms of the root *r-s-l*, is followed by a dramatic shift in favour of the nominal over the verbal form in the Medinan period, in all contexts, as shown by Graphs A3.1–A3.4, in the Appendix.

This preference for the nominal form in the Medinan period is striking, as this is the case despite the fact that the root is not used to refer to angels in this period at all. It would appear that things with a clear divine, or heavenly origin, and/or that are abstract, are sent (*n-z-l*) throughout the qur’ānic corpus. For things that fall into the above category but to which both verbal roots are applied, namely an *āyah*, “a sign,” a *kitāb*, “book,” and *tanzīl*, “revelation,” there is a marked increase in the use of *n-z-l* over *r-s-l*, throughout the Meccan portions of the Qur’ān, with a clear preference for *n-z-l* becoming evident in the Medinan period (see Graphs A3.1–A3.4, in the Appendix). People or things with potentially divine, or heavenly origin, but who, or which, are concrete, are almost consistently described as *being sent* (*r-s-l*). There are, of course, a few exceptions to this, as noted, which can be explained by the fact that all but the last only become concrete once they reach earth.<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>300</sup> A meaning shared with the root of Sabaic *rsl*, “messenger,”

<http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/Sabaweb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultList?idSearchRoot=rsl>

<sup>301</sup> E.g., manna, Q 2:57; *māidah*, “a table,” Q 5:112, 114, 115; *libās*, “a garment,” Q 7:26; *kanzun*, “treasure,” Q 11:12; *an’ām*, “cattle,” Q 39:6; *ḥadīd*, “iron,” Q 57:25; the people of the book, Q 33:45.

The initially implausible *sending (down)* of iron can be understood as referring to the common belief that the knowledge required to make it constituted some sort of magical, divine, or forbidden knowledge. This is most evident in the Enochic tradition, where knowledge of metalwork is one of the skills illicitly imparted to humans, usually by the angel/watcher 'Azāzā'ēl/Αζαήλ,<sup>302</sup> reflecting the “widespread suspicion of chemical skills in Greco-Roman culture.”<sup>303</sup> This suspicion appears to have continued into the (pre-)qur'ānic milieu. The acquisition of the knowledge required to create metal is inversely portrayed as divinely mandated in the many traditions surrounding Solomon's knowledge and power over the demons, who were forced to turn their skills in this area to his advantage.<sup>304</sup> This positive view of such knowledge appears in qur'ānic references to Solomon and/or his father, David, who are gifted knowledge of metallurgy, enabling them to make armour, or perhaps to instruct the *jinn* to make it for them (Q 21:80; Q *Saba*' 34:11—12).

---

<sup>302</sup> E.g., 1 En. 8:1–4, but 69: 1–14 credits *Gādar'ēl*.

<sup>303</sup> Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40). Angels are also explicitly said to have brought down magic (*Copt.*: μαγία), in the *Pistis Sophia*, I 15.14, 18.8–9, 20.11–16; cf. 3 En. 5:9; and Eusebius recounts a tradition from Alexander Polyhistor (*Praep. ev.*, 9.17.1–9 (frag. 1), 9.18.2 (frag. 2), which attributes the preservation and dissemination of astronomical knowledge, which could be equated with magic, to giants. Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 134. Whether these were the giant offspring of the watchers, who somehow survived the flood, or descendants of Noah, who, by merit of having survived the flood must have been giants, is unclear, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of the Angels*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2014), 7–12. That the aforementioned giant was also said to have founded the city of Babylon, provides a further link with the angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, to whom magic was sent down, and passed on to men there (Q 2:102), see Section 7.2.

<sup>304</sup> E.g., Jer 52:20; 1 Kgs 10:16, 17; 2 Chr 4:1–22, 9:20, and the *kabra nagašt*, “*The Glory of the Kings*,” in which Solomon's rings allow him to save himself from the blacksmiths/forgers, Witold Witakowski and Eva Balicka-Witakowska, ‘Solomon in Ethiopian Tradition’, in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 224, and Book 12 of the Syriac *Zosimus*, where the vessels in which Solomon imprisons the demons are made from electrum, Jacques van der Vliet, ‘Solomon in Egyptian Gnosticism’, in *The Figure of Solomon*, 207. Cf. Jos. Ant. 8:45.

Besides angelic *rusul*, non-angelic messengers are also “sent,” when termed *rusul/mursalūn*.<sup>305</sup> Non-angelic *rusul* are, however, just as likely to “come” (*j-y-ʿ*).<sup>306</sup> On a few occasions, *rusul* are also “created,” or “made” (*j-ʿ-l*).<sup>307</sup> The nine references to Muhammad “being sent,” are all only based on inference.<sup>308</sup> And yet, the Qurʾān makes it clear that *rijāl*, “men,” have previously “been sent,”<sup>309</sup> making it more than plausible that Muhammad, as a man, could have been sent as a *rasūl*, but not explicit from the text. A number of other things, or people, either with a messenger function themselves, or as an extension of a messenger’s mission, are also “sent,” for example:

- the *rūḥ*, “spirit” (Q 19:17),<sup>310</sup>
- a *bashīr*, “bearer of good news,”<sup>311</sup>
- a *nadhīr/muthīrūn*, “warner,”<sup>312</sup>
- occasionally, a *shahid*, “witness” (Q 33:45; Q 48:8; Q *al-Muzzammil* 73:15),
- but not a *wakīl*, “disposer of affairs” (Q 17:54),

---

<sup>305</sup> E.g., Q 2:151; Q 4:64, 79–80 (implied); Q 5:70; Q 6:48; Q 9:33; Q 13:38; Q 14:4; Q 15:10 (implied); Q 16:63 (implied); Q 17:77; Q 18:56; Q 20:134; Q 21:25; Q 22:52; Q 23:32, 44; Q 25:20; Q 26:27; Q 28:47; Q 30:47; Q 34:44 (implied); Q 37:72 (implied); Q 40:78; Q 41:14; Q 42:51; Q 43:45; Q 48:28; Q 57:25; Q 61:9; Q 64:6; Q 73:15, although occasionally they are described as having been sent through the use of the roots *b-ʿ-th* (Q 2:129; Q 10:47; Q 16:36; Q 17:15, 94; Q 25:41; Q 28:59; Q 40:34; Q 62:2); and *q-f-y* (Q 2:87; Q 57:27).

<sup>306</sup> E.g., Q 2:101; Q 3:81, 183, 184; Q 4:170; Q 5:15, 19, 32, 70; Q 6:130; Q 7:43, 53, 101; Q 9:128; Q 10:13, 47; Q 12:50 (Joseph); Q 14:9; Q 16:113; Q 23:44; Q 30:9; Q 35:25; Q 36:13; Q 40:83; Q 41:14; Q 43:29; Q 44:13, 17; *ʿ-t-y*, Q 7:35; Q 9:70; Q 15:11; Q 20:47; Q 36:30; Q 39:71; Q 40:22, 50; Q 51:52, a root applied to angelic *rusul* only occasionally: Q 15:61; Q 29:33, of the messengers to Lot, and Q 29:31, to Abraham

<sup>307</sup> Q 26:21; Q 28:7, of Moses; Q 35:1, of *malāʾika*.

<sup>308</sup> Q 13:30; Q 21:107; Q 25:56; Q 33:45; Q 34:28; Q 35:24; Q 42:48; Q 48:8; Q 61:6, the latter of which is perhaps more explicit in that it refers to a *rasūl*, whose name could be an abbreviated form of Muhammad.

<sup>309</sup> E.g., Q 12:109; Q 16:43; Q 21:7.

<sup>310</sup> See Sections 2.2.5, 5.1.1, and 6.2.

<sup>311</sup> Q 2:119; Q 4:165; Q 6:48; Q 17:105; Q 18:56; Q 25:56; Q 33:45; Q 34:28; Q 35:24; Q 48:8.

<sup>312</sup> Q 2:119; Q 4:165; Q 6:48; Q 17:105; Q 18:56; Q 25:56; Q 33:45; Q 34:28, 34, 44; Q 35:24; Q 37:72; Q 43:23, 24; Q 48:8.



- or a *ḥafīẓ*, “guardian” (Q *al-Shūrā* 42:48; Q *al-Muṭaffifīn* 83:33).

In addition to *rusul*, *nabiyyūn*, “prophets,” are also sent (Q 7:94; Q 43:6), with a number of biblical figures specifically described as *having been sent*,<sup>313</sup> but only one Arabian prophet/messenger, the brother of ‘Ād, i.e., *Hūd* (Q *al-Aḥqāf* 46:23). Although it is only implied that messages (Q 7:6, 87; Q *Saba’* 34:34), revelation,<sup>314</sup> and one or more *kutub* “scriptures” (Q *al-Ghāfir* 40:70; Q *al-Dukhān* 44:5), *are/were/have been sent*, *rusul* are commonly sent along with God’s *āyāt*, “signs,”<sup>315</sup> *hudā*, “guidance” (Q 9:33; Q 48:28; Q *al-Ṣaff* 61:9); and/or the *dīn al-ḥaqq*, “religion of truth” (Q 9:33; Q 48:28; Q 61:9). God also decides whether or not to send his *raḥmah*, “mercy” (Q 21:107; Q *al-Faṭīr* 35:2), or *sulṭān*, “authority” (Q *al-Mu’minūn* 23:45; Q 51:38).

The root *r-s-l* is also frequently used to describe the sending of various weather-related phenomena, some of which are positive, such as rain,<sup>316</sup> and *rīḥ*, “winds,”<sup>317</sup> while others are less welcome, such as:

- a hurricane,<sup>318</sup> *ṣā’iqah*, “thunder” (Q *al-Ra’d* 13:13),
- a *ḥāṣīb*, a “storm of stones,”<sup>319</sup>
- or of clay (*ḥijārah ṭīn*, Q 51:33),
- or a flood (*ṭūfān*, Q 7:133; *sayl*, Q 34:16).

---

<sup>313</sup> Such as Abraham (Q 57:26); Noah (Q 7:59; Q 11:25, 57; Q 23:23; Q 29:14; Q 57:26; Q 71:1); Moses (Q 11:96; Q 14:5; Q 40:23; Q 43:46; Q 51:38); Aaron (Q 26:13; Q 28:34); along with the Children of Israel (Q 7:105, 134; Q 20:47; Q 23:45; Q 26:17, although in the sense of being allowed to leave Egypt with Moses); Joseph (Q 12:12, 45); Benjamin (Q 12:63, 66, implied); and Jonah (Q 37:147).

<sup>314</sup> Q 7:75, 87; Q 40:70; Q 44:5.

<sup>315</sup> Q 7:133; Q 11:96; Q 17:59; Q 21:5; Q 23:45; Q 40:23, 50; Q 43:46; Q 57:25.

<sup>316</sup> Q 6:6; Q 11:52; Q 71:11 (implied).

<sup>317</sup> Q 7:57; Q 15:22; Q 25:48; Q 27:63; Q 30:46, 48; Q 35:9.

<sup>318</sup> Also, *rīḥ*, Q 30:51, Q 33:9; Q 41:16; Q 51:41; Q 54:19; *qāṣīf*, Q 17:69.

<sup>319</sup> Q 17:68; Q 29:40; Q 54:34; Q 67:17.

As an extension of this, *r-s-l* is the root used to describe the sending of plagues, such as those that afflicted the Egyptians,<sup>320</sup> as well as those that have, or will befall the Unbelievers.<sup>321</sup> The latter also need to keep a look out for *shayāṭīn*, “demons/devils,” which may be unleashed against them (Q 19:83).<sup>322</sup> Finally, a number of miscellaneous items are *sent*, usually on one occasion only.<sup>323</sup>

### 3.1.3 Talking/Speaking: *q-w-l*

**Table 3.4** *q-w-l in Angelic References in the Qur’ān*

Verbal Root	<i>malak/malā’ika</i>	Other Terms	Period	%	
				<i>sūrah</i>	Verse
<i>q-w-l</i>	-	Q 51:25, 28, 30, 32	M1	7	13
	Q 25:22	Q 11:70, 73; Q 15:52, 53, 55, 58, 63; Q 19:19, 21; Q 29:32, 34; Q 36:14, 16, 19	M2	43	47
	Q 16:32	Q 7:37; Q 11:69, 70, 81; Q 29:31-33	M3	29	25
	Q 2:102; Q 3:42, 45; Q 4:97 (x2)	-	MED	21	16

Of the verbal roots identified as occurring at least three times in angelic references, *q-w-l* accounts for a quarter of the thirty-seven verbal roots, which appear in references to angels described by terms other than *malak/malā’ika*, but only 6 percent of the forty-four verbal roots, which appear in references to *malak/malā’ika*. It refers to the activity that angels described by terms other than *malak/malā’ika* do most often, mainly in the middle and later Meccan periods: nearly a quarter of verbal roots occurring at least three times, in all angelic references, describe the act of speaking. The context is, of course, predominantly in narratives,

<sup>320</sup> E.g., *jarād*, “locusts,” *qummal*, “lice,” *ḍafāḍī’*, “frogs,” and *dam*, “blood,” Q 7:133.

<sup>321</sup> Such as *rijz*, “punishment,” Q 7:162; *ḥusbān*, “calamity,” Q 18:40; *fitnah*, “trial,” Q 54:27; *ṣayḥah*, “a shout,” Q 54:31; or a “flame of fire,” Q 55:35.

<sup>322</sup> See Section 5.1.2.

<sup>323</sup> A *hadīyah*, “present” Q 27:35; *anfus*, “souls” Q 39:42; the *nāqah*, “she-camel” Q 54:27; *ṭayran abābīl*, “flocks of birds” Q 105:3; *hāshrīn*, “gatherers” Q 7:111; Q 26:53; the *wārid*, “water-drawer” Q 12:19; and the Egyptian women, who gossip about Joseph Q 12:31.

namely the visitations to Abraham (Q 11:69–81; Q 51:24–37; Q 29:31), and Lot (Q 15:51–77), and the annunciations to Zechariah (Q 3:38–41; cf. Q 19:2–15), and Mary (Q 3:42–48; Q 19:16–19), which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. That angels speak is a necessary aspect of their role as messengers but does not allow them to demonstrate, or develop individual personalities. Unlike in (extra)biblical material, where angels often identify themselves as such, or by personal names,<sup>324</sup> qur’ānic angels only ever describe themselves in terms of their relationship to God, as *rasūl/rusul rabbiki/a*, “messenger(s) of your Lord (Q 19:19; Q 11:81), never as *malā’ika*, or by any other term. The fact that even then they only do this on two occasions, both of which relate to biblical stories, further suggests no explanation of their identities was deemed necessary for the qur’ānic audience to comprehend their identities. This could be both because the qur’ānic audience were familiar with the pre-/extra-qur’ānic contexts in which they appeared, and/or because the concept of angels, as God’s messengers, was already an established concept. Thus, angels could have been known entities, even to those sections of the qur’ānic audience who were not versed in the parabiblical narratives in which angels appear in the Qur’ān.

---

<sup>324</sup> See footnote 137.

### 3.1.4 Prostrating/Worshipping/Praising/Serving: s-j-d, s-b-ḥ, ‘b-d

**Table 3.5** *s-j-d/s-b-ḥ/‘b-d in Angelic References in the Qur’ān*

Verbal Root	<i>malak/malā’ika</i>	Other Terms	Period	%	
				<i>sūrah</i>	Verse
<i>s-j-d</i>	-	-	M1	-	-
	Q 15:29, 30; Q 17:61 (x3); Q 18:50; Q 20:116 (x2)	-	M2	56	57
	7:11 (x3); 16:49; 38:72, 73	_325	M3	33	29
	2:34 (x2)	-	MED	11	14
Verbal Root	<i>malak/malā’ika</i>	Other Terms	Period	%	
				<i>sūrah</i>	Verse
<i>s-b-ḥ</i>	-	-	M1	-	-
	-	_326	M2	-	-
	39:75; 42:5 <sup>327</sup>	-	M3	50	50
	2:30; 2:32	-	MED	50	50
Verbal Roots	<i>malak/malā’ika</i> : verses (Total Occurrences)	Other Terms	Period	%	
				<i>sūrah</i>	Verse
<i>all</i>	-	-	M1	-	-
	5 (8)	-	M2	36	40
	6 (8)	-	M3	43	40
	3 (4)	-	MED	21	20

<sup>325</sup> Although angels must logically be included in the assertion that *wa-allāh yasjud man fī al-samāwāt wa-al-ārd*, “who(ever) is in the heavens and the earth prostrates to God” (Q 13:15, from the later Meccan period), since no term is used to refer to angels, this is not included in either categories referring to angels as *malak/malā’ika*, or by other terms, or calculations stemming from them. In contrast, angels are not listed in the elaboration that follows the similar phrase in Q 22:18 (Medinan), while inanimate objects (the sun, moon, stars, hills, and trees, cf. Q 55:6, early Meccan), as well as humans, are. See Section 2.2.4.

<sup>326</sup> As with broad descriptions of creation prostrating in worship (*s-j-d*) to God (see footnote 326 above), it is logical to read angels into descriptions of all of creation praising God (*s-b-ḥ*): Q 17:44 (later Meccan), and Q 24:41 (Medinan) but again, since these do not refer to angels by any term, they are not included in the statistical analysis of references to angels by any term.

<sup>327</sup> Q 40:7 clearly refers to angels, but this is only implied, as no term is used to refer to them, either in that verse, the preceding, or subsequent ones.

The key points about the acts of worshipping/prostrating, praising, and serving, indicated by the verbal roots *s-j-d*, *s-b-ḥ*, and, for the sake of consistency, *‘-b-d*,<sup>328</sup> are that it is never explicitly performed by angels described by terms other than *malak/malā’ika* in any period, nor by *malā’ika*, in the earliest Meccan period.<sup>329</sup> The former can be explained by the fact that these activities largely take place within the heavenly sphere, and angels described by terms other than *malak/malā’ika* tend to operate within the earthly sphere, but the latter is more surprising. Although the percentage of references to *malak/malā’ika* from the earliest Meccan period is on a par with the Medinan period (19 versus 22 per cent of all references to *malak/malā’ika*, see Table 2.1), the percentage of verses containing references to *malak/malā’ika* is at its lowest in the former (just 9 percent of all references to *malak/malā’ika*), which goes some way to explaining this discrepancy. In material from the earliest Meccan period, *malā’ika* can be found performing duties connected to worship, e.g., as the heavenly host (Q 69:17; Q 70:4; 89:22, see Section 4.1.1). Angelic worship is not explicitly described as taking place in the earliest Meccan period, and the image of the heavenly host depicted is specifically linked to events surrounding the final judgement. The descent, or arrival, of God, along with his angels, will itself herald the end of times, which is the focus of these references. In fact, most references to *malak/malā’ika* from the earliest Meccan period, are connected with eschatological events.<sup>330</sup> A preoccupation with the approaching end of times, and associated punishment, is a theme that is characteristic of the earliest Meccan period.<sup>331</sup>

---

<sup>328</sup> The roots *s-j-d* and *‘-b-d* are attested in pre-Islamic inscriptions in both North and South Arabia. Sabaic and Nabatean *msgd* appear to have indicated a place of prayer or prostration, from the root *s-g-d*, <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=4999&showAll=0>, and *‘-b-d* (Safaitic) describing servitude or submission,

<http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/Sabaweb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultList?idSearchRoot=%CA%BFbd>

<sup>329</sup> See footnotes 326 and 327 above. See also Section 4.1.8.

<sup>330</sup> As above, and Q 53:26; Q 74:30, 31; Q 78:38; Q 89:22.

<sup>331</sup> Sinai, *The Qur’an—A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 410.

When angels do worship, or are ordered to, they generally do so in the context of the angelic prostration to Adam,<sup>332</sup> i.e., to a being other than God, worship of the latter usually being described by the roots *s-b-h*,<sup>333</sup> and *‘-b-d*.<sup>334</sup> Descriptions of angels praising God (*s-b-h*) are often only implied, and connected to eschatological events (e.g., Q 37:160; Q 39:75; Q 40:7), but stress their close proximity to God.<sup>335</sup> This is also true for the root *‘-b-d*, “to serve,” which is not included in the statistics here, owing to the fact that it is only explicitly applied to angels (*malā’ika*), on one occasion: Q 4:172 (Medinan).<sup>336</sup> It therefore does not pass the threshold of at least three occurrences in angelic references, required for inclusion in this statistical analysis of roots. However, the two references in which angels are implied, certainly suggest that they serve God: the descriptions of *man ‘indahū*, “those near him” (Q 21:19), and *lladhīn ‘inda rabbika*, “those who are near your lord” (Q 7:206), point to angels simply from their close proximity to God.<sup>337</sup> Such closeness is commonly ascribed to celestial creatures, who constitute the heavenly host (see Section 4.1.1).<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, the description of these individuals as being *lā yastakbirūna ‘an ‘ibādatihī*, “not too proud to serve him,” in both verses (cf. Q 4:172; Q 16:49), reminds us of angels from the contrast with *iblis*, who *was* too proud, or

---

<sup>332</sup> Where the verbal root used is *s-j-d*: Q 2:34; Q 7:11; Q 15:29, 30; Q 17:61; Q 18:50; Q 20:116; Q 38:72, 73. On the angelic prostration to Adam, see Section 5.1.4.

<sup>333</sup> Explicitly: Q 39:75; Q 42:5 (later Meccan), and Q 2:30, 32 (Medinan), cf. the implied references to “those who are near him,” Q 21:20, (middle Meccan, considered by al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabarī to refer to angels, Nasr, *The Study Quran*), and “those who carry the throne,” Q 40:7 (late Meccan). NB The root *h-m-d* is not used in a verbal context in angelic references but usually appears as a noun in conjunction with *s-b-h*.

<sup>334</sup> Explicitly: (*m-l-k*) Q 4:172, implied: Q 7:206; Q 21:19, but understood as referring to angels by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī, Nasr.

<sup>335</sup> E.g., Q 7:206; Q 21:20; Q 39:75; Q 40:7

<sup>336</sup> See the (extra)biblical references in footnotes 366–367 below.

<sup>337</sup> A conclusion also reached by e.g., al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Zamakhsharī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>338</sup> E.g., Isa 6:2–4; 1 Kgs 22:19; Dan 7:9–10; 2 Chr 18:18; 1 En. 16:21–22, 60:2, 71:7–10; Sib. Or. 3:2:1–2; Apoc. Zeph. Sah. frag. B:8; Matt 25:31; Rev 4:2–11, 5:11, 8:2–4; 2 En. [J/A] 21:1, 22:2; 29:3; 4 Ez 8:21; T. Ab. [A] 2:1, 7:11, 15:11; [B] 8:5; Apoc. Ab. 18:3, 12–14; T. Sol. 5:9; Apoc. El. (C) 2:9, 3:4; 2 Bar 21:6, 48:10, 51:11; T. Isaac 2:5; 3. En. 5:8, 10, 14, 15B:1, 18:19, 24; 22:13, 15, 22B:2, 22C:6, 27:2, 28:5–9, 32:1, 33:1–3, 35:3–4, 36:1–2, 39:1–2, 40:4, 47:3–4, cf. 16:2, 46:2; Ques. Ezra 26,29–30.

arrogant, to bow at God's command (Q 2:34; Q *Ṣād* 38:74, 75; cf. Q 7:13). The narrative of Satan's/the devil's refusal to comply with God's order to worship, or prostrate to Adam, can be found in several rabbinic, and late antique Christian texts, although pride is not consistently, or explicitly, cited as the reason for this.<sup>339</sup> Finally, the information that angels *yusabbiḥūnahu*, "glorify/praise him," in Q 7:206, recalls explicit references to angels doing so (Q 2:30, 32; Q 39:75, Q 42:5). Praising God is also a common, and therefore, unsurprising activity for angelic beings to do more generally (see footnotes 366–368).

In non-angelic contexts, the roots *s-j-d*, *s-b-ḥ*, and *ʿ-b-d* otherwise describe either desired or actual practices of the Believers.<sup>340</sup> This stands in contrast to the Unbelievers (including *iblis*), who either do not, will not, or, in some cases, *will*, worship God, but only at the final judgment, when it will be too late.<sup>341</sup> As well as describing the mode of worship of

---

<sup>339</sup> Cf. LAE 14:3; *Invest. Abbat.* 6:2; Cav. Tr. 3:1; Gen. Rab. 24; Yovhannēs Mandakuni, *Concerning Love and Jealousy and Envy*, 3, 90, and *Epistle Concerning Auguries and Spells and Illicit Charms*, 10, 199 (English translation from, Michael E. Stone, *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition Fifth through Seventeenth Centuries* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 285, 288). Note that Schäfer thinks this narrative's origins lie in gnostic, rather than rabbinic material, Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 84. On this narrative in the Qur'ān see Section 5.1.4.

<sup>340</sup> *s-j-d*: Q 53:62; Q 96:19 (early Meccan); Q 15:98; Q 17:107; Q 25:60, 64; Q 26:219; Q 50:40; Q 76:26 (middle Meccan); Q 7:206; Q 32:15; Q 39:9; Q 41:37 (late Meccan), and Q 4:102; Q 9:112; Q 22:18, 77; Q 48:29 (Medinan); *s-b-ḥ*: Q 15:98; Q 17:93, 108; Q 20:130; Q 25:58 (middle Meccan); Q 10:10; Q 30:17; Q 32:15 (late Meccan); Q 3:191; Q 24:16; Q 33:42 (Medinan); *ʿ-b-d*: Q 53:62; Q 109:2–5 (early Meccan); Q 15:99; Q 17:23; Q 18:110; Q 19:65; Q 21:25, 92, 106; Q 27:91; Q 30:61; Q 50:8; Q 71:3 (middle Meccan); Q 6:102; Q 10:3, 104; Q 11:2, 50, 61, 84, 123; Q 13:36; Q 16:36, 114; Q 29:56; Q 39:2, 11, 14, 17, 66; Q 40:66 (late Meccan); Q 2:21, 138, 172, 207; Q 3:51, 64, 79; Q 4:36; Q 9:112; Q 22:77; Q 24:5; Q 66:5; Q 98:5 (Medinan). In this I include singular commands to the (implied) Messenger, on the basis that the Messenger is also a Believer, and as such, constitutes a model for all Believers.

<sup>341</sup> E.g., *s-j-d*: Q 68:42–43; Q 84:21 (early Meccan); Q 15:31–33; Q 17:61; Q 25:60; Q 27:25; Q 38:75 (middle Meccan); Q 7:11–12 (late Meccan); Q 2:34 (Medinan); *s-b-ḥ*: Q 25:18 (middle Meccan); Q 34:41 (late Meccan); *ʿ-b-d*: Q 109:2–5 (early Meccan); Q 18:16; Q 21:98; Q 25:17, 55; Q 26:92; Q 37:22, 61, 169; Q 43:20; Q 43:45 (middle Meccan); Q 10:18, 28–29; Q 11:26, 62, 87, 109; Q 12:40; Q 14:10; Q 16:35–36, 73; Q 28:63; Q 34:41, 43; Q 39:3, 15, 64; Q 40:60; Q 41:37; Q 46:5 (late Meccan); Q 5:60; Q 6:56; Q 9:31; Q 22:11, 71 (Medinan).

historical, mainly biblical, figures,<sup>342</sup> some of the roots also polemically describe what Christians do, mainly because they believe that God has a son.<sup>343</sup> Contemporary cultic practice at a designated site is also positively portrayed through the use of these roots.<sup>344</sup> Finally, a number of largely inanimate objects, such as the sun, moon, stars, mountains, and trees prostrate (*s-j-d*) to God.<sup>345</sup> This is subsequently extended to include thunder and birds through the root *s-b-h*.<sup>346</sup> The ability of birds (like angels) to fly, presumably rendering their designation as earthly, or heavenly beings somewhat ambiguous. It follows that believers should not prostrate to things like the sun and moon, as Unbelievers do, and the Queen of Sheba and her people did.<sup>347</sup>

As a noun, *‘abd/‘abīd/‘ibād*, “servant(s)/slave(s),” has both positive and negative connotations in the Qur’ān: the historical figures, who faithfully served God naturally falling into the first category.<sup>348</sup> And yet, the Children of Israel are described both as God’s servants—(Q *Ṭā Hā* 20:77; Q 26:52, presumably a positive reference, despite some of them reneging on their covenant with him)—and the Egyptians’ slaves (Q 23:47; Q 26:22), which is clearly negative. Among God’s servants are the unnamed Messenger,<sup>349</sup> the Messiah/Jesus (Q 4:172; Q 19:30; Q 43:59), Joseph (Q 12:24), Noah,<sup>350</sup> Zechariah (Q 19:2), the Children of Israel,<sup>351</sup> David (Q 27:15, Q 38:17), Solomon (Q 27:15; Q 38:30), Abraham (Q 37:111; Q 38:45), Moses

---

<sup>342</sup> *s-j-d*: Q 19:58; Q 20:70; Q 26:46; Q 27:24-25 (middle Meccan); Q 12:4, 100; Q 7:120 (late Meccan); Q 3:43 (Medinan); *s-b-h*: Q 19:11; Q 20:33; Q 21:79, 87; Q 37:143 (middle Meccan); Q 12:108 (late Meccan); *‘b-d*: Q 106:3 (early Meccan); Q 17:3; Q 19:2, 30, 36, 42, 44, 49; Q 20:14; Q 21:53, 66-67, 73; Q 23:23, 32; Q 26:70-71, 75; Q 27:15, 19, 43, 45; Q 36:22, 60-61; Q 37:81, 85, 95, 111, 122, 132; Q 38:17, 30, 41, 44-45; Q 43:26, 59, 64; Q 54:9; Q 71:27 (middle Meccan); Q 7:59, 65, 70, 73, 85; Q 14:35; Q 29:16-17, 36; Q 34:13; Q 41:14; Q 46:21 (late Meccan); Q 2:133; Q 4:172; Q 5:72, 117; Q 60:4; Q 66:10 (Medinan).

<sup>343</sup> *s-b-h*: Q 10:68 (late Meccan); Q 2:116 (Medinan); *‘b-d*: Q 9:31 (Medinan) cf. Q 21:26; Q 43:81 (middle Meccan).

<sup>344</sup> E.g., *s-j-d*: Q 10:68 (late Meccan); Q 2:116, 125; Q 3:113; Q 24:36 (Medinan); *s-b-h*: Q 24:36 (Medinan).

<sup>345</sup> Q 55:6 (early Meccan); Q 16:48 (late Meccan); Q 22:18 (Medinan).

<sup>346</sup> Q 21:79; Q 38:18 (middle Meccan); Q 13:13 (late Meccan); Q 24:41 (Medinan).

<sup>347</sup> *s-j-d*: Q 27:24-25 (middle Meccan); Q 41:37 (late Meccan).

<sup>348</sup> See footnote 343.

<sup>349</sup> Q 2:23; Q 17:1; Q 18:1; Q 25:1; Q 39:36; Q 53:10; Q 57:9; Q 72:19.

<sup>350</sup> Q 17:3; Q 37:81; Q 54:9; Q 66:10.

<sup>351</sup> Q 20:77; Q 26:52; Q 44:18, 23.



(Q 37:122), Aaron (Q 37:122), Elias (Q 37:132), Job (Q 38:41, 44), Isaac (Q 38:45), Jacob (Q 38:45), and Lot (Q 66:10). They are also those whom Unbelievers deign to take as protectors in addition to God,<sup>352</sup> or mistake as his offspring (Q 21:26). And yet it is the Unbelievers' actions that are at fault: the servants they erroneously take as protectors, could actually be angels, who are in themselves undoubtedly positive figures. As the frequent qualifications to those of his servants who do *believe*, attest,<sup>353</sup> God's servants are not synonymous with the Believers, but more akin to a chosen or selected people. This could well be a universal designation for all of creation, as it is also applied to those who do not (currently) believe, or act in a way that is consistent with those who do believe.<sup>354</sup> It is somewhat anomalous that angels do not prostrate (*s-j-d*) to God but it is clear that worshipping him in some way (generally *s-b-h*), is a key part of their role. Unlike humans, however, they have no choice but to perform this duty, which is an intrinsic part of the reason for their creation.

### 3.1.5 Conclusion

From the above, a number of points stand out:

- firstly, the application of the above verbal roots to angels serves to strengthen their heavenly origin.
- The fact that *malā'ika* are more likely to be "sent down" (*n-z-l*), than angels referred to by other terms, and are never "sent" (*r-s-l*), reaffirms the heavenly origin of the former. This clearly becomes more important by the Medinan period, when even angels referred to by other terms are no longer described as being "sent" (*r-s-l*).

---

<sup>352</sup> E.g., Q 7:194; Q 18:102; Q 43:15; cf. Q 25:17.

<sup>353</sup> E.g., Q 19:63; Q 21:105; Q 23:109; Q 25:63; Q 29:56; Q 35:32; Q 37:40, 74, 81, 111, 122, 128, 132, 160; Q 38:44, 83; Q 39:10; Q 42:23; Q 50:8.

<sup>354</sup> E.g., Q 2:186; Q 3:20; Q 6:88; Q 9:104; Q 17:17, 53; Q 25:17, 58; Q 34:9; Q 35:28, 32; Q 36:30; Q 37:169; Q 39:7, 16, 53; Q 40:48, 85; Q 42:25, 27.

- Secondly, and, most crucially, they clearly mark angels out as different from both humans, and the rest of creation.
- Even when angels and humans do the same actions (e.g., talking and worshipping), they do so in subtly different ways, which restricts any potential independence such acts might preclude. This thus halts the development of any individual, autonomous angelic personalities.
- Although humans are enjoined to worship God, with some complying, and some not, angels are simply ordered to bow (albeit before Adam, but by God).
- With the exception of *Iblīs*, on whom more subsequently (Section 5.1.4), they comply without question, despite, in the case of the *Iblīs* pericope, their clear opposition to Adam's creation in the first place.

## 4 Angelic Roles in the Qur'ān

Angels are described as performing a variety of roles throughout the Qur'ān, many of which are familiar from Jewish and Christian traditions, such as the heavenly host, God's servants, messengers, soldiers, advocates or intercessors, guardian angels, guardians of heaven and hell, angels of death, eschatological actors, witnesses, and teachers. Table 4.1 below summarises references to angelic roles in the Qur'ān. The presence of angels playing these same roles in (extra)biblical literature provides the background against which angelic roles in the Qur'ān must be evaluated. It also offers the opportunity to understand how these roles may have developed, or been reinterpreted in the Qur'ān.

**Table 4.1**      *Angelic Roles in the Qur'ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
The Heavenly Host	Q 69:17; Q 70:4; Q 89:22	-	M1
	-	Q 21:19, 20	M2
	Q 13:13; Q 16:49, 50; Q 39:75; Q 42:5; Q 53:26 <sup>355</sup>	Q 40:7	M3
	Q 2:30, 210; Q 4:172	-	MED
God's Servants	-	-	M1
	Q 43:19	Q 21:27	M2
	Q 16:50	-	M3
	-	-	MED
God's Messengers	Q 97:4	Q 51:24, 25, 31 <sup>356</sup>	M1
	-	Q 15:51, 57, 61; Q 19:17, 19; Q 26:160; Q 36:13, 14, 16, 20	M2
	Q 16:2; Q 35:1	Q 11:69, 70, 77, 81; Q 29:31, 33	M3
	Q 3:39, 42, 45; Q 22:75 <sup>357</sup>	-	MED
Soldiers	-	-	M1
	Q 25:25	Q 36:28	M2
	Q 41:30, 31	-	M3
	Q 3:124, 125; Q 8:9, 12; Q 66:4	Q 48:4, 7	MED
Advocates/ Intercessors	Q 53:26 <sup>358</sup>	-	M1
	-	Q 21:28	M2
	Q 42:5	Q 40:7	M3
	-	-	MED
Guardian Angels	-	Q 82:10, 11	M1
	-	Q 10:21 <sup>359</sup> ; Q 43:80	M2
	-	Q 6:61	M3
	-	-	MED
Guardians of Heaven/Hell; Angels of Death	Q 74:30, 31 <sup>360</sup>	-	M1
	Q 21:103; Q 25:22	-	M2
	Q 13:23; Q 16:28, 32; Q 32:11	Q 6:61; Q 7:37	M3
	Q 4:97; Q 6:93; <sup>361</sup> Q 8:50; Q 47:27; Q 66:6	-	MED
Eschatological Actors	Q 78:38; Q 89:22	-	M1
	Q 25:22, 25	-	M2
	-	Q 7:37; Q 41:30, 31	M3
	Q 2:210; Q 8:50	-	MED
Witnesses	-	Q 83:21	M1
	-	Q 50:21	M2
	-	Q 39:69; Q 40:51	M3
	Q 3:18; Q 4:166	-	MED
Teachers	-	-	M1
	-	-	M2
	-	-	M3
	Q 2:102	-	MED

<sup>355</sup> According to Nöldeke, this was part of an undated later addition to the *surah*, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 81.

<sup>356</sup> Although Nöldeke considered verses 24–60 to be a later addition, Nöldeke, 83.

<sup>357</sup> Although according to Nöldeke, large parts of the *sūrah*, including verses 68–76, are of late Meccan origin, Nöldeke, 158.

<sup>358</sup> See footnote 356.

<sup>359</sup> See footnote 199.

<sup>360</sup> See footnote 226.

<sup>361</sup> According to some, this was part of a Medinan addition to a late Meccan *sūrah*, with which Nöldeke was not entirely in agreement, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 119.

Table 4.1 (above) shows that the range of roles angels play remains more or less consistent throughout the qur'ānic corpus, however, some roles are limited to one or more periods, as shown by Graphs 4.5–4.10 before each section below, in which the ten roles outlined above will now be examined individually.

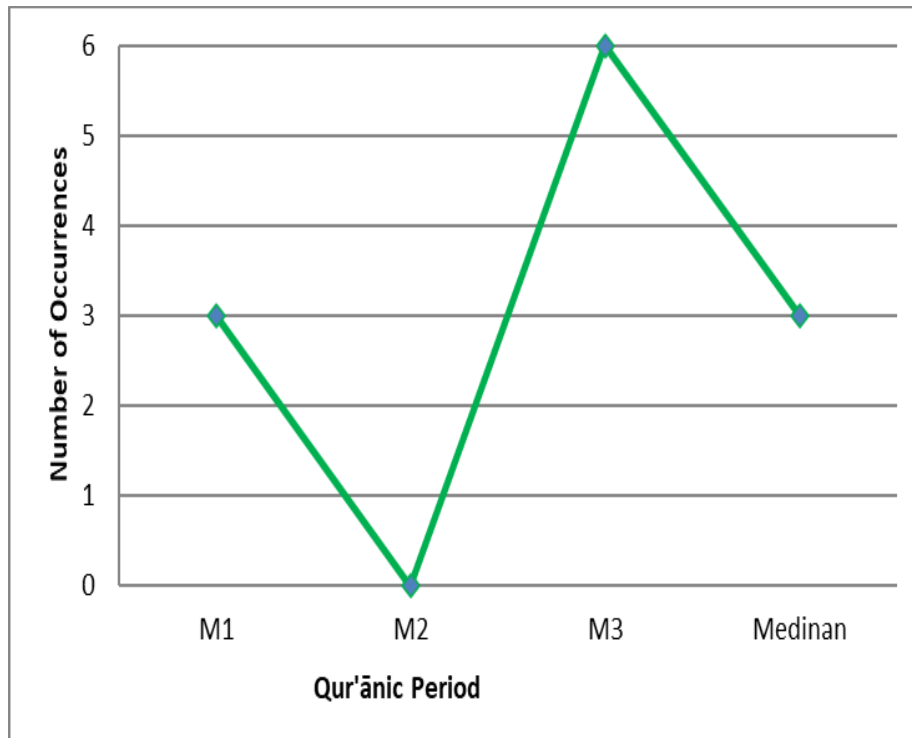
#### 4.1.1 Angels as Celestial Beings: The Heavenly Host

*Table 4.2 References to Angels as the Heavenly Host in the Qur'ān*

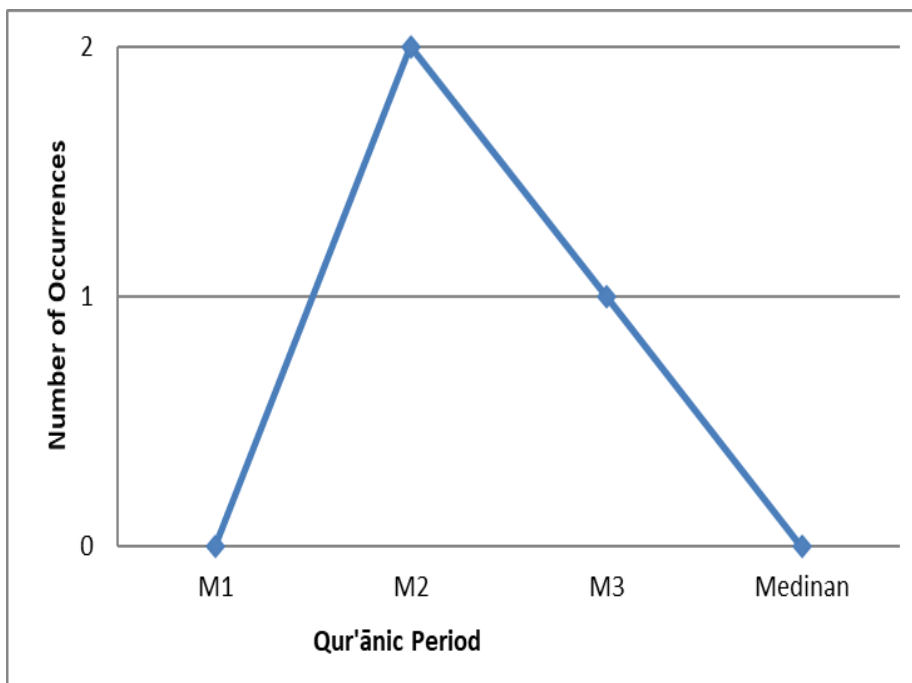
Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
The Heavenly Host	Q 69:17; Q 70:4; Q 89:22	-	M1
	-	Q 21:19, 20	M2
	Q 13:13; Q 16:49, 50; Q 39:75; Q 42:5; Q 53:26 <sup>362</sup>	Q 40:7	M3
	Q 2:30, 210; Q 4:172	-	MED

<sup>362</sup> See footnote 356.

*malak/malā'ika*



*Non-malak/malā'ika*



The Hebrew *sabā ha-šāmayim* (Neh 9:6; Dan 8:10), Greek στρατιὰ τῶν οὐρανῶν (Neh 9:6), δυνάμεως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Dan 8:10), and στρατιᾶς οὐρανόυ (Luke 2:13), are usually translated as “heavenly host,” which has clear military connotations in the above contexts. Even within the Hebrew Bible, however, the term would also come to refer to the assembly of heavenly beings, which encircled and worshipped God (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18).<sup>363</sup> Although the same heavenly (angelic) army may also logically be located near God, or described as serving, or praising him, as they clearly are in Hebrew and Greek, this does not appear to be the case in the Qur’ān, where a liturgical aspect is not present in references to the *jund min al-samā’/junūd min samāwāt*, or *min rabbika*, “the host(s)/force(s) of heaven/your lord.” Furthermore, *mal’āika* are not explicitly depicted as constituting a heavenly army in quite the same way as in the Bible. This does not mean that angels do not form part of God’s heavenly army in the Qur’ān, rather, that the military aspect of the angels’ roles is not stressed by the term(s) used to refer to them in the context of praising God. The terms *sabā ha-šāmayim*/στρατιὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ/στρατιὰ τῶν οὐρανῶν, are also used in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, in connection with the unsanctioned worship of figures other than God, a connotation which is absent from qur’ānic usage.<sup>364</sup> On the *jund/junūd min a(l)-samā’/samāwāt/min rabbika*, see Section 2.2.4; on angels as soldiers, see Section 4.1.4.

The role of the heavenly host as outlined above, is found throughout late antiquity, in both biblical and extrabiblical traditions.<sup>365</sup> In the Qur’ān, it also revolves around surrounding, and/or carrying the divine throne,<sup>366</sup> accompanying God on his travels (Q 2:210; Q 89:22), and

---

<sup>363</sup> H. Niehr, ‘Host of Heaven’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 428.

<sup>364</sup> Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16, 21:3, 5, 23:4, 5; 2 Chr 33:3, 5; Zeph 1:5; Jer 8:2, 19:13, although the Greek term is not employed in the LXX translation of Deut 17:3, or 2 Kgs 17:16, 21:3; Acts 7:42.

<sup>365</sup> E.g., Ps 103:20; Isa 6:1–3; Dan 7:10; Jub. 30:18, 31:14; T. Levi 3:5; 1 En. 39:12, 40:1, 61:10; Heb 12:22; Apoc. Ab. 19:4–7, and those (extra)biblical references listed in footnotes 367–368 below.

<sup>366</sup> Q 39:75; 40:7; 69:17. Cf. e.g., Ezek 1:1–28; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18; 1 En. 60:3, 71:7; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 7:14–15, 9:9; Rev 5:11, 7:11; 2 En. [J/A] 21:1, 22:2; 4 Ezra 8:21; 2 Bar. 48:10; T. Ad. 2:9, 4:8; 3 En. 18:24, 35:3, [App.] 22B:6; Ques. Ezra [A] 27–30.

praising him,<sup>367</sup> tirelessly (Q 21:19), both day and night (Q 21:20).<sup>368</sup> The striking features of this role in the Qur'ān are firstly, its clear eschatological aspect, with the angels' praises either taking place on *yawma'idh*, "that day," or being preceded, and/or followed, by warnings to the Unbelievers about the fate that awaits them, and/or requests for leniency towards the Believers.<sup>369</sup> Secondly, the preference for the verbal root *s-b-h* to describe the angels' act of praise is to be noted (see Section 3.1.4); the root *s-j-d*, which causes so much controversy in the *Iblīs* pericope (Section 5.1.4), by suggesting the angels are to worship Adam, as they do God, is only employed once in the context of the angelic worship of God (Q 16:49).<sup>370</sup> In contrast to *Iblīs*, whose pride prevented him from obeying God's command to prostrate before, and/or worship Adam, the angels are also described as *not* being too proud to worship, or serve God on two occasions (Q 4:172; Q 21:19; cf. Q 4:172; Q 16:49).

On isolated occasions, the angels are simply present (Q 53:26), or described as ascending (*'-r-j*), to God with the *rūḥ*, "spirit," but their presence within the heavenly realm is sufficient evidence on its own to label these as references to the heavenly host, whose logical role would be to praise God. The two references to angels by terms other than *malak/malā'ika*, in this category (Q 21:20; Q 40:7), employ no term to refer to the angels, but the collective description of *man fī al-samāwāt wa-al-arḍ*, "whoever are in heaven and earth" (Q 21:19), surely cannot *exclude* angels, who must, therefore be intended in Q 21:20. Angels are clearly

---

<sup>367</sup> Q 2:30; Q 13:13; Q 16:49; Q 39:75; Q 40:7; Q 42:5. Cf. e.g., Deut 33:2; Ps 29:1, 103:21, 148:2; Zech 14:5; Neh 9:6; T. Levi 3:5–8; 1 En. 40:3–4, 47:2, 61:11–12; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 7:15–17, 8:3, 16–19, 9:28–31, 42, 10:1–5, 19, 11:23, 25–32; Apoc. Zeph. A, from Clement, *Stromata* 5.11.77; T. Job 48:3, 50:1–2; 4Q405 = 4QShirShabbf 20, I 2–8; Luke 2:13–14; Heb 1:6, 12:22–23; Rev 4:8, 5:12–13, 7:11–12, 19:1–3, 6–7; LAE/Apoc. Mos. 33:2, Apoc. Mos. 17:1–2, 22:3, 27:5, 33:5; 2 En. [J/A] 1:6, 17:1, 19:3, 20:1–3, 23:1–2, [J] 31:1; T. Ab. [A] 20:12–13, [B] 4:4–6; Apoc. Ab. 18:14; Hist. Rech. 16:8c; T. Isaac 4:45–46, 7:1; T. Ad. 1:4–5, 9, 2:2, 6, 4:8; 3 En. 5:14, 35:4, 38:1, 40:1–2, 48B:1; Ques. Ezra [A] 28–30; Tanḥ. B., Exod 115.

<sup>368</sup> The belief that angelic worship is continuous and unwavering is also found in several (extra)biblical texts, e.g., T. Levi 3:8; Rev 4:8; Apos. Con. 7.25.1–10, 8.12.6–27; Lad. Jac. 2:15; 2 En. [J/A] 21:1, [J] 22:2, [A] 22:3; 3 En. 25:5, 27:8. Cf. 3 Bar. [Slav.] 10:5, [Gk.] 12:7, where it is the birds who praise God unceasingly, with Q 21:79, and Q 24:41.

<sup>369</sup> E.g., Q 39:75; Q 40:7; Q 69:17; Q 89:22.

<sup>370</sup> On this narrative see Section 3.1.4.



present in Q 16:49, where they are mentioned by name as part of this group. The parallels between Q 40:7, and Q 39:75, and Q 69:17, clearly suggest the subjects in Q 40:7, are the same as in the latter two verses, where they are explicitly referred to as *malā'ika*. The role of the heavenly host would thus appear to be both a key duty of both *malak/malā'ika*, and angels referred to by other terms, as well as one that was seen as heralding the final judgment.

#### 4.1.2 Angels as God's Servants

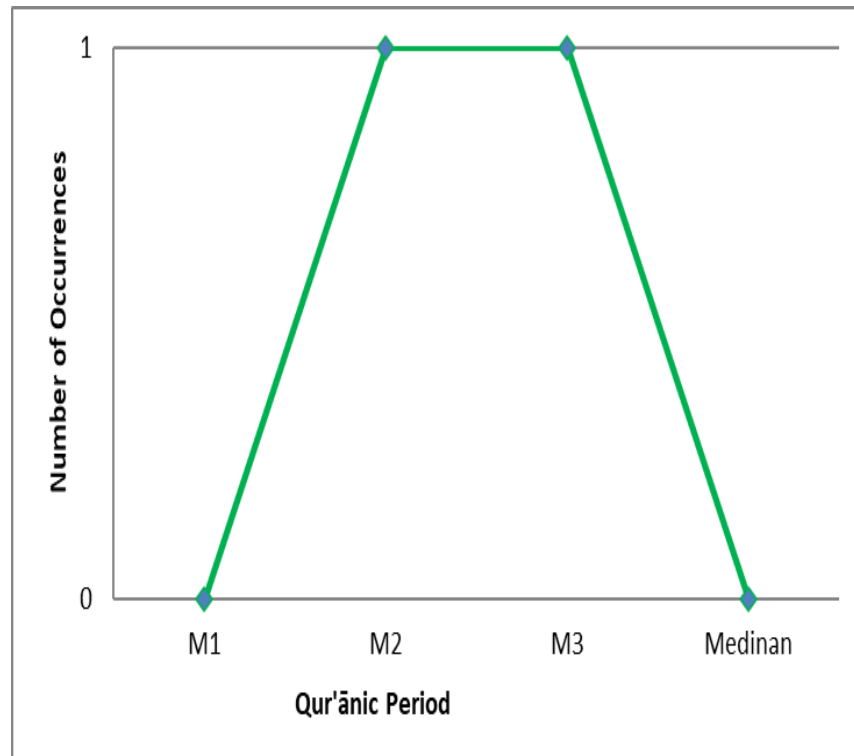
**Table 4.3**      *References to Angels as God's Servants in the Qur'ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
God's Servants	-	-	M1
	Q 43:19	Q 21:27	M2
	Q 16:50	-	M3
	-	-	MED

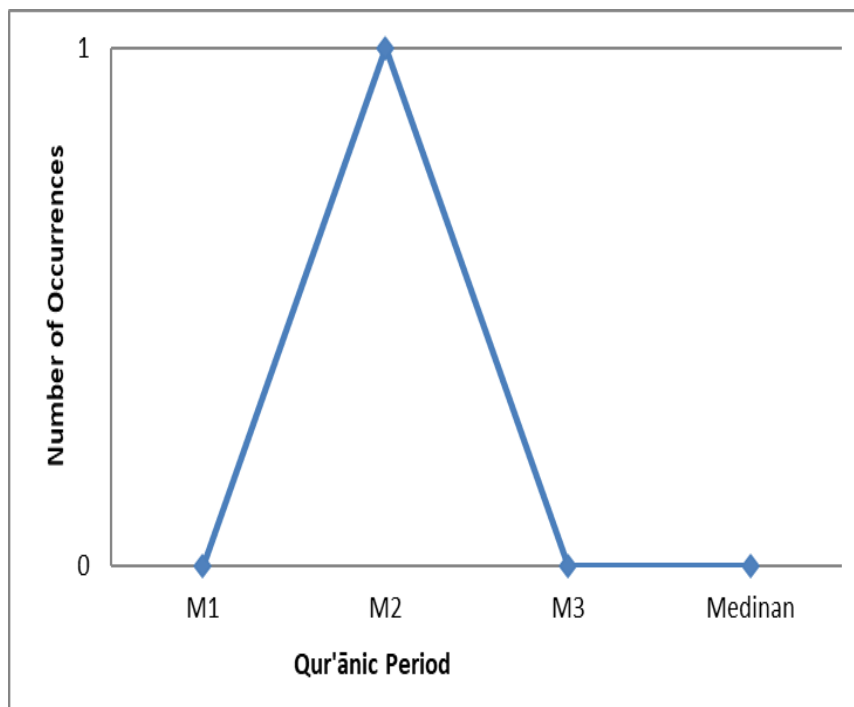
*Graphs 4.2a & b*

*Angels as God's Servants in The Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*

**malak/malā'ika**



**Non-malak/malā'ika**



To a certain extent an extension of the role of the heavenly host, angels are also specifically described as acting as God's servants, or carrying out his orders without question on a number of occasions (Q 16:50; Q 21:27; cf. Q 43:19). In Q 16:50, they are described as *fearing* (*kh-w-f*) God, which displays clear parallels with Q 21:28 (*kh-sh-y*), and raises the question, whether this fear is the reason they praise God so dutifully; never ceasing or failing in the execution of his will, rather than that they have no free will themselves.<sup>371</sup> Belief in the absence of angelic free will in postbiblical Judaism can be inferred from some rabbinic material, even if the manuscripts themselves postdate the Qur'ān.<sup>372</sup> Such fear could be a natural consequence of being in God's presence: it is an emotion frequently experienced by humans in (extra)biblical literature who ascend through the heavens, and are admitted into God's realm. The belief that it is dangerous, or impossible, for ordinary mortals to gaze at God's face, is also a recurrent theme.<sup>373</sup> Given the necessity of divine proximity for angels to successfully carry out their role, they might be expected to be afforded some protection from the effects of the blinding light of God's presence.<sup>374</sup> Angels do in fact appear to suffer less frequently than humans in (extra)biblical literature in this respect.<sup>375</sup> In the New Testament, they are even explicitly said to see God's face (Matt 18:10).<sup>376</sup>

The absence of any mortal ascents to heaven in the Qur'ān does not allow for a comparison of this trope, but further points to a belief, or concern, that the heavenly and

---

<sup>371</sup> Al-Qurṭubī and al-Ṭabrisī suggest the angels' fear could be due to the possible punishment God may bring down upon them, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>372</sup> E.g., tanḥ. B., Ex. 115 claims the angels can only act on God's command, Marmorstein, 'Fallen Angels'.

<sup>373</sup> E.g., Exod 33:18–20; T Levi 3:9; 1 En. 14:14–25, 15:1, 60:3–5; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 3:9, 9:1–2, 37; Sib. Or. 3.2:17, frag. 1:10–11; Apoc. Zeph. 6:4–15; Apoc. Mos. 34:1–2; LAE 25:2, 26:1; LAB 42:10; Lad. Jac. 2:1–3, 6–8, 3:4; 2 En. [J] 20:1–3, 21:2–5, 22:1–6, 37:1, 39:5–8, [A] 20:1, 21:2–6, 22:1–6, 37:1. 39:3–8; 4 Ezra 7:87, 13:3; Apoc. Ab. 9:1–3, 10:2, 16:2–4; 3 Bar. [Gk.] 7:2–5, [Slav.] 8:5; Apoc. Ad. 1:11; 3 En. 1:5–8; Ques. Ezra [A] 25–26.

<sup>374</sup> This is the case in 3 En. 22C:5–6, where God covers his face, in part, to protect the angels standing opposite his throne, from being blinded by the light he emanates.

<sup>375</sup> E.g., T. Levi 3:9; 1 En. 14:21–23; 4 Ezra 8:22; 3 En. 22:5–6, 27:11, 28:7, 48A: 1, 48B:1; Ques. Ezra [A] 29.

<sup>376</sup> Cf. Gen. Rab. 48:11, where they enjoy his splendour, and Sipre Lev 1.1, in which they are said not to; Clement allows for them to see the Son's face which is also God's (Eric Francis Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 210–11).

earthly spheres should, and are, to be kept separate. Angels may be able to move between the two, but only at God's command (Q 21:27; cf. Q 97:4). The only circumstances under which humans might glimpse the heavenly realm, is either after death, or at the final judgment, when, presumably, the earthly realm would cease to exist in the way it had up until then.<sup>377</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Angels as Messengers

**Table 4.4**      *References to Angels as Messengers in the Qur'ān*

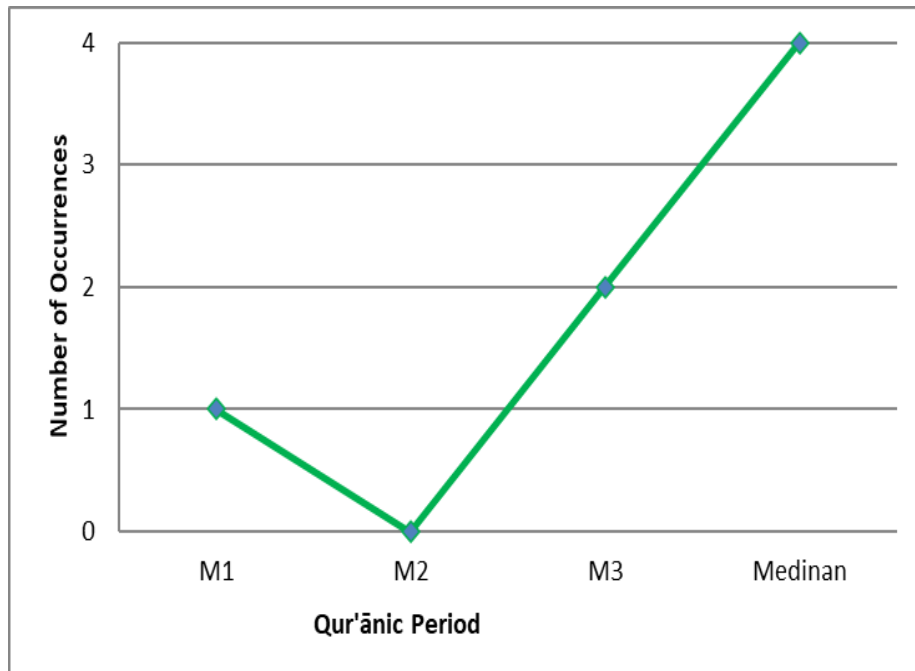
Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
God's Messengers	Q 97:4	Q 51:24, 25, 31 <sup>378</sup>	M1
	-	Q 15:51, 57, 61; Q 19:17, 19; Q 26:160; Q 36:13, 14, 16, 20	M2
	Q 16:2; Q 35:1	Q 11:69, 70, 77, 81; Q 29:31, 33	M3
	Q 3:39, 42, 45; Q 22:75 <sup>379</sup>	-	MED

<sup>377</sup> E.g., Q 2:82; Q 4:124; Q 7:42, 49; Q 16:32; Q 18:107; Q 19:60; Q 23:11; Q 36:26; Q 39:73; Q 40:40; Q 43:70; Q 89:30. Exceptions may be Abraham (Q 6:75), and *Idrīs* (Q 19:57).

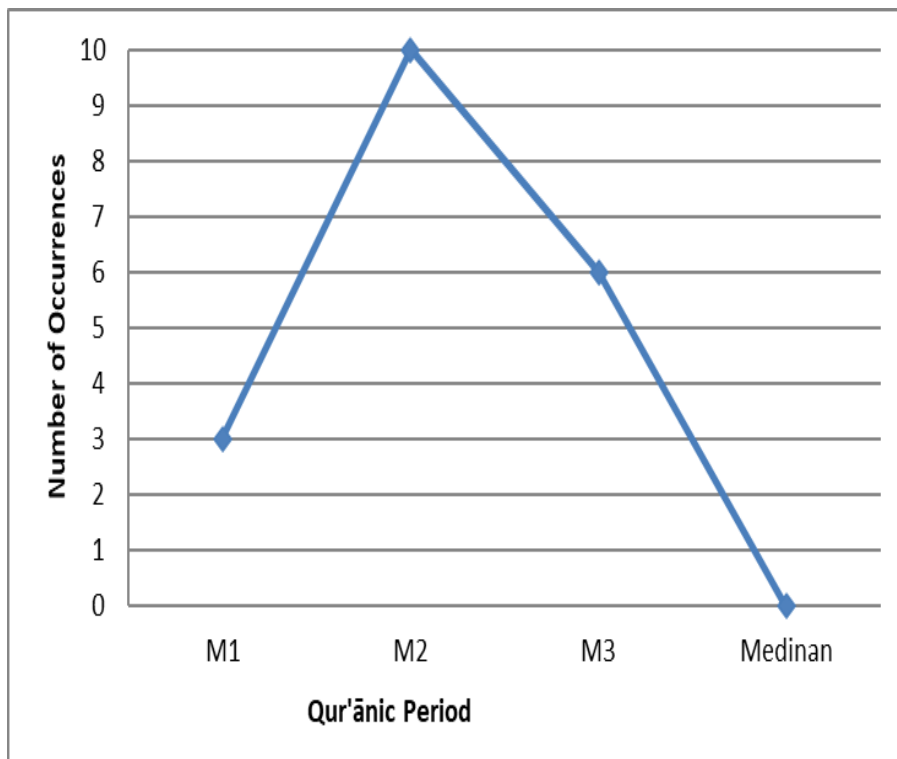
<sup>378</sup> See footnote 357.

<sup>379</sup> See footnote 358.

*Graphs 4.3a & b      Angels as God's Messengers in the Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*  
**malak/malā'ika**



**Non-malak/malā'ika**



Perhaps the most important of all the roles played by angels in late antiquity, allowing them to cross between the heavenly and divine realms, and thus form a link between the divine being and mankind.<sup>380</sup> In the Qur'ān, the vast majority of references to angels as messengers recount narratives that are clearly biblical in origin, and which appear to have been familiar to at least some of the Qur'ān's audience. These narratives fall into two categories: those featuring Abraham and Lot, and the annunciations to Zechariah and the Virgin Mary, which are discussed in more detail in Sections 6.1 and 6.2. The messengers in the stories involving Abraham and Lot in the Qur'ān are variously called "guests," *ḡayf*, "a strange, or foreign people," *qawm munkarūn*, "messengers," *mursalūn*, and "our messengers," *rusulnā*. The apparent ambiguity as to the visitors' identities, their number, and whether one or more of them, or God, is speaking at different points in the stories, is reflected in the Hebrew, and all subsequent ancient/pre-modern translations of the biblical versions of the stories (see Table 4.5 below and a simplified version below that (Table 4.6 which highlight the affinities between the translations, where they exist).

---

<sup>380</sup> E.g., Gen 16:7–12, 18:9, 14, 19:2–5; Judg 6:11–12, 13:3, 6, 8, 9; 1 Sam 9:8, 10; Ezek 9:1–7; 1 Kgs 13:18; Dan 10:11; Zech 1:14; 2 Chr 36:15–16; T. Reu. 3:15; T. Levi 3:7; T. Isaac 2:1; T. Jos. 6:6; 1 En. 10:1–2; Apoc. Zeph. 4:9; T. Job 18:5; Mark 16:5–7; Matt 1:20–21, 2:13–14, 19:20, 28:1–7; Luke 1:11–20, 26–38, 2:8–15, 24:1–7; Acts 1:10–11, 10:3–7, 8:26; Gos. Pet. 55–56; Rev 5:2, 14:6–7, 22:16; 2 En. [J/A] 2:8, 21:3, 72:3,5, [A] 72:8; 4 Ezra 4:1–3, 52, 5:31, 6:33, 7:1–2; T. Ab. [A] 1:4, 2:1, 4:9, 7:11, 8:11, [B] 1:1–2; T. Jac. 1:6; 3 Bar. [Gk./Slav.] 1:3–4, 4:15; 2 Bar. 6:5–6, 55:3, 56:1–2; T. Jac. 1:6; 3 En. 6:1. For Philo, this, and not continuous praise of God, was their main duty, Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 50.

**Table 4.5** *Nomenclature Applied to Abraham and Lot's Visitors*

Story Text/Verse	Abraham			Lot							
	18:2	18:16	18:22	19:1	19:2	19:5	19:8	19:10	19:12	19:15	19:16
MT	3 ‘ānāšîm	hā’ānāšîm		2 hamal’ākîm	‘ăḏōnay	(hā)’ānāšîm				hamal’ākîm	‘ānāšîm
SP						(hā)’ānāšîm			hamal’ākîm		
4Q180 2-4 II, 3-4 <sup>381</sup>	3 ha-‘ānāšîm = mal’ākîm										
LXX	3 ἄνδρες	οἱ ἄνδρες		2 ἄγγελοι	κύριοι	οἱ ἄνδρες	τοὺς ἄνδρας	οἱ ἄνδρες		οἱ ἄγγελοι	
Syr.	3 gavrim	gavro		2 malākhîh	morî	gavro				malākhîa	gavro/malākhîa
Onqelos	3 guvrin	guvraya’		2 mal’akaya’	dvonay	guvraya’	gavraya’		guvraya’	mal’akaya’	guvraya’
Pseudo-Jonathan	3 mal’akîn	mal’akaya				govraya’					
Neofiti		govriyah	govriyah /gavriya’								
Vulgata	3 viri	viri	-			2 angeli	domini	viri	viris		
Coptic (Sahidic)	3 rōme	rōme		2 angelos	čaf	rōme				angelos	
Ethiopic	3 ‘adaw	‘adaw		2 malākəst	‘agā’əstəya	‘adaw			-	malākəst	‘adaw
Armenian	3 erek’	aranc’n		2 hreštakk’n	teark’	ark’n	aranc’d	aranc’n	ark’n	hreštakk’n	
Georgian	3 kacni	kacni		2 angelozni	naupalno	kacni	kacta			angelozni	
Arabic Bible	3 rijāl	al-rijāl		al-malākān	saīday	al-rajulān				al-malākān	al-rajulān
Qur’ān	rusulna (11:69; 29:31)	al-mursalūn (51:31)		rusulna (11:77: 29:33)	qawm munkarūn (15:62)			ḏaifīy (11:78; 15:68)		rusul rabbika (11:81)	
	ḏaif ibrahīm (15:51; 51:24)	al-mursalūn (15:57)		al-mursalūn (15:61; 26:160; 36:13, 14, 16)		ḏaifhi (54:37)					
		qawn munkarūn (51:25)				mursalūn (36:20)					

<sup>381</sup> Although no copies of Genesis 18–19 were discovered amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls, this fragment from the 4QAgēs of Creation, which translates as “[ ] the three men [who] / appear[ed to Abrah]am at the oaks of Mamre were angels, [and Yahweh],” appears to refer to Genesis 18:2–22, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 40.

**Table 4.6**      *Discrepancies between Translations of Terms Used to Refer to Abraham and Lot's Visitors*

Story Text/Verse	Abraham			Lot								
	18:2	18:16	18:22	19:1	19:2	19:5	19:8	19:10	19:12	19:15	19:16	
MT	3 men	men		2 angels	lords	men				angels	men	
SP						men			angels			
4Q180 2-4 II, 3-4	3 men = angels			N/A	N/A							
LXX	3 men	men		2 angels	lords	men				angels		
Syr.										angels	men/angels	
Onqelos										angels	men	
Pseudo-Jonathan	3 angels	angels										
Neofiti		men										
Vulgata	3 men	men	-			men			-	angels	-	
Coptic		men				angels						
Ethiopic		men				men		-	angels	men		
Armenian						men				angels		
Georgian												
Arabic Bible										angels	men	
Qur'ān		our messengers (11:69; 29:31)	messengers (51:31)		our messengers (11:77: 29:33)	strange people (15:62)		my guests (11:78; 15:68)		messengers of your lord (11:81)		
	Abraham's guests (15:51; 51:24)	messengers (15:57)		messengers (15:61; 26:160; 36:13, 14, 16)	his guests (54:37)							
		strange people (51:25)			messengers (36:20)							



However, this ambiguity as to the visitors' identities, or natures, did not prevent them from being unanimously identified as angelic beings in rabbinic and other extrabiblical literature.<sup>382</sup> In the Qur'ān, these visitors typically "come" (*j-y-*) to their hosts,<sup>383</sup> and are described by Abraham (Q 15:57; Q 51:31), Lot (Q 36:20), the narrator,<sup>384</sup> and even themselves (Q 11:81; Q 36:16), as *mursalūn/rusul*, or as, 'having been sent' (Q 11:70). They bring *bushra*, "good news," to Abraham (Q 11:69; Q 29:31), who is curious to know their *khaṭb*, "mission" (Q 15:57; Q 51:31), and are then "denied," by the people of Lot (*k-dh-b*, Q 26:160; Q 36:14), who urges them to "follow/obey," them (*t-b-*, Q 36:20).

Angelic messengers also bring good news to Zechariah (Q 3:39), and Mary (Q 3:45); a *kalimah*, "word," from God, in the form of a son (as before). Mary also receives a visit from God's *rūḥ*, "spirit" (Q 19:17), who, despite appearing to her *basharān*, "in the form of a

---

<sup>382</sup> E.g., Jub. 16:1; T. Ash. 7:1; SP Gen 19:12; Philo: *Abr.* 107, 118; 4Q180 2–4 ii; Heb 13:2; T. Ab. [A] 6:4–6, [B] 2:10, 6:7–13; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 56.1, 5, 9; Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 3.6–7, 6.3–5; Irenaeus, *Epid.* 44; Philo, *QG* 4.44; Josephus, *A.J.* 1.196; Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 4:1–2; Tg. Neof. Gen. 18:2, 19:1, 15; Tg. Onq. Gen. 19:1, 15; Tg. Ps.-J. Gen. 18:2, 16, 22, 19:1, 15; Augustine, *Maxim.* 2.26.6–7; Gen. Rab. 50:2; John Chrysostom, *Hom. 45 Act.* 20:32; *Hom. 42 Gen.* 387:6; *Laz., concio* 2.5; *Theatr.* 3, leading some scholars to remark that "[s]uch exegetical agreement across a range of rabbinic sources of varying date and place of redaction is surprising," (Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, 'Abraham's Angels: Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 18–19', in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 189.

<sup>383</sup> E.g., Q 11:69, 77; Q 15:61; Q 29:31, 33; Q 36:13.

<sup>384</sup> E.g., Q 11:69, 77; Q 15:61; Q 26:160; Q 29:31; Q 36:13, 14.

“man,”<sup>385</sup> describes himself as *rusul rabbiki*, “a/the messenger of your lord.” This construct otherwise only appears in angelic references in relation to the messengers to Lot (Q 11:81; cf. Q 36:16, and see Sections 2.2.2 and 6.1). The *rūḥ*, “spirit,” that appears to Mary is described as having been ‘sent,’ (*r-s-l*), to her, a verbal root that elsewhere is only used in this context by the angels themselves (Q 11:80). Elsewhere in the Qur’ān, the *rūḥ*, “spirit,” is “sent (down)” (*n-z-l*), along with the angels (here, *malā’ika*: Q 16:2; Q 97:4), the implications of the use of *n-z-l* versus *r-s-l* having already been discussed in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2. Finally, we learn that God can make or choose angels (*malā’ika*), to be *rusul*, “messengers” (Q *al-Ḥajj* 22:75; Q 35:1), although, as discussed in Section 2.2.2, angelic *rusul* are in many ways distinct from human ones.

Q 35:1 is also the Qur’ān’s only reference to angels having wings, and/or the ability to fly, a useful, if not always necessary attribute for messengers to have, and one that is a common feature of (extra)biblical and late antique descriptions of angels.<sup>386</sup> As noted by Burge in his analysis of *sūrah* 35, the qur’ānic description of angels as having more than two wings, as

---

<sup>385</sup> The ability of angels to temporarily take on the appearance of humans, or at least for humans to perceive them as such, is a common feature of angelic envoys to humans, both on earth, and in visions or dreams (e.g., Gen 18:2, 16, 22, 19:5, 8, 10,12; Josh 5:13; Judg 13:3, 6, 8–11, 13, 15–18, 20–21; Ezek 9:2; Dan 10:5; 1 En. 17:1; Jos. Asen. B 14:6, 8–9, 11–12, 15:1–2, 11, 13–15, 16:1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 1–17x, 19–20, 22, 17:1–9, IV 18:3, 19:5–7, 9; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10; John 20:11, 12; LAB 9:10, Liv. Pro. (Elijah) 21:2; Lad. Jac. 5:1; 2 En. [J/A] 1:4, 6, 8, 10, 3:1, 7:1–3, 8:1, 9, 10:1, 4, 11:1, 13:1, 14:1, 16:1, 18:1–3, [J] 9, [J/A] 19:1, 20:1–2, 21:2–4; T. Ab. [A] 2:2, 3:5, 4:1,3, 5:3–4, 6:2, 5–6, 7:3–6, 8, [B] 4:2, 5:2–5, 6:10–11, 7:5, 9, 13; Apoc. Ab. 10:4, 15:6; Apoc. Ad. 2:1–3, 3:1). Humans who see angels within heaven, or through the medium of heavenly visions, usually perceive them as hybrid creatures, and it is usually only their faces which look like those of humans (e.g., Ezek 1:5–8; Lad. Jac. 1:4–6; Apoc. Ab. 18:3; 3 En. 44:5).

<sup>386</sup> E.g., Exod 25:20, 37:9; Ps 18:10; 2 Sam 22:11; Isa 6:2–6; Ezek 1:6, 8–9, 11, 23–25, 3:13, 10:5, 8, 12, 16, 19, 21–22; 1 Kgs 6:27, 8:6,7; Dan 9:21; 1 Chr 28:18; 2 Chr 3:11–12, 5:7–8; 1 En. 61:1, 93:12; Rev 4:8, 14:6; Apos. Con. 7.35.1–10, 8.12.6–27; Apoc. Mos. 37:3; 2 En. [J/A] 1:5, 3:1, 4:2, [J] 11:4, [J/A] 12:2, 16:7, [J] 18:1, [J/A] 19:6, 21:1, 5, [J] 29:5, [J/A] 67:2, [A] 72:3, [J/A] 72:9; Lad. Jac. 2:15; Apoc. Ab. 18:6–7, 23:12 (the latter in reference to ‘Azāzā’ēl/Aζαήλ, who, at least originally, was an angel); 3 Bar. [Gk.] 2:2, 3:2, 7:5, [Slav.] 3:2, 6:2, 8:5; T. Sol. 20:15; Apoc. El. (C) 5:2–4; Apoc. Sed. 2:5; 3 En. 1:5; 9:3, 15:1 (describing Enoch’s transformation into an angel), 19:25, 21:2–3, 22:13, 15, 25:6, 9–10, 41:3, 42:2, 47:4, 48A:2, [App.] 23:1, 16–17; Ques. Ezra A:29.

well as potentially an odd number of them, should not be taken literally, or read through the lens of modern scientific knowledge.<sup>387</sup> Exaggerated, or superlative descriptions of angels are also a common feature of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic texts.<sup>388</sup> Q 35:1 should therefore be understood as an expression of angels' otherworldliness, and of God's unlimited creative power in fashioning them in whichever way he desires.<sup>389</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Angels as Soldiers

**Table 4.7**      *References to Angels as Soldiers in the Qur'ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
Soldiers	-	-	M1
	Q 25:25 <sup>390</sup>	Q 36:28	M2
	Q 41:30, 31	-	M3
	Q 3:124, 125; Q 8:9, 12; Q 66:4	Q 48:4, 7	MED

<sup>387</sup> Burge, 'The Angels in *sūrat al-malā'ika*', 60.

<sup>388</sup> As noted by several scholars, e.g., Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine*, 182; F.I. Andersen, '2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 106, although Daniélou claims this is only true of later texts, while for Anderson, it is only the case in early ones, neither view appears to be correct, as demonstrated by the wide range of references in both earlier and later texts, e.g., T. Reu. 5:6; 1 En. 71:13; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 9:6; Gos. Pet. 40; Hippolytus of Rome, *Haer.* 9.13.2–3; Rev 4:6–8; 2 En. [J/A] 1:4–5, 18:1; Apoc. Ab. 18:3–5, 23:7; 2 Bar. 56:14; Gen. Rab. 68:12; 3 En. 9:1–5, 17:1–2, 18:19. 25, 21:1–4, 22:3–9, 25:1–4, 6, 26:2–7, 10, 33:3–4, 35:2.

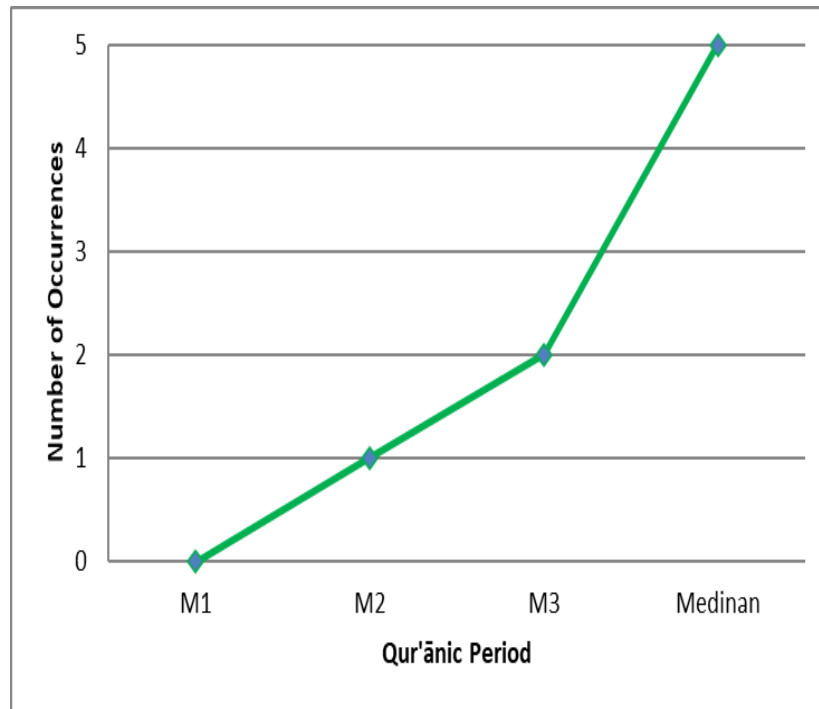
<sup>389</sup> Burge, 'The Angels in *sūrat al-malā'ika*', 60–61. An explanation also proposed by e.g., al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>390</sup> Although the reference here is not explicitly to (angelic) soldiers, the description of them being *sent down* on the day when the sky/heavens will be split open, both mirrors other, more explicit references to angelic soldiers being *sent down* (e.g., Q 3:124; 36:28), and reflects references to angels being present at the final day (e.g., Q 78:38; 89:22; 25:22; 2:210).

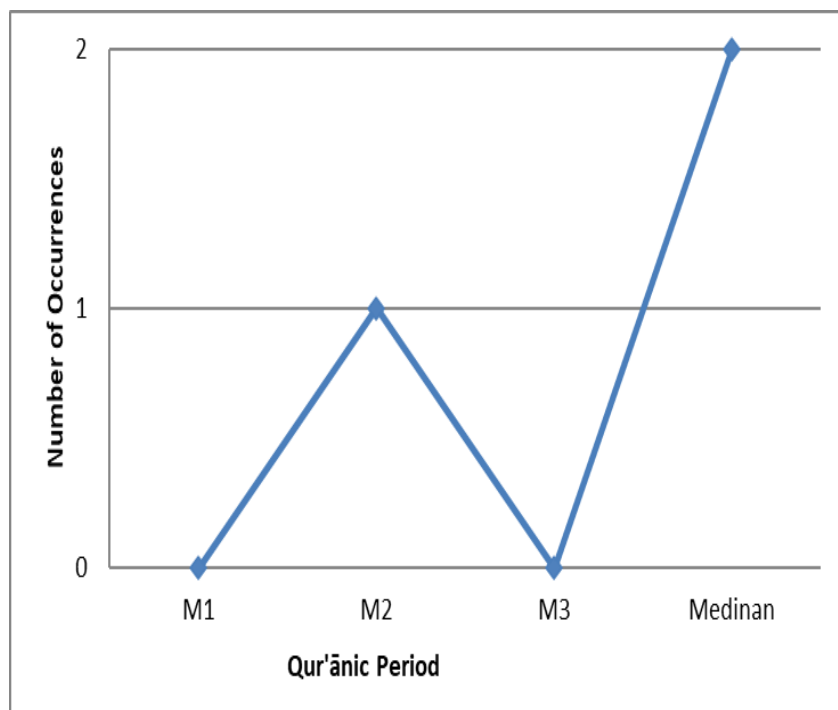
*Graphs 4.4a & b*

*Angels as Soldiers in the Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*

**malak/malā'ika**



**Non-malak/malā'ika**



The key point about this role is the clear divine origin of the angelic soldiers/forces, made explicit through the use of the verbal root *n-z-l*, the importance of which was discussed in Section 3.1.1,<sup>391</sup> and the references to heaven as the place from which they originate.<sup>392</sup> These run through all qur'ānic periods, and occur in both references that use *malak/malā'ika*, and those that do not. The military aspect of this role is underlined by the three references to between one and five thousand such angelic soldiers being sent (Q 3:124, 125; Q *al-Anfāl* 8:9). These only appear in later Medinan references, and perhaps illustrate the gradual shift described by Marshall, in which Muhammad and his community are handed responsibility for punishing the Unbelievers (on earth). This humanly inflicted, temporal punishment becomes a means of indirect divine punishment, in which the Believers would surely be grateful for, if not require, angelic assistance.<sup>393</sup> As with Burge's analysis of Q 35:1, the reference to a certain number of angelic soldiers should be read, not literally, but as an expression of great quantity; a trope that is regularly employed in (extra)biblical texts in relation to angels.<sup>394</sup> It follows that while strengthening (*th-b-t*) the Believers (Q 8:12), whose *awāliyyā'*, "protectors,"<sup>395</sup> they are, and whom the promise of paradise awaits (Q 25:24; Q *Fuṣṣilat* 41:31; Q 48:5), the angelic soldiers (will) smite/strike (*ḍ-r-b*) the Unbelievers,<sup>396</sup> for whom an angelic appearance only heralds doom.<sup>397</sup> There is therefore an eschatological aspect to this role,<sup>398</sup> but most references

---

<sup>391</sup> Q 3:124; Q 25:25; Q 36:28; Q 41:30.

<sup>392</sup> Q 36:28; Q 48:4, 7.

<sup>393</sup> Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, 152–85.

<sup>394</sup> See footnotes 388–389.

<sup>395</sup> A role otherwise generally only (successfully) performed by God: e.g., Q 2:107, 120; Q 4:119, 123, 173; Q 5:55; Q 6:14, 51, 70, 102; Q 9:74, 116; Q 10:27; Q 11:12, 20, Q 43 57, 113; Q 12:64; Q 13:11, 16;; Q 17:68, 86, 97; Q 18:17, 26, 50, 102; Q 25:18; Q 29:22, 41; Q 32:4; Q 33:17, 65; Q 34:21, 37, 41; Q 39:3, 62; Q 40:21, 33; Q 42:6, 8, 9, 28, 31, 44, 46; Q 44:41; Q 45:10; Q 46:32; Q 47:11; Q 48:22.

<sup>396</sup> Q 8:12, recalling Q 8:50.

<sup>397</sup> Q 25:27; Q 41:28; Q 48:7.

<sup>398</sup> Q 25:25; Q 41:30, 31; Q 48:3.

appear to refer to events regarded as historical by Islamic tradition (Q 3:124–125),<sup>399</sup> indeterminate conflict(s) with the Meccans (Q 8:9, 12), and the destruction of Lot’s people (Q 36:28),<sup>400</sup> which are in-line with Marshall’s Medinan punishment paradigm.<sup>401</sup>

In contrast to this, in (extra)biblical material, although angels are sometimes described as, or compared to soldiers, or as constituting a (heavenly) army,<sup>402</sup> they rarely/less frequently take part in battles, or provide the sort of support to Believers seen in the Qur’ān. When they

---

<sup>399</sup> There is some disagreement among early and Medieval Islamic scholars as to whether the reference here is to the Battle of *Uḥud* or *Badr*, and whether angels fought at both battles or just the latter, providing simply moral support at the former (e.g., ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī), Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>400</sup> It should, however, be noted that this reference to angels not needing to be sent down to Lot’s people does not refer to a conflict between Believers and Unbelievers. Rather, it points to the potential strength of angels, even if the Qur’ān here denies that angels were responsible for the destruction of Lot’s people. See Section 6.1. Cf. Q 48:4, and Q 66:4, which also point to potential angelic strength, albeit in different contexts. Al-Ṭabarī reads Q 36:28 as meaning that God did not send another revelation following these *rusul*, which acts as a warning to the Quraysh, for whom the qur’ānic messenger represents their last chance to avoid suffering a similar fate, Nasr.

<sup>401</sup> See footnote 394.

<sup>402</sup> E.g., Num 22:23, 31; Josh 5:14–15; 1 Chr 21:16, 27, 30; 2 Chr 32:31; 1 En. 54:4–5, 56:1, 60:1; 4 Macc. 4:10; Matt 26:53; Acts 12:23; Rev 9:16–17; Apos. Con. 7.25.1–10, 8.12.6–27; T. Ab. [A] 2:2, 4, 19:4, [B] 14:7; 2 En. [J/A] 1a:5–6, 18:1, 20:1, 2, [A] 21:1, 33:7, [J/A] 22:2, 29:1, 3, [J] 33:7, 39:8; T. Ad. 4:6–7; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 1:4, 4:24; 6:17; 3 En. 5:14, 19:16, 22B:2, 48D:7.

do wage war, this tends to be in a future, eschatological context.<sup>403</sup> For most late antique groups, in both the past and present, certainly in the Hebrew Bible, and throughout late antiquity, it is usually God himself who supports, strengthens, and delivers people from their foes.<sup>404</sup> The extent and method of divine involvement in earthly battles clearly has ramifications for the degree of divine transcendence, the discussion of which is beyond the remit of this section.

---

<sup>403</sup> E.g., Dan 10:20; T. Levi 3:3; T. Naph. 8:2; 1QM 9, 14, 12, 1–4; 4Q491; 4Q529; 4QM<sup>a</sup>; Apoc. Eli. (C) 5:21; Rev 12:7, 19:14. Cf. Origen, *Princ.*, 1.8.1, where Gabriel is said to be in charge of warfare. From the evidence of the War Scroll, the Qumran community in particular appear to have counted on angelic support in the final battle between good/evil and light/dark, at the end of time, Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 33–34. Potential “exceptions” are 2 Sam 24:16–17, but the first reference to the *mal’āk*, “angel” (the LXX refers to this angel as ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ, the “angel of God”), is followed by one to the *mal’āk yhwh*/ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου “angel of the Lord”; in Eccl 48:21, and 1 Macc 7:41, both God and his ἄγγελος, “angel,” are involved in the destruction of the Assyrians, whether independently of each other or not, is unclear; in the T. Levi 5:3, the ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ, “angel of God,” hands Levi a shield and a sword, and urges him to take vengeance on Shechem, during which he (the angel), will be with him, although 6:11 states that this was in fact God’s vengeance; in 2 Macc 8:18–20, God provides assistance from heaven, which could be angelic in nature, while in 2 Macc 11:6, and 15:22, Judas Maccabee, or his followers, beg God to send an ἄγγελος, “angel,” to save them, a request which appears to be fulfilled in the first instance in verse 11:8, following the arrival of a figure clad in white, dressed for battle, riding a horse. Yet, this victory is later attributed to God himself (2 Macc 12:11, 16); 2 Bar. 80:1, although it is unclear here if the, “angels,” (*Syr. mal’akā*), actually fought against the surrounding enemies, or simply prevented the temple vessels from falling into their hands; in Exod. Rab. 18:5, it is Michael who defeats Sennacherib’s army. Rosemary A. Arthur notes that participation in eschatological battles, is one of two main functions of angels in qumranic texts, Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 51.

<sup>404</sup> E.g., Exod 14:14, 23:22–23, 27–28, 33:2; Deut 1:30, 42, 4:34, 20:4, 33:29; Josh 10:14, 25, 42, 23:3; Judg 3:10, 6:15–16, 11:32, 12:3; Ezek 30:24–25; Jer 1:19, 15:20; Zech 10:5, 14:3; 2 Chr 20:17, 22:6, 32:8. Dan 10:13–14 could represent an exception, but here, the context is still definitively eschatological. References to the *mal’āk yhwh* acting on God’s behalf (e.g., Isa 37:36; 2 Kgs 19:35), are not included here, since the *mal’āk yhwh* is a manifestation, or hypostasis, of the Godhead.

#### 4.1.5 Angels as Advocates/Intercessors between Man and God

**Table 4.8**      *References to Angels as Advocates/Intercessors in the Qur'ān*

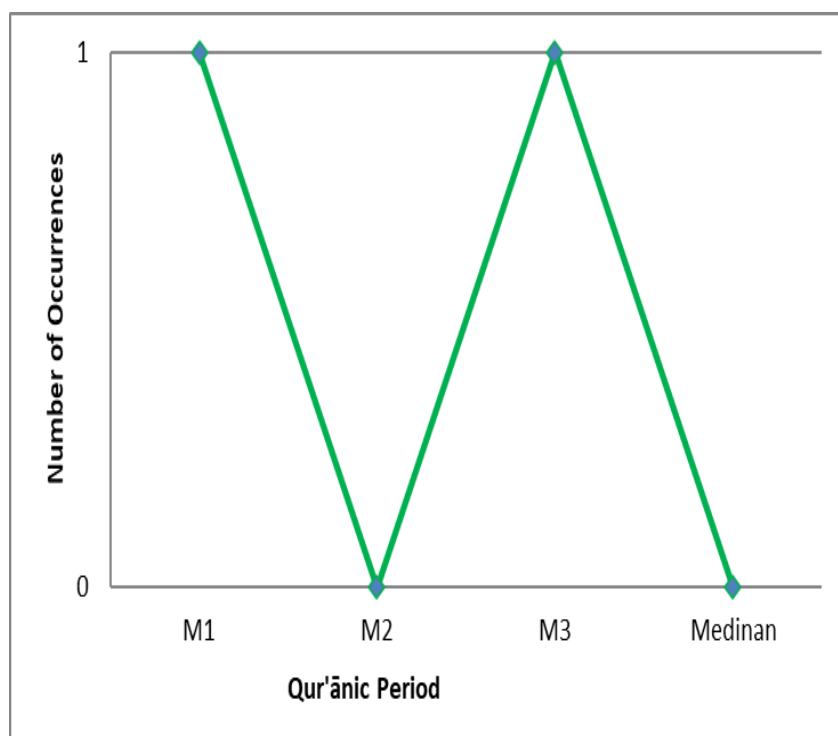
Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
Advocates/ Intercessors	Q 53:26 <sup>405</sup>	-	M1
	-	Q 21:28	M2
	Q 42:5	Q 40:7	M3
	-	-	MED

---

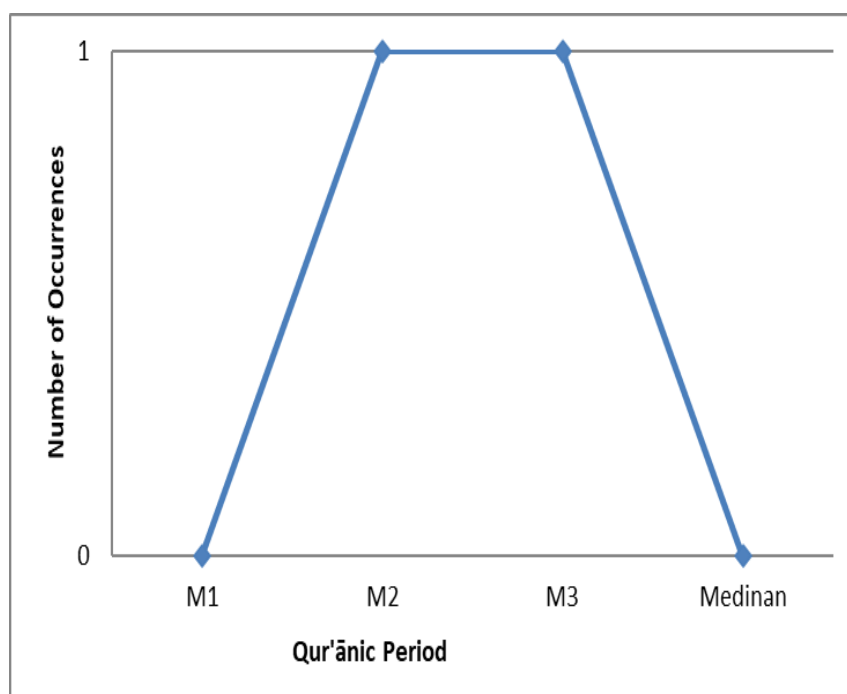
<sup>405</sup> See footnote 356.



*Graphs 4.5a & b      Angels as Advocates/Intercessors in the Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*  
**malak/malā'ika**



**Non-malak/malā'ika**



This role is noticeable for its absence in the Medinan period. Prior to this, angels are depicted as acting as intercessors in the middle and later Meccan periods, even if by the Medinan period it was to no avail (cf. Q 2:255). However, even intercession with permission (whether angelic or otherwise), is mainly condemned by the late Meccan period.<sup>406</sup> There would appear to be a semantic split in the root used to describe the angels' act of intercession, with *sh-f-*, being employed in the references to angelic intercession from the early and middle Meccan periods, and *gh-f-r*, in those from the later Meccan period. Such a small sample can hardly be indicative of general or wider usage, however, and the fact that the former hardly appears in Medinan material at all, while the latter does significantly more so than in Meccan material, is not sufficient evidence in itself to draw any conclusions about the usage of these roots.

The limited references to angelic intercession in the Qur'ān, and the tendency to limit it, stands in stark contrast to the tradition of angelic intercession in late antique Jewish and Christian material.<sup>407</sup> This in itself represents a development from the relatively few references to angelic intercession in the Hebrew Bible, and its almost complete absence from the New Testament.<sup>408</sup> In the case of the latter, this was presumably because the "immediacy of the presence of God precluded any further use of angelic mediation," which was now focussed on

---

<sup>406</sup> E.g., Q 6:51, 70; Q 30:13; Q 32:4; Q 39:43, 44; Q 40:18. Cf. the singular early Meccan (Q 74:48), and middle Meccan references (Q 36:23), and three Medinan ones (Q 2:48, 123, 254).

<sup>407</sup> E.g., Tob. 12:15; T. Levi 3:6; 5:6; T. Dan. 6:2; 1 En. 9:1–11, 13:4–6, 10, 15:2, 40:6, 47:2, 99:3, 104:1–4; Apoc. Mos. 29:14, 33:5, 35:2; 2 En. [J/A] 33:10; T. Ab. [A] 9:3, 7, 14:5–14, [B] 7:18–8:1; 3 Bar. [Gk./Slav.] 11:4–16:3; Hist. Rech. 16:8c–8d; T. Ad. 2:1, 6, 9; Apoc. Sed. 12:3, 14:1, 16:2, 4; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 2:5–7; 3 En. [App.] 15B:2–5. This increase in references to angelic intercession in extrabiblical material, compared to the Bible, does not come at the expense of non-angelic intercession, or direct communication with God: for example, y. Ber., 9, 1 13a says that man should not call on Michael or Gabriel instead of God. Since angelic intercession is the subject of discussion here, and a comparison of different methods of intercession warrants a publication on its own, this will not be examined further here.

<sup>408</sup> E.g., Job 5:1; 33:23; 1 Kgs 13:6; Zech 1:12–13; Rev 8:3–4, although the references are not always explicit and use a range of terms to refer to angels. It should, however, be noted, that the Bible neither condemns, nor denies the efficacy of angelic intercession, although the New Testament does, of course, speak out against angelic veneration (e.g., Col 2:16, 18; Gal 1:8; Rev 19:10, 22:8–10), which could be connected to it. On this, see Section 5.1.6.

Christ.<sup>409</sup> The differences between angelic intercession in the Qur'ān and extrabiblical material are best exemplified by the Enochic literature. Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, the manuscript evidence has now conclusively demonstrated that the Enochic tradition “circulated across a surprisingly broad geographical range,” plausibly including the (pre-)qur'ānic milieu.<sup>410</sup> This means qur'ānic views on angelic intercession could have developed against a background that viewed it positively, and may thus represent a conscious rejection of it.

As it appears in the Enochic tradition, angels can be found actively interceding at their own initiative, both for (righteous) victims,<sup>411</sup> as well as wrongdoers (e.g., 1 En. 9:1–11), and at God's command (e.g., 2 En. [J/A] 33:10). The requirements that must be fulfilled for successful angelic intercession on behalf of mortals within the Enochic tradition, are underlined by the watchers' request to Enoch to intercede on their behalf (1 En. 13:4, 16:2; 2 En. [J/A] 7:4). Enoch initially complies with this request (1 En. 13:6–7; cf. 2 En. [J/A] 18:7), but a vision subsequently reveals the futility of this endeavour (1 En. 13:8). According to 1 Enoch, Enoch was created to reprimand the watchers (1 En. 14:3, 16:2–3), and man cannot intercede on behalf of (fallen) angels (1 En. 15:2; 2 En. [J/A] 7:5).<sup>412</sup> Presumably, the watchers could not have asked other angels to intercede for them, even if they had not been rendered mute (1 En. 13:5), and were to be ignored (1 En. 14:4, 7), in the same way that they were unable to intercede on behalf of their own offspring (1 En. 14:7), who were neither fully human, nor angelic. Enoch's failed intercession on behalf of the watchers, and their own on behalf of their children, as well as for themselves, seemingly fail as a consequence of their impossibility, rather than any principle of impermissibility. The rules of intercession established in 1 Enoch appear to be mainly concerned with respecting the boundaries that exist between the earthly and heavenly spheres (e.g., 1 En. 15:10), and the nature(s) of those involved. Intercession can thus usually only proceed in one direction (earthly → heavenly), and via a being with a more elevated nature

---

<sup>409</sup> Macdonald, 'Christology and the Angel of the Lord', 332.

<sup>410</sup> Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 9.

<sup>411</sup> E.g., 1 En. 47:2, 99:3, 104:1–4; 2 En. 30:2; 3 En. [App.] 15B:2.

<sup>412</sup> Although Enoch appears to contradict himself in 2 Enoch [J/A] 18:7, by claiming to have done just that.

(i.e., mortal → angelic). This explains why neither Enoch, nor other angels, could intercede on behalf of the watchers, and the watchers could not intercede on behalf of their offspring (e.g., 2 En. [J/A] 53:1–2).<sup>413</sup> This view would appear to be limited to the (early) Enochic tradition,<sup>414</sup> as human intercession on behalf of humans not only occurs in non-Enochic material, but sometimes alongside, or in addition to, angelic intercession.<sup>415</sup>

The Qur’ānic restrictions, if any can be established given the limited number of references, appear to be based on more straightforward notions of limiting authority, i.e., only God can decide who can intercede and when, if at all. These may be connected to broader concerns regarding the division, or sharing of authority, with its potential to lead to *shirk*. Given the Qur’ān’s apparent concern to define and maintain a strict degree of separation between the heavenly and earthly spheres,<sup>416</sup> it is perhaps surprising that this does not appear to feature in relation to angelic intercession. Presumably, this was overshadowed by the more pressing need to avoid the risk of *shirk*. If no forms of intercession between man and God are permitted, its nature is of little consequence. As was noted in Section 2.1, this view of angelic intercession as ineffaceable because it was impermissible, can only be ascertained with certainty by the Medinan period, so it is possible that some form of angelic intercession was permitted prior to this.<sup>417</sup> Bowker thinks the Qur’ān demonstrates that belief in the efficacy, and permissibility of such intercession was so deep rooted, that the Qur’ān could not hope to eradicate, only to contain it.<sup>418</sup> He further notes this tension between what was clearly an established practice of

---

<sup>413</sup> Although this reference could be read as denying the efficacy of any kind of intercession between man and God, not just that via a mortal intermediary.

<sup>414</sup> In contrast, the Qumranites did not consider angels to be valid intermediaries at all, and prayed directly to God, what Arthur calls a transitional phase between biblical and ‘Dionysian’ Christian understandings of (angelic) intercession, Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 52.

<sup>415</sup> E.g., Gk. Apoc. Ezra 2:5–7; T. Ab. [A] 14:5–14.

<sup>416</sup> On this see Section 3.1.1.

<sup>417</sup> The assertion in Q 1:5, that Believers only seek help from God, either suggests otherwise, or constitutes an exception.

<sup>418</sup> J. W. Bowker, ‘Intercession in the Qur’an and the Jewish Tradition’, *JSS* 11, no. 1 (1966): 72.

(angelic) intercession and attempts to limit it is also evident in the Jewish tradition.<sup>419</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the Qur'ān was successful in suppressing the practice of intercession, the threat it clearly posed to the principle of *tawḥīd*, “oneness,” of the Godhead, ruled out its continued acceptance on practical, as well as theological grounds.

---

<sup>419</sup> Bowker, 79–80, e.g., y. Ber. 9:1.

#### 4.1.6 Guardian Angels

**Table 4.9**      *References to Angels as Guardian Angels in the Qur'ān*

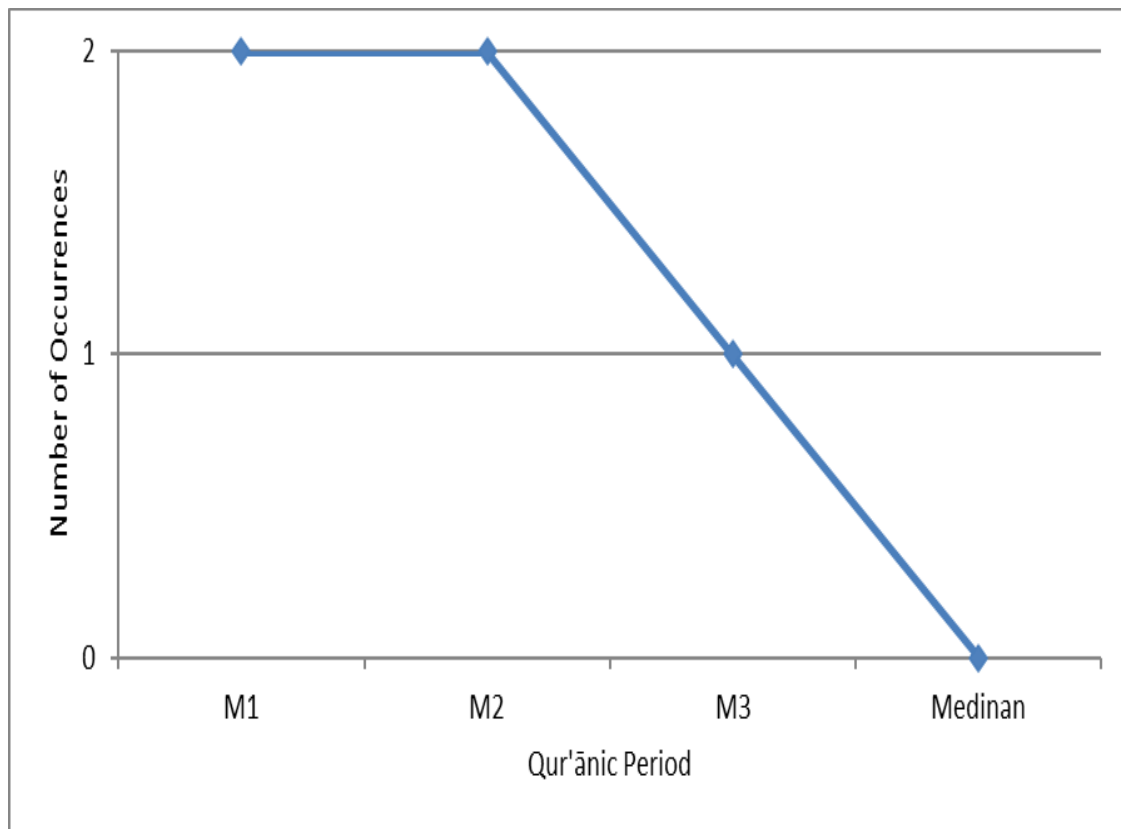
Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
Guardian Angels	-	Q 82:10, 11; Q 86:4	M1
	-	Q 10:21 <sup>420</sup> ; Q 43:80	M2
	-	Q 6:61	M3
	-	-	MED

**Graph 4.6**      *Guardian Angels in The Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*

#### *malak/malā'ika*

There are no instances of *malā'ika* playing this role.

#### Non-*malak/malā'ika*



<sup>420</sup> See footnote 199.

The six references in this category all stem from the Meccan portion of the Qur’ān and employ the terms, *ḥafīẓ(ūn)* (Q 82:10–11; Q *al-Ṭāriq* 86:4); *ḥafāẓah*, “guardians” (Q 6:61), and *rusul* (Q 6:61; Q *Yūnus* 10:21; Q 43:80).<sup>421</sup> These are both protectors (Q 82:10–11; Q 86:4, and Q 6:61), and strict law-enforcers (Q 10:21; Q 43:80). The latter are tasked with recording the activities of the Unbelievers, but plausibly also those of the Believers. Q 6:61 goes on to describe God’s *rusul* as “taking,” (*w-f-y*), or facilitating the movement of souls upon death, a task elsewhere assigned to *malā’ika*,<sup>422</sup> and once to *rusul* (Q 7:37, late Meccan), but seemingly never to non-angelic *rusul*, so we can be confident that it is angels who are described here (see Section 4.1.7). Additionally, the Qur’ān explicitly says that human messengers are not sent to act as *ḥafīẓūn* (Q 42:48; Q 83:33), the role of a guardian (angel) appearing to be beyond the remit of the duties of a human *rasūl* (see Section 2.2.2). That both the *ḥafīẓūn* in Q 82:10–11, and the *rusul* in Q 10:21,<sup>423</sup> and Q 43:80, are described as *writing* (*k-t-b*), provides a semantic link that further helps identify the *rusul* as angels, and not as human messengers, who are never described as writing.<sup>424</sup> Given that we know angelic *rusul* also fetch the souls of men upon their deaths (Q 6:61; Q 7:37), we can confidently read Q 10:21, and Q 43:80, as referring to angelic, rather than human *rusul*, and thus Q 82:10, and 11, as referring to angelic (scribal) guardians. The reference here to angels recording man’s good and/or bad deeds overlaps somewhat with the role of angelic witnesses, and will thus be examined in more detail in Section 4.1.9.

In the Bible, the concept of a ‘guardian’ angel, assigned by God to protect a specific individual, usually during their lifetime, was clearly well established from the outset.<sup>425</sup> This role

---

<sup>421</sup> See Section 2.2.7.

<sup>422</sup> Q 16:28, 32; Q 32:11 (late Meccan); Q 4:97; Q 8:50; Q 47:27 (Medinan).

<sup>423</sup> See footnote 199.

<sup>424</sup> Writing, both generally, and in the context of the recording of sins, will be discussed in the sections on angels as witnesses (4.1.9), and teachers (4.1.10).

<sup>425</sup> E.g., Job 33:23–6; Gen 19:9–17, 24:40, 48:16; Exod 14:9, 23:20, 23, 32:34, 33:2; Num 20:16; Ps 34:7, 91:11; Isa 63:9; Dan 3:28, 6:22, 10:13, 21, 12:1; Matt 18:10; Acts 12:7–11; Heb 1:14, Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 27.

was further developed in extrabiblical texts.<sup>426</sup> If anything, it is surprising that there are so few references to guardian angels in the Qur'ān, but again, this could be due to the need to avoid dividing, or diluting power. Although there is some evidence from extrabiblical material, that an individual's guardian angel was tasked with preventing them from straying from the straight path (e.g., T. Dan. 5:4; T. Ben. 6:1; T. Ad. 4:2), this is more often God's responsibility.<sup>427</sup> In the Qur'ān, it is only God who has the power to determine who should be guided (or perhaps, guarded), and who should be allowed to go astray.<sup>428</sup>

---

<sup>426</sup> E.g., Tob. 5:21; T. Jud. 3:10; T. Dan. 6:5; T. Ben. 6:1; 1 En. 20:3, 5, 100:5, although the latter reference is to an eschatological guardian angel; 1 QM 9, 15–16, 17.6–7; Apos. Con. 7.38.15; 2 En. [A] 19:5, [J/A] 33:6; [J] 33:10, [J/A] 33:11–12, [A] 35:2; T. Ab. [B] 6:13; Apoc. Ab. 10:3, 6, 16:4, 17:14; Apoc. El. (C) 5:6 (again, post-death); T. Jac. 1:10, 2:5–11, 4:15; T. Ad. 4:1–2; Apoc. Sed. 7:13, 14:1; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 2:13–15; 3 En. 1:4. Pseudo-Philo refers to personal guardian angels (LAB 13:6, 59:4), while Origen argued that all humans were born with a divine guide; for Christians, this was an angel, while for non-Christians, it was a demon, *Comm. Jo.*, 8.26, *Comm. Matt.*, 13.26–28, Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, 98.

<sup>427</sup> Letter of Aristeas 195, 207, 239; Ps. Sol. 12:5; Ps.-Ph., LAB 20:4, 24:4, 53:12; 4 Ez. 16:75; Ode Sol. 14:4.; 4 Bar. 5:35; Hist. Rech. 17:2–3; Apos. Con. 8.6.6.

<sup>428</sup> E.g., Q 1:6; Q 2:26, 53, 70, 142, 143, 150, 185, 198, 213, 258, 264, 272; Q 3:8, 86, 101, 103; Q 4:26, 68, 88, 137, 143, 168, 175, 176; Q 5:16, 51, 67, 105, 108; Q 6:39, 56, 71, 77, 80, 84, 87, 88, 90, 117, 125, 140, 144, 149, 161; Q 7:16, 30, 43, 155, 158, 178, 186; Q 9:18, 19, 24, 37, 80, 109, 115; Q 10:9, 25, 35, 45, 88, 108; Q 11:34; Q 12:52; Q 13:27, 31, 33; Q 14:4, 12, 21, 27; Q 15:39; Q 16:9, 15, 36, 37, 93, 104, 107, 121, 125; Q 17:15, 84, 97; Q 18:17, 24, 57; Q 19:58, 76; Q 20:50, 122, 123; Q 21:31; Q 22:16, 24, 37, 54; Q 24:35, 46, 54; Q 25:31; Q 26:62, 78; Q 27:41, 63, 92; Q 28:22, 50, 56, 63; Q 29:69; Q 30:29; Q 33:4; Q 34:6, 24, 50; Q 35:8; Q 37:99, 118; Q 39:3, 18, 23, 36, 37, 41, 57; Q 40:28, 33, 34, 74; Q 41:17; Q 42:13, 44, 46, 52; Q 43:10, 27; Q 45:23; Q 46:10; Q 47:5, 17; Q 48:2, 20; Q 49:17; Q 53:30; Q 57:26; Q 61:5, 7; Q 62:5; Q 63:6; Q 64:11; Q 68:7; Q 72:10; Q 74:31; Q 76:3; Q 90:10; Q 92:12; Q 93:7.



#### 4.1.7 Angelic Guardians of Heaven and Hell

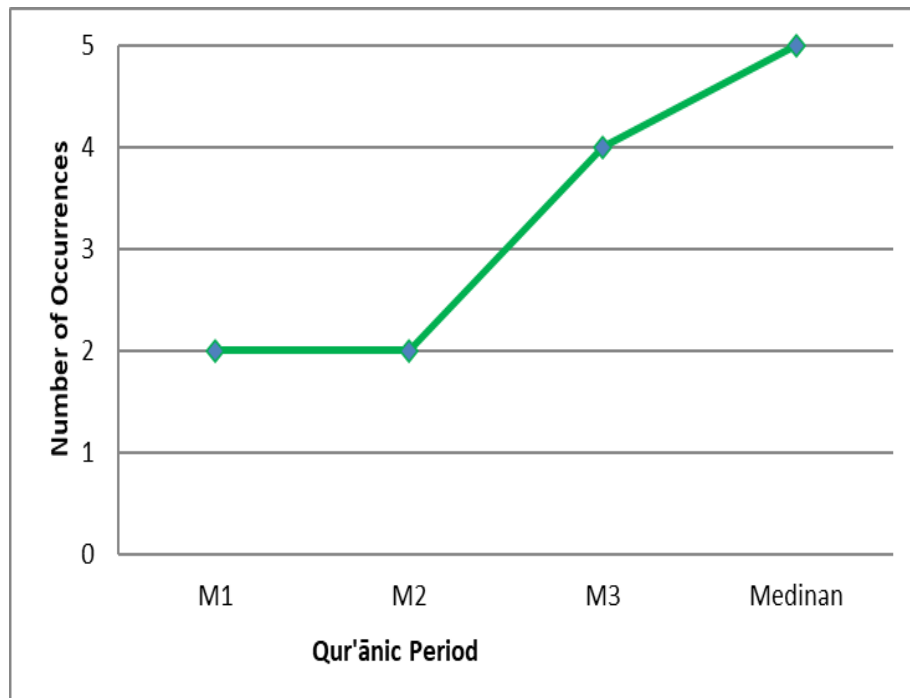
**Table 4.10** *References to Angels as Guardians of Heaven and Hell in the Qur'ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
Guardians of Heaven/Hell	Q 74:30, 31 <sup>429</sup>	-	M1
	Q 21:103; Q 25:22	-	M2
	Q 13:23; Q 16:28, 32; Q 32:11	Q 6:61; Q 7:37	M3
	Q 4:97; Q 6:93; <sup>430</sup> Q 8:50; Q 47:27; Q 66:6	-	MED

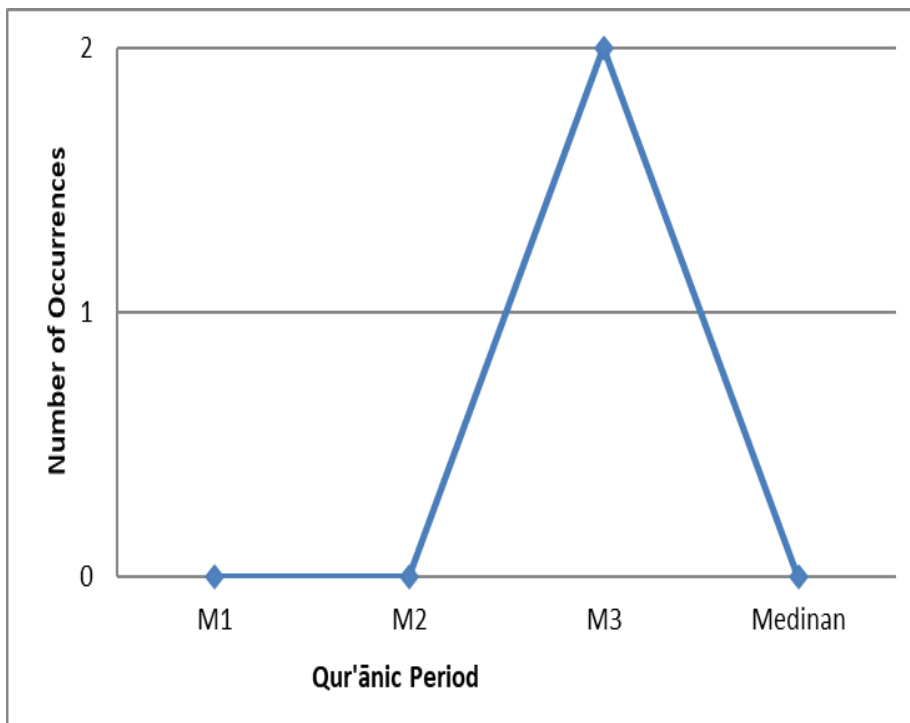
<sup>429</sup> See footnote 226.

<sup>430</sup> According to some, part of a Medinan addition to a late Meccan *sūrah*, with which Nöldeke was not entirely in agreement, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 119.

*Graphs 4.7a & b      Angelic Guardians of Heaven and Hell in the Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*  
**malak/malā'ika**



**Non-malak/malā'ika**



Angelic guardians of heaven and hell, as well as angels who accompany humans on the journey to heaven (or hell) after death, are referred to more than a dozen times in the Qur'ān. These references occur mostly in references to *malak/malā'ika* from the later Meccan and Medinan periods, with a noticeable chronological increase in the number of references throughout the qur'ānic corpus. The almost complete absence of references to angels by terms other than *malak/malā'ika* in the Medinan period explains the lack of these here (see Table 2.5 above). The apparently increasing importance of distinguishing between the earthly and heavenly realms, tallies with the overall increase in references to this role between the earliest Meccan and Medinan periods.<sup>431</sup> In the later Meccan period, God can be found performing this role just as often as angels.<sup>432</sup> Welch sees this as part of a broader transfer of function in post-*Badr* references, with angels predominantly serving God before this, but supporting man afterwards.<sup>433</sup>

There are two distinct sides to the role; that of guardians of hellfire, who appear only in the early Meccan and Medinan periods,<sup>434</sup> and angels of death. In Q 32:11, the *malak al-mawt*, “angel of death,” appears as a definite figure, but this single reference makes it hard to determine whether or not this angel was, or became, an independent character in the Qur'ān.<sup>435</sup> In the middle and later Meccan periods, collective angels facilitate the movement of people's souls to heaven.<sup>436</sup> From the middle Meccan period onwards, however, this is more

---

<sup>431</sup> As the increasing preference for the root *n-z-l* instead of *r-s-l* to describe the sending of things with a definite heavenly origin throughout the qur'ānic corpus appears to imply. See Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, and Graphs A3.1:–A3.4, in the Appendix.

<sup>432</sup> E.g., Q 10:46, 104; Q 13:40; Q 16:70; Q 40:77.

<sup>433</sup> Alford T. Welch, ‘Allah and Other Supernatural Beings’, *JAAR* 47, no. 4 (1979): 748–49. He further views this as having also occurred in the field of revelation, with angels taking on responsibility for this from God/his *rūḥ*, in the Medinan period, but this is based on a reading of Q 2:97 as referring to the Angel Gabriel's/*Jibrīl*'s bringing down of the qur'ānic revelations, which is not explicit from the text.

<sup>434</sup> Q 66:6; Q 74:30, 31.

<sup>435</sup> As is the case in post-qur'ānic tradition, see footnote 196.

<sup>436</sup> Q 6:61; Q 16:32; Q 13:23; Q 21:103.

often, to hell,<sup>437</sup> in both references to *malak/malā'ika*, and to angels by other terms. The *'adhāb*, “punishment,” that the latter constitutes, is frequently juxtaposed with the reward represented by the former, with both groups arriving there described as *entering (d-kh-l)*, their final resting places. Sinners are, however, prevented from entering paradise (Q 25:22), while the angels themselves will also enter the garden to greet the Believers (Q 13:23). For wrongdoers, seeing angels (Q 25:22), is not a cause for celebration, as is often the case when angels appear to humans on earth.<sup>438</sup> In the Medinan period, angels performing this role become noticeably more militant, are described as *ghilāz*, “stern,” and *shadād*, “severe” (Q 66:6), more vocal in their condemnation of sinners (Q 4:97; Q 6:93), and even physically violent (Q 8:50; Q *Muḥammad* 47:27).

The two references to angels by terms other than *malak/malā'ika* in this category (Q 6:61; Q 7:37), employ the term *rusul*, but can be identified as angels from context (the act of taking men's souls upon their deaths), and the linguistic affinity with references that do employ the terms *malak/malā'ika*.<sup>439</sup> The reduced range of terms used to refer to angels in the late Meccan period, and the resulting predominance of the term *rusul* (Table 2.1 above), also supports the identification of these *rusul* as angels, in the sense of *malā'ika*, and not as human *rusul*.

References to this role in the Bible are sparse,<sup>440</sup> but (extra)biblical angels are frequently tasked with accompanying mortals on their journeys from life to death, as well as on temporary ascents to the heavenly realm.<sup>441</sup> In both cases, the mortals in question are often already

---

<sup>437</sup> Q 4:97; Q 6:61, 93; Q 7:37; Q 8:50; Q 16:28; Q 25:22; Q 32:11; Q 47:27.

<sup>438</sup> E.g., Q 3:39, 45; Q 11:69, 71, 74; Q 15:53–55; Q 19:7; Q 29:31; Q 41:30; Q 51:28.

<sup>439</sup> E.g., the use of the verbal root *w-f-y*, which also appears in Q 4:97; Q 8:50; Q 16:28, 32; Q 32:11; Q 47:27; the accusation of denying God's *āyāt*, and lying (*k-dh-b*), against him, which appears in Q 6:93.

<sup>440</sup> E.g., Job 33:22; Prov 16:14; Matt 13:39, 41–42, 49; Luke 16:22.

<sup>441</sup> E.g., T. Jud. 10:2; Apoc. Zeph. Akh. Tx. 4:6–7; 2 En. [J/A] 3:1; T. Ab. [B] 9:5–10, [A] 11:5, 13:13, 14:8; 3 En. 6:1; Apoc. Ad. 3:4; Apoc. Sed. 2:5; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 6:3–14; Ques. Ezra A:14–16, B:5–6, and the references in footnote 443 below. In rabbinic Judaism, angels of death were tasked with delivering sinners to hell and inflicting punishment on them. The angel of death, often identified with *haśāṭān*, or evil personified, became a particularly prominent figure, Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 65–67.

well-known figures, and the text(s) in question expand upon their stories as they appear in the Bible.<sup>442</sup> The earliest and most well-known example of this is that of the *Book of the Watchers*, which “sets the tone for the entire body of later apocalyptic literature.”<sup>443</sup> It was thus one of, if not the, most influential extrabiblical work for both Jews and Christians, and, it would seem, for the qur’ānic *Urgemeinde* as well. Although it would appear that the writers of extrabiblical material, particularly those of apocalypses, held a “general belief that an angel called for the spirit of every man at death,” the significance of this is unclear.<sup>444</sup> Guiding humans to heaven or hell after death, of course overlaps with the angels’ eschatological role, which is discussed in Section 4.1.8. Like qur’ānic angels, extrabiblical angels also mete out justice on sinners, which is often observed by humans on temporary heavenly ascents, as well as foretold for the end of time.<sup>445</sup> Less often, they are described as guarding heaven, and/or hell in the present.<sup>446</sup>

#### 4.1.8 Angels as Eschatological Actors

**Table 4.11**     *References to Angels as Eschatological Actors in the Qur’ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur’ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā’ika</i>	Other Terms	
Eschatological Actors	Q 78:38; Q 89:22	-	M1
	Q 25:22, 25	-	M2
	-	Q 7:37; Q 41:30, 31	M3
	Q 2:210; Q 8:50	-	MED

<sup>442</sup> E.g., T. Levi. 2:7–5:6; 1 En. 17:1–4, 21:5, 22:3, 24:6, 32:6, 33:3; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 7:2–5; T. Job 52:5–10; 2 En. [J/A] 36:2, 55:1–2, 67:2, 71:28, 72:1, 9; T. Ab. [B] 8:2–12:14, 14:7, [A] 9:8, 10:1–15:4, 20:10–14; Apoc. Ab. 12:1–18:14; 3 Bar. [Sl.] 1:7–17:1, [Gk] 1:8–17:2; T. Isaac 2:5, 5:4; T. Jac. [Boh.] 5:13; T. Ad. 3:6.

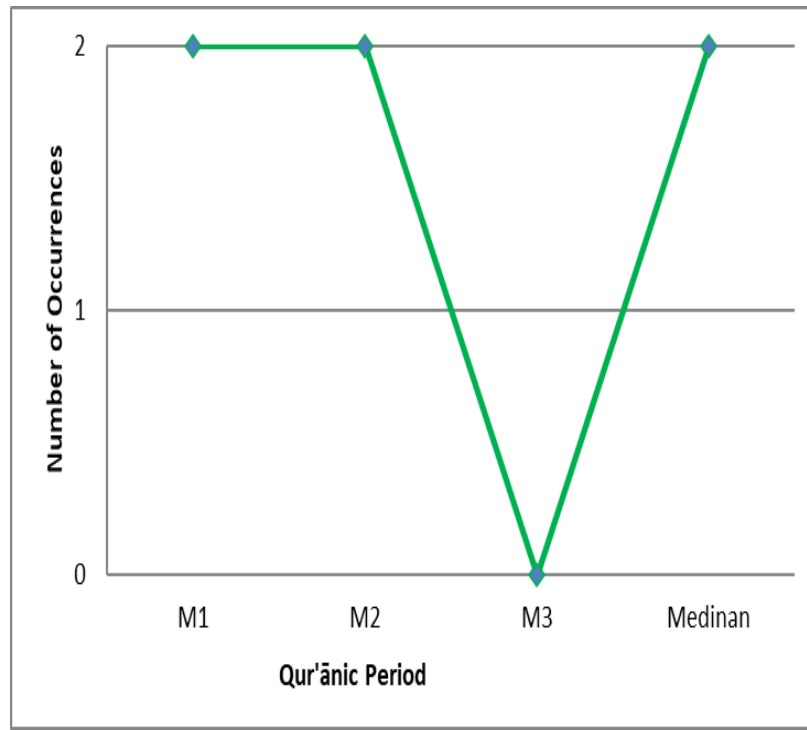
<sup>443</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press 1993), 29.

<sup>444</sup> Kuhn, ‘The Angelology of the Non-canonical Jewish Apocalypses’, 227–28.

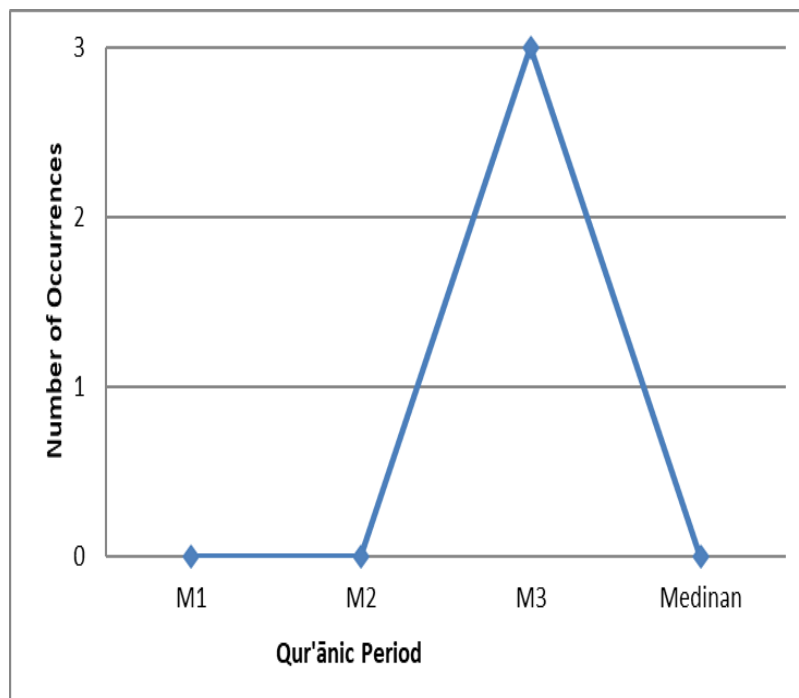
<sup>445</sup> E.g., 1 En. 53:3–5, 54:1–6, 63:1, 66:1, 67:4, 69:1, 100:4; Sib. Or. 2:285; Apoc. Zeph. Sah. Frag. B:1–2; 2 En. [J/A] 7:1–3, 10:3; T. Ab. [B] 9:5–10, [A] 12:1–2, 12:10, 14, 13:11–12; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 4:22; 3 En. 44:1–6, 47:1–4; Vis. Ezra 19, 27, 40.

<sup>446</sup> E.g., 2 En. [J/A] 8:8, [J] 42:4.

*malak/malā'ika*



*Non-malak/malā'ika*



This role overlaps considerably with a large number of other roles, but here the focus will be on aspects of angels' eschatological role that are exclusive to it, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition. In the Qur'ān, the presence or appearance, of angels (along with God), in itself, heralds the last day.<sup>447</sup> This is a cause for joy for the Believers, who need not fear them (Q 41:30), but not the Unbelievers, for whom their arrival is not good news (Q 25:22). The angels will strike or smite (*d-r-b*, Q 8:50), the latter, before taking their souls (Q 7:37; Q 8:50), to the fate that awaits them, the hellfire, with the Unbelievers, or wrongdoers, frequently going on to lament their sinfulness.<sup>448</sup>

Eschatological references both to angels, and more generally speaking, are noticeably absent from the Hebrew Bible, which lacks a definite concept of life after death, and thus the need for a developed eschatology. In contrast, it is in relation to events at the end of time that angels play their most important role in the New Testament.<sup>449</sup> Angelic involvement in eschatological events is also a common feature of many extrabiblical texts: the coming, along with Christ, of angels, is in itself one of the signs of the end, which they often announce like heralds.<sup>450</sup> After praising God/Christ, they will gather, punish, and sometimes even judge sinners,<sup>451</sup> at whose demise they can sometimes be found rejoicing.<sup>452</sup> They will additionally protect the righteous,<sup>453</sup> over whom they will also rejoice.<sup>454</sup> Crucially, (extra)biblical angels will

---

<sup>447</sup> Q 2:210; Q 25:25; Q 78:38; Q 89:22.

<sup>448</sup> E.g., Q 25:27–28; Q 78:40; Q 89:24.

<sup>449</sup> Heijne, 'Angels'.

<sup>450</sup> E.g., T. Lev. 18:5; 1 En. 1:9, 61:10–12; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 4:14; Sib. Or. 2:240; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Thess 4:16; Mark 8:38; Matt 13:41, 16:27, 24:30–31, 25:31; Luke 9:26; Rev 7:1–3, 8:1–13, 9:1, 13, 10:1, 11:15, 14:6–7; Apoc. El. (C) 3:4, 5:2–6, 39; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 3:8; Apoc. Dan. 3:7.

<sup>451</sup> E.g., T. Levi 3:2–3; 1 En. 1:9, 53:3, 54:6, 55:3, 56:5, 62:11, 63:1, 66:1, 91:15, 100:4, 10; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 1:5; Sib. Or. 2:285; Matt 13:41–43, 49; Rev 9:15, 14:17–20, 16:1–21, 19:6–7, 20:1; 2 En. 10:1, 4; 4 Ezra 16:67; Herm. Sim. 6.2.5 (62.5), 7.1–6 (66.1–6); 3 En. 18:24.

<sup>452</sup> E.g., 1 En. 47:2, 61:11–12, 97:1, 99:3.

<sup>453</sup> E.g., 1 En. 61:3, 99:3, 100:5, 104:1; Sib. Or. 2:315; Mark 13:27; Matt 13:49, 24:31; Rev 7:1–3; 4 Ezra 7:85, 95; Apoc. El. (C) 1:10, 5:2–6; Apoc. Ad. 5:9, 12.

<sup>454</sup> E.g., 1 En. 51:4, 104:4.

also be responsible for fighting and defeating the antichrist.<sup>455</sup> Compared to biblical, and certainly extrabiblical angels, qur'ānic angels have much more limited authority, and less agency in directing events at the end of time. This would merit further examination as part of a larger study of qur'ānic eschatology.

#### 4.1.9 Angels as Witnesses

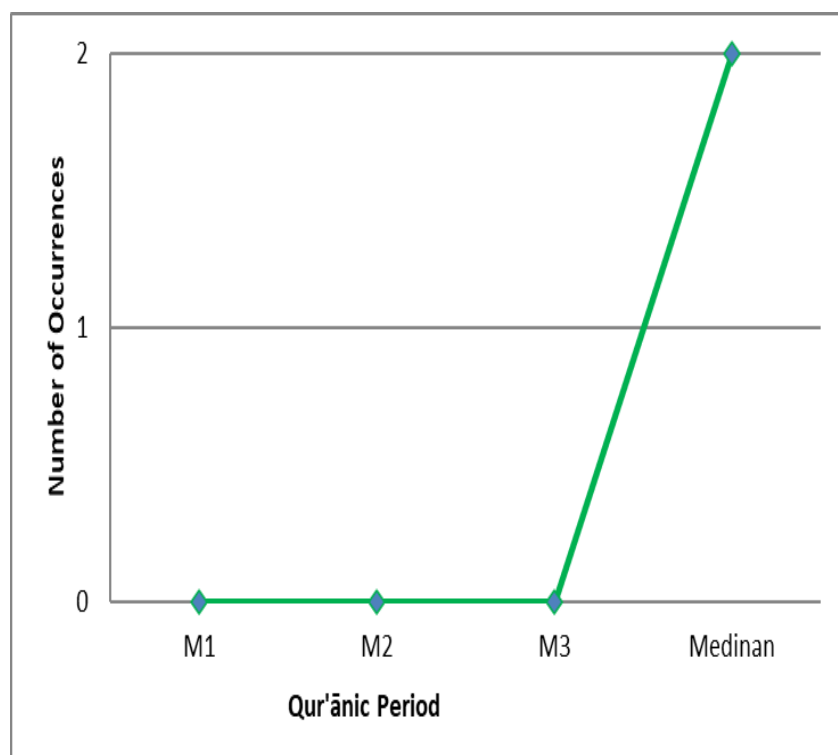
**Table 4.12**     *References to Angels as Witnesses in the Qur'ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
Witnesses	-	Q 83:21	M1
	-	Q 50:21	M2
	-	Q 39:69; Q 40:51	M3
	Q 3:18; Q 4:166	-	MED

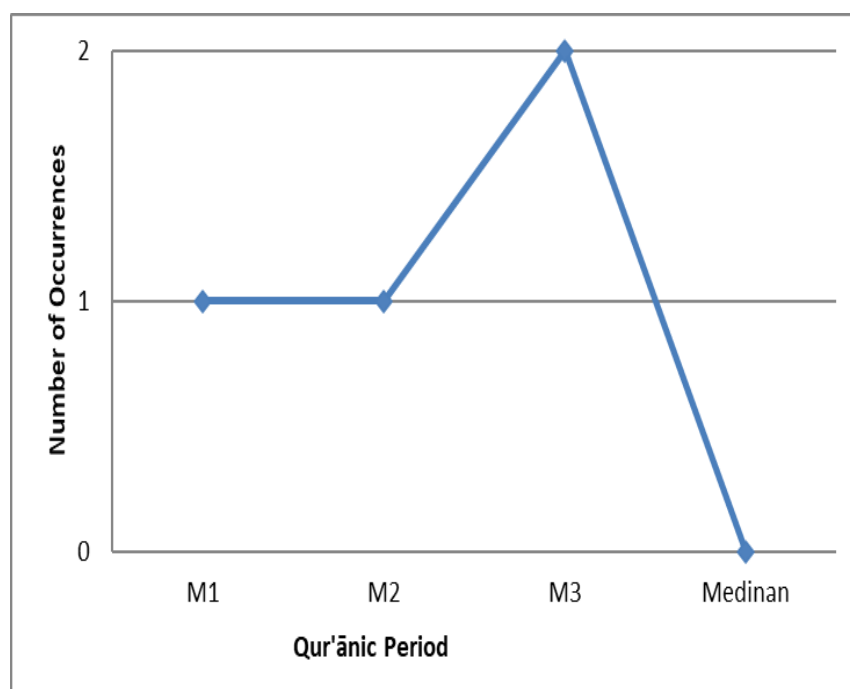
<sup>455</sup> E.g., Rev 12:7, 20:1–3; Apoc. El. (C) 5:21. Usually this was Michael, before this task was handed to the Messiah, who had previously not been involved in this at all, Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), 151.



*Graphs 4.9a & b      Angels as Witnesses in the Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*  
**malak/malā'ika**



**Non-malak/malā'ika**



The paucity of references to this angelic role makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions about it. Besides God himself, *wa-ūlū l-ʿilmi qāʾiman bil-qisṭi*, “those imbued with knowledge,” and the angels bears witness to the fact that, *allāh annahu lā ilāh illā huwa*, “there is no god but he” (Q 3:18). The witness to, or testimony, that the revelation (i.e., the Qurʾān), is from God, is witnessed once by the angels (Q 4:166), the Believers (Q *al-Māʾidah* 5:83), and by a witness from amongst the Children of Israel (Q 46:10), but more often by God himself (Q 4:166; Q 6:19; Q 48:28). However, this usage is rare, and the root *sh-h-d* appears more frequently in polemical, eschatological, and legal contexts.<sup>456</sup> The four references here, which use terms other than *malak/malāʾika*, none of which are Medinan, relate to an eschatological aspect of witnessing the good, and/or bad deeds of mankind upon death/the last day.<sup>457</sup> The absence of any term to refer to angels in these references means this is not necessarily obvious but was interpreted as such by most Islamic scholars.<sup>458</sup> Angels also explicitly record good, and/or bad deeds elsewhere in the Qurʾān,<sup>459</sup> and accompany souls to heaven or hell upon death,<sup>460</sup> so the reading of angels here is not without precedent, as some translations sometimes add in parentheses.<sup>461</sup>

Despite the high occurrence of the root *k-t-b* throughout the Qurʾān, the only figures besides angelic *rusul*, who clearly can, or do, write, are those who falsify scripture,<sup>462</sup> the Lord (Q 3:53; Q 5:83), and a scribe (Q 2:282). Extrabiblical angels are also prolific writers, recording

---

<sup>456</sup> E.g., Q 2:23, 84, 140, 282, 283; Q 3:64, 70, 81, 86, 98, 99; Q 4:6, 15, 33, 41, 159; Q 5:8, 106–108, 117; Q 6:19, 130, 150; Q 7:37, 172; Q 9:17, 94, 107; Q 10:29; Q 11:17, 18, 103; Q 13:43; Q 16:84, 89; Q 17:96; Q 22:17; Q 24:2–8, 13, 24; Q 28:75; Q 29:52; Q 33:55; Q 36:65; Q 37:150; Q 39:69; Q 40:51; Q 41:20–22, 47; Q 43:19; Q 46:8, 10; Q 50:21; Q 57:19; Q 58:6; Q 59:11; Q 63:1; Q 65:2; Q 70:33; Q 73:15; Q 83:3, 7.

<sup>457</sup> Q 39:69; Q 40:51; Q 50:21; Q 83:21.

<sup>458</sup> E.g., Q 39:69: ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabrisī; Q 40:51: al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭabrisī; Q 50:21: al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī; Q 83:21: al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabrisī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>459</sup> Q 82:10, 11; Q 10:21; Q 43:80.

<sup>460</sup> Q 4:97; Q 6:61, 93; Q 7:37; Q 8:50; Q 13:23; Q 16:28, 32; Q 21:103; Q 25:22; Q 32:11; Q 47:27.

<sup>461</sup> E.g., Q 50:21 in Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Qurʾān, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qurʾān* (Birmingham: IPCI Islamic Vision, 1999).

<sup>462</sup> Q 2:79; Q 52:41; Q 68:47.

man's deeds in heavenly books, or on tablets, to be used as evidence against (or sometimes for), them at judgment.<sup>463</sup> They use this evidence not only to testify for or against men, but also act as chief prosecutors, defence counsel, and, sometimes, even judges and jailors.<sup>464</sup> This is particularly significant, because they have no independent responsibility for, or power over such things in the Bible, where it is God (or Christ), alone who has authority in this area.<sup>465</sup>

---

<sup>463</sup> E.g., Jub. 4:6, 28:6; 1 En. 10:8 (here, angels are ordered to record the sins of 'Azāza'ēl/Aζαήλ), 89:68–70, 104:1; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 9:21–22; Ant. 11:12; 2 En. [J/A] 19:5; Apoc. Zeph. 3:6–9, 7:1–11; T. Ab. [B] 10:7, [A] 12:8, 12, 13:9, Jos. Asen. 15:4(3); Apoc. Paul 7–10; 3 En. 18:17, 25, 27:1–2, 30:2, 44:9. Such heavenly books recording every man's good and bad deeds are also mentioned in the Qur'ān, but not those responsible for writing them (Q 84:7–12).

<sup>464</sup> E.g., 1 En. 89:71, 99:3, 16, 100:10; Apoc. Zeph. 6:17; T. Ab. [B] 10:3, 8, 10–11, [A] 12:9, 10, 13, 16, 17, 13:1, 10–11; 4 Ezra 16:66; Apoc. Paul 7–10; 3 En. 4:3–5, 18:19, 20, 24, 27:1–2, 30:2, [App.] 48C:2 (Enoch as Metatron).

<sup>465</sup> E.g., Despite the lack of a developed eschatology in the Hebrew Bible, leaving aside pleas for clemency, or references to God's potential to forgive sins, it is clear, both that God is aware of man's deeds, and that he will decide whether or not to remember his sins, before passing judgment on him, and meting out the appropriate punishment, e.g., Job 6:2, 16:19, 21:22, 31:6; Gen 15:14; Exod 32:32–34; Ps 7:8, 9:8, 40:7, 50:4, 6, 7, 51:4, 56:8, 62:9, 69:28; 1 Sam 3:13, 12:5; Hos 7:2, 8:13, 9:9, 13:12; Amos 1:9, 11, 13; Mic 1:2, 6:10–13, 7:9; Isa 43:25, 65:17; Jer 14:10, 31:34, 42:5; Ezek 18:20–22, 24, 21:24–25, 33:12–16, 18–20; 1 Kgs 8:32; Dan 5:27, 12:1; 1 Chr 16:33; 2 Chr 6:23; Mal 3:5, 16; Neh 13:14. Even *haśāṭān*, in his role as court prosecutor, has his remit limited, or requires God's permission to carry out his work (e.g., Job 1:12, 2:6; Zech 3:1–2). The only possible reference to angelic involvement in this process is in Daniel 7:10, where a "thousand thousands," are described as serving God, while "ten thousand times ten thousand," stand before him. These words only occur once elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in an unrelated context, but that angels are intended here, can be inferred from their proximity to God, and other (extra)biblical references, which also use this trope of superlative multiplication to describe the extent of the heavenly host: e.g., 1 En. 40:1, 60:1, 71:1; Rev 5:11; 2 Bar. 48:10; 3 En. 5:14, 40:1–2, 35:10, 40:1–2, [App.] 48B:1. In Daniel 7:10, the heavenly court duly sits in judgment, and the books are opened before it. Although angels are likely present here, there is no suggestion that that they have compiled the books of evidence, nor do they participate in any definite way in the court's activities. The situation is somewhat different in the New Testament, both because the number of references to angelic involvement in this respect is significantly proportionally greater (e.g., 2 Cor 1:23, 5:10; Rom 4:8; 14:10; Luke 10:20; Acts 3:19, 10:31; 2 Pet 2:4–10; Heb 8:12, 10:17; Rev 18:15), and because there is a least one reference to an eschatological, angelic-like figure equipped with a pair of scales, presumably with which to judge souls (Rev 6:5). More tellingly though, 2 Pet 2:11 (cf. Jude 9), explicitly says that angels will not deem to pass judgment (on the false prophets and teachers, who have, and will arise), before the Lord.

Given that the later portions of the Qur'ān limit omnipotent power to God alone,<sup>466</sup> that angels have any agency is perhaps surprising. The qur'ānic insistence that angels never act upon their own initiative, but only with God's permission,<sup>467</sup> and that their intercession cannot override his will,<sup>468</sup> serves as a check upon the proliferation of angelic power. It also perhaps indicates an awareness of the potential contradiction, and/or danger, of unlimited, or independent angelic authority.

#### 4.1.10 Angels as Teachers

**Table 4.13**     *References to Angels as Teachers in the Qur'ān*

Angelic Role(s)	Qur'ānic Reference(s)		Period
	<i>malak/malā'ika</i>	Other Terms	
Teachers	-	-	M1
	-	-	M2
	-	-	M3
	Q 2:102	-	MED

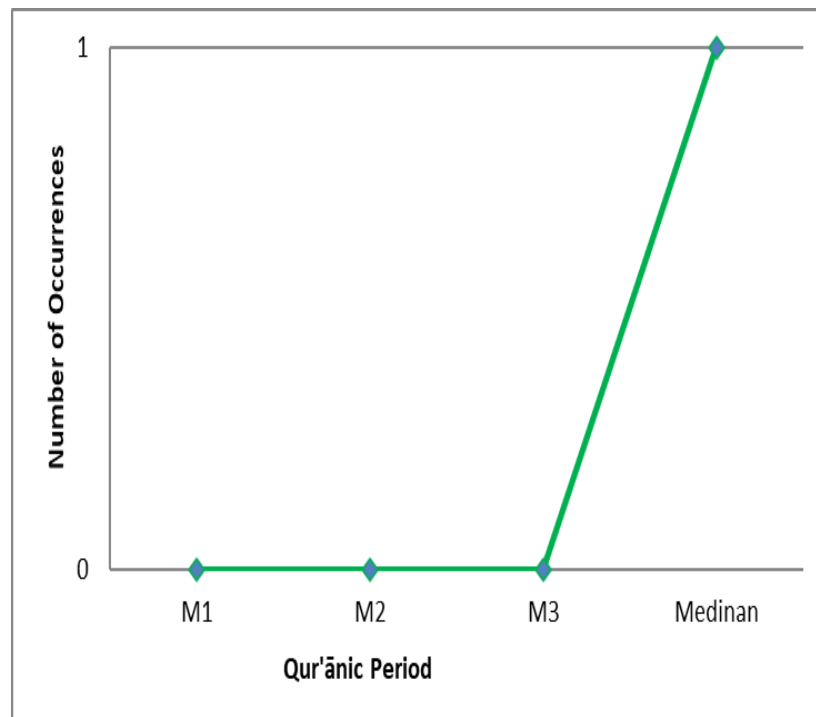
<sup>466</sup> This is only asserted twice in the second Meccan period (Q 18:45; Q 67:1), with a third of references stemming from the late Meccan period (Q 6:17; Q 11:4; Q 16:70, 77; Q 29:20; Q 30:50, 54; Q 35:1, 44; Q 41:39; Q 42:9, 50; Q 46:33), and nearly sixty percent from the Medinan period (Q 2:20, 106, 109, 148, 165, 259, 285; Q 3:26, 29, 165, 189; Q 4:85, 133, 149; Q 5:17, 19, 40, 120; Q 8:41; Q 9:39; Q 22:6, 39; Q 24:45; Q 33:27; Q 48:21; Q 57:2; Q 59:6; Q 60:7; Q 64:1; Q 65:12; Q 66:8).

<sup>467</sup> E.g., Q 16:50; Q 21:27; Q 97:4.

<sup>468</sup> Q 21:28; Q 53:26; cf. Q 2:255; Q 34:23.

*Graph 4.10 Angels as Teachers in the Qur'ān by Qur'ānic Period*

***malak/malā'ika***



***Non-malak/malā'ika***

There are no instances of angels referred to by terms other than *malak/malā'ika* performing this role.

Given the prominence of the post-qur'ānic tradition that it was the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* who taught Muhammad the qur'ānic revelations, how to pray, and accompanied him on his ascent to heaven, it is perhaps surprising that the Qur'ān only includes this one reference to angels performing the act of teaching (Q 2:102).<sup>469</sup> Otherwise, apart from the occasional polemical reference, only God, or a *rasūl* (who himself has been taught by God), generally can, and do

<sup>469</sup> As recounted by e.g., Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, 37 and Tibrīzī, *Mishkāṭ*, i, 5, See Giesela Webb, 'Gabriel', in *EQ* (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2001–2006), with which most other commentators concur, e.g., ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī, and al-Ṭabarī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

teach.<sup>470</sup> This is similar to the situation in both the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament, where angels are rarely tasked with teaching.<sup>471</sup> Extrabiblical material, however, is dominated, if not characterised by the figure of the *angelus interpres*, who guides and instructs humans on temporary ascents to heaven, or explains visions and dreams.<sup>472</sup> Unlike the angels in Q 2:102, this action of teaching is always sanctioned by God, with the angel(s) in question frequently stressing the divine mandate behind their role, and thus of the information they divulge.<sup>473</sup>

In contrast to the nature of the knowledge taught by angels in extrabiblical literature,<sup>474</sup> the type of knowledge passed on by angels in the Qur'ān—*siḥr*, “magic,”—is clearly viewed as something negative. This is borne out by the other references to *siḥr* in the Qur'ān, in which it is generally either what the Unbelievers claim God's signs to be,<sup>475</sup> or an accusation levelled at Moses, Aaron, and/or the Children of Israel,<sup>476</sup> Jesus (Q 61:6), or Pharaoh's sorcerers (Q 10:81; Q 20:73). This is despite it having a clear heavenly origin, indicated by the use of the verbal root *n-z-l* (see Section 3.1.1), to describe the manner in which it reached the two angels, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*. It was only by refusing, or failing to comply with what it is implied they were commanded to do, i.e., pass this (presumably, black), magic onto men, by issuing a warning against it, that disaster on earth did not ensue. This further suggests it was in some way

---

<sup>470</sup> E.g., God: Q 2:31, 32, 239, 251, 282; Q 3:48; Q 4:113; Q 5:4, 110; Q 6:91; Q 12:6, 21, 37, 68, 101; Q 18:65, 66, Q 21:80; Q 27:16; Q 36:69; Q 53:5; Q 55:2, 4; Q 62:2; Q 96:4, 5; a/the messenger: Q 2:129, 151; Q 3:164; additional purely polemical references: Q 16:103; Q 20:71; Q 26:49; Q 49:16.

<sup>471</sup> E.g., Judg 13:8; Zech 1:9–6:5; Dan 7:16, 8:16–26, 9:21–22; Rev 1:1, 4:1, 17:1, 21:9, 21:9, 10, 22:1, 22:6, 8.

<sup>472</sup> In this, there is of course, some overlap with the role of an angelic guardian of heaven and/or hell (see Section 4.1.6), who accompanies mortals on temporary ascents to the heavenly realm, as well as after death. There is however, a distinction between merely pointing out physical characteristics, and explaining their meaning, the latter being more explicitly pedagogical, see the texts cited in footnote 158.

<sup>473</sup> See Sections 1.5 and 1.7, and footnotes 79, 140, and 158.

<sup>474</sup> Of course, the knowledge transmitted by the watchers in the Enochic tradition, which is clearly reflected in Q 2:102 (see Section 7.2), is also clearly illicit, but otherwise, Enoch receives divinely sanctioned instruction from the angels, which forms part of his legacy.

<sup>475</sup> Q 5:110; Q 6:7; Q 10:76; Q 11:7; Q 21:3; Q 27:13; Q 28:48; Q 34:43; Q 37:15; Q 43:30; Q 46:7; Q 52:15; Q 54:2; Q 74:24.

<sup>476</sup> Q 10:77; Q 20:57, 63, 66, 71; Q 26:35, 49; Q 28:36.

dangerous or illicit. In much the same way, some of the knowledge passed on by the watchers, such as metal-working, which is not, in itself, intrinsically evil or negative, could become negative in certain contexts i.e., warfare, or idolatry.<sup>477</sup> This verse and the background to the story of the angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, is discussed in more detail in the chapter on named angels (Section 7.2).

Extrabiblical angelic teachers frequently write, and/or instruct their human students to write down what they teach them.<sup>478</sup> Despite the singular reference to angels teaching in Q 2:102 making no mention of angels writing, there is evidence elsewhere in the Qurʾān, that angels can, and do write in other contexts (e.g., Q 10:21; Q 82:10–11). The contradiction between the art of writing being both ordained by God (e.g., Q 2:282; Q 18:109; Q *al-ʿAlaq* 96:4-5), and, at the same time, condemned (e.g., Q 2:79), should not be considered overly problematic: the same paradox exists in the Enochic tradition. 1 Enoch 69:9–10 makes it clear that writing was not meant for men, while at the same time Enoch is lauded as the “scribe of righteousness,”<sup>479</sup> and tasked with writing books.<sup>480</sup>

#### 4.1.11 Summary

This analysis of angelic roles has shown that, while none of the roles identified and examined are unique to the Qurʾān, there are often aspects to them which are particular to the qurʾānic presentation. For example, the qurʾānic heavenly host, is not the same as the *sabā* *hašāmāyim*/στρατιαι τῶν οὐρανῶν/δυνάμεως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ/στρατιᾶς οὐρανίου of the MT/LXX/NT, which can have distinctive military connotations,<sup>481</sup> and connection with the

<sup>477</sup> E.g., 1 En. 8:1, 69:6–7; cf. LAB 2:9, and the irony of Jub. 5:9.

<sup>478</sup> E.g., Jub. 1:27, 2:1, 4:21, 10:13, 12:27, 23:32, 32:24, 33:18, 50:13; 1 En. 33:4, 68:1; Mart. Ascen. Isa 4:21–22; LAE 4:5–8; 4 Ezra 12:37; 4 Bar. 6:16; Hist. Rech. 6:6b.

<sup>479</sup> E.g., 1 En. 12:4, 15:1; cf. T. Levi 10:5; T. Jud. 18:1; T. Dan 5:6; 1 En. 92:1; T. Ab. [B] 11:4; 2 En. [A] 36:3, [App.] *Merilo Pravednoe*.

<sup>480</sup> E.g., 1 En. 14:1, 81:6, 89:62–64; 2 En. [J/A] 22:11, 23:3–6; T. Ab. [B] 11:7–9. In fact, 1 En. 69:11 suggests that writing is an exclusively angelic, as opposed to mortal, characteristic.

<sup>481</sup> E.g., 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18; Neh 9:6; Luke 2:13.

worship of beings other than God.<sup>482</sup> When qur'ānic angels do appear in a military context, they provide practical support to the Believers,<sup>483</sup> which in (extra)biblical material is more often postponed to an eschatological future context.<sup>484</sup>

The other striking aspect of angelic roles in the Qur'ān this analysis has uncovered is the extent to which angelic authority or remit is limited, compared to extrabiblical (but not always biblical) angels performing the same roles. This is despite the fact that angels potentially become more important in the Qur'ān over the same time period. Qur'ānic angels worship God out of fear (Q 16:50; Q 21:28); at no point do they represent a manifestation of God, in the manner of a *mal'āk yhwē*; their intercession is only at God's discretion (Q 21:28; Q 53:26), and even then, often ineffective (Q 2:255). It is God, rather than angels, who steers man along the right way (or not, see footnote 429), and although their testimony is key to the final judgment (see Table 4.9), they do not exercise judgment themselves, and are not responsible for defeating Satan, as extrabiblical angels are often permitted, and/or required to do (see footnote 456). The concern to avoid the duplication or division of authority is perhaps one of the reasons why the Qur'ān appears to view angelic pedagogical activity so negatively, in contrast to the frequently positive, divinely mandated presentation of it in extrabiblical literature (the watchers excepting).

Finally, as with the early Enochic tradition, the Qur'ān displays an increasing tendency, which is particularly noticeable in relation to angels, to define and delimit the heavenly and earthly spheres, and the things that belong in them.<sup>485</sup> Angels may be able to move between the two, but this is only ever with God's permission, and when on earth, they do not take on human characteristics, even temporarily. Even if they appear as men, this is an illusion, rather than an actual metaphysical change to their natures, as illustrated by the fact that they do not (even pretend) to eat when visiting Abraham (Q 11:70; Q 51:21; cf. Q 25:7 and see Section 6.1). This is also the case in Jewish and Christian traditions: the temporary appearance in human

---

<sup>482</sup> E.g., Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16, 21:3, 5, 23:4, 5; 2 Chr 33:3, 5; Zeph 1:5; Jer 8:2, 19:13; Lk 2:13; Acts 7:42.

<sup>483</sup> Q 3:124–125; Q 8:12; Q 36:28; Q 89:12.

<sup>484</sup> E.g., T. Levi 3:3; T. Naph. 8:2; 1QM; 4Q491; 4Q529; Apoc. Eli. (C) 5:21; Rev 12:7, 19:14.

<sup>485</sup> On this see Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, and Graphs A3.1–A3.4, in the Appendix.



form of angelic beings, is exactly that, and they are required to transform back into an angelic form, in order to return to heaven (e.g., Judg 6 and 13).<sup>486</sup>

---

<sup>486</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 228.

## 5 Other Aspects of Angels

There are a number of other aspects of angelic activity and nature, which do not fall neatly under the heading of angelic roles. These include large topics, such as how the *rūḥ*, “spirit,” *shayāṭīn*, “demons/devils,” and *jinn* relate to angels, and the figure of *Iblīs*, as well as those about which the Qur’ān has less to say; such as the question of angelic veneration, and whether or not angels can be *khulāfa’*, “successors, vice-regents,” but which it is still necessary to examine to some degree, in order to build as complete a picture of angels in the Qur’ān as possible.

### 5.1.1 Angels and the *rūḥ*, “Spirit”

The qur’ānic corpus contains only twenty references to the *rūḥ*, “spirit” (on two occasions, these are to the *rūḥ al-quḍus*, or *al-rūḥ al-amīn*, “the Holy/true Spirit”). Among these are one-off references to the *rūḥ* forming part of the heavenly host along with the angels (Q 70:4); performing an eschatological role (Q 78:38), both of which are from the earliest Meccan period, and as the agent of the annunciation to Mary (Q 19:17), which is examined in more detail in Section 6.2. References to the *rūḥ* in the Qur’ān are outlined in Table 5.1 below, with references to angels and the *rūḥ* shown in bold typeface.

**Table 5.1**      *References to the rūḥ in the Qur’ān*

Qur’ānic Period	Verse	Sense/Theme
M1	<b>Q 78:38</b> <sup>487</sup>	<b>The rūḥ and the angels stand before God</b>
	<b>Q 97:4</b> <sup>488</sup>	<b>The angels and the rūḥ descend with God’s permission</b>
	<b>Q 70:4</b> <sup>489</sup>	<b>The angels and the rūḥ ascend to God</b>
M2	Q 26:193	The bringing down of the Qur’ān is attributed to the <i>rūḥ al-amīn</i>
	Q 15:29	Creation of Adam
	Q 19:17	Creation of Jesus
	Q 38:72	Creation of Adam
	Q 21:91	Creation of Jesus
M3	Q 32:9	Creation of Adam
	Q 17:85 <sup>490</sup>	The rūḥ is from the <i>amr</i> of my Lord
	<b>Q 16:2</b>	<b>The angels and the rūḥ are sent down to whom God wills</b>
	Q 16:102	The bringing down of the Qur’ān is attributed to the <i>rūḥ al-quḍus</i>
	Q 40:15	The rūḥ is sent down to whom God wills
	Q 42:52	
Medinan	Q 2:87	Jesus is strengthened by the rūḥ
	Q 2:253	
	Q 4:171	Jesus is God’s messenger and rūḥ
	Q 58:22	Men are strengthened by God’s rūḥ
	Q 66:12	Creation of Jesus
	Q 5:110	Jesus is strengthened by the rūḥ

<sup>487</sup> As O’Shaughnessy notes, Nöldeke-Schwally regarded vv. 37ff., as stemming from the second Meccan period, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 82; Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, vol. 1, ed. Friedrich Schwally, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961 [1909–1938]), 104, while Bell and Blachère agree it is later than the current context, Richard Bell, *The Qur’ān: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 629; Blachère, *Le coran*, 69. O’Shaughnessy, *Spirit in the Koran*, 16.

<sup>488</sup> As O’Shaughnessy, *Spirit in the Koran*, 16, notes, Blachère, *Le coran*, 81, regarded this verse as stemming from a later period, in the case of Bell, specifically from the Medinan, Bell, *The Qur’ān*, 2:669.

<sup>489</sup> Bell, *The Qur’ān*, 2:616; Blachère, *Le coran*, 93.

<sup>490</sup> Nöldeke assigns this to the second Meccan period: Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 102–6.

One of the few scholars to have examined the role of the *rūḥ* in the Qur’ān, Thomas O’Shaughnessy, saw it as a definite figure, who plays a role along with the angels, but who is still somehow separate from them.<sup>491</sup> The *rūḥ* is often personified in the Qur’ān in connection with angels (e.g., Q 16:2; Q 70:4; Q 78:38; Q 97:4), and according to O’Shaughnessy, is “a created personal being, either a superior angel, or a member of a species above the angels.”<sup>492</sup> He further argues, however, that it is unlikely that it was identified with, or as, the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, at this early stage in the Qur’ān.<sup>493</sup> Three of the references here stem from earlier, rather than later portions of the qur’ānic corpus, even if various scholars consider them to be later than their traditional dating to the first Meccan period.<sup>494</sup> An examination of references to angels has suggested that they became more defined, and that their identification as specific creatures became more important by the Medinan period (see Chapter 2, especially Section 2.2.5). This could explain why the lines between angels and the *rūḥ* are perhaps less clearly demarcated in these earlier references. The use of the root *n-z-l* further confirms the heavenly origin of the *rūḥ* (Q 16:2; Q 97:4; see also Section 3.1.1). The fact that the *rūḥ* is listed as standing before God (by implication on the last day), before the angels are mentioned, also suggests both that it is potentially closer to him than they are, and that its location is not the same as the angels’ (Q 78:38). All this strongly suggests that the *rūḥ* is not, and cannot simply be an angel of some kind.

Muslim exegetes, did, however, identify the *rūḥ* in verses concerned with revelation, such as Q 26:193, as the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, on the basis that he was considered to have been tasked with bringing down or revealing the Qur’ān to Muhammad in Q 2:97.<sup>495</sup> This identification is, however, based on a post-qur’ānic interpretation of the verses in question; my

---

<sup>491</sup>O’Shaughnessy, *Spirit in the Koran*, 17.

<sup>492</sup> O’Shaughnessy, 23.

<sup>493</sup> O’Shaughnessy, 23.

<sup>494</sup> See footnotes 488—490.

<sup>495</sup> See footnote 242 and Webb, ‘Gabriel’.

analysis, and that of others, finds no grounds to support such a reading.<sup>496</sup> Despite this, the Angel Gabriel's/*Jibrīl*'s identification with the *rūḥ al-qudus* is undoubtedly pre-qur'ānic. This association finds expression in several early Christian, extrabiblical texts, which sought to Christianise Jewish beliefs about angels, reformulating them in light of Trinitarian, angelomorphic, ideas about the natures of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.<sup>497</sup> For example, although "the angel of the Holy Spirit" in *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* (3:16–17) is not explicitly identified, the fact that this figure forms one half of a pair with Michael, points to Gabriel, as Michael's logical counterpart. It has further been suggested that a lacuna in the Greek before the first "angel" originally read "Gabriel."<sup>498</sup> The "angel of the Spirit," who appears to Joseph in the same text in 11:4 is not named, but the angel who visited Joseph was clearly understood by some to have been Gabriel by the late sixth/early seventh century, as evidenced by *The History of Joseph the Carpenter* (6), which names the angel as Gabriel.<sup>499</sup> The description of "the angel of the Holy Spirit" as sitting on the left of the Great Glory in 11:33, further points to Gabriel, who is also said to be on God's left in 2 Enoch [J/A] 24:1, a sign of his high rank.<sup>500</sup> The evidence of these texts does not mean that the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, should be interpreted as the *rūḥ* in Q 2:97, rather, that his pre-qur'ānic association with the (Holy) Spirit needs to be borne in mind when examining verses such as Q 19:17, for example (see Section 6.2). The figures of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and the *rūḥ* clearly converge in this verse,

---

<sup>496</sup> al-Azmeh, 'Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings', 145–47. Although I would not agree with al-Azmeh's explanation for this conflation, as being due to the difficulty in distinguishing between God and his angel, and thus as a qur'ānic personification of the divine, that parallels the *mal'āk yhwḥ* in biblical texts.

<sup>497</sup> Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine*, 127–32, Mart. Ascen. Isa. 3:15, 4:10, 21, 7:23, 8:14, 9:36, 39–40, 10:4, 11:4, 33. Knibb notes that it has been suggested that a lacuna in the Greek fragment of 3:15 originally read "Gabriel," but he does not say by whom, Michael Anthony Knibb, 'Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A New Translation and Introduction', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H Charlesworth, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 160.

<sup>498</sup> Michael Anthony Knibb, 'Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A New Translation and Introduction', 160.

<sup>499</sup> Benjamin Harris Cowper, 'The History of Joseph the Carpenter', in *The Apocryphal Gospels and Other Documents Relating to the History of Christ* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1867), 105.

<sup>500</sup> Collins, John J. 'Gabriel: II', in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 339.

even if they are not originally or intrinsically one and the same being.<sup>501</sup>

As noted by O'Shaughnessy, although angels are often called "spirits" in the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible, targums, and Qur'ān never use the term *rūḥ*/*rūḥ* to refer to angels.<sup>502</sup> That *rūḥ* is not an interchangeable term for an angel in the Qur'ān has already been established in Section 2.2.5, although it has the last two meanings in post-qur'ānic and modern Arabic,<sup>503</sup> and later Islamic theologians employ it with this sense.<sup>504</sup> That there is no plural form of *rūḥ* in the Qur'ān<sup>505</sup> points to it being conceived of as a single entity, power, or possibly "an individual angel, evidently with a special implication,"<sup>506</sup> multiple angels always being referred to as *malā'ika*, or by other terms (See Section 2.2).<sup>507</sup>

Crucially for this investigation of the potential identification of the *rūḥ* as an angel, in Q 19:17, the *rūḥ* is said to be sent; not, as we might expect, through the use of the root *n-z-l* but rather, by, *r-s-l*. This ought to deny its heavenly origin, and yet the parallels between Q 19:17, and Luke 1:26, allow us to read this as an angelic emissary; more precisely, as the Angel Gabriel himself. On the basis of these points, we cannot but interpret the *rūḥ* here as anything other than the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*; not because the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is the *rūḥ*, but because he is the one who was sent to announce the impending birth of Jesus to Mary (on which, see Section 6.2).

It is clear, that while the *rūḥ* was not considered to be an angel in the Qur'ān, references to it need to be read against the background of "Gnostic" ideas about the interchangeability,

---

<sup>501</sup> Cf. Luke 1:26, 28, 36; Sib. Or. VIII, 456–61; Ep. Apos. 9, 198, see Sections 6.2 and 7.1

<sup>502</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *Spirit in the Koran*, 17.

<sup>503</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 11.

<sup>504</sup> D.B. Macdonald, 'The Development of the Idea of the Spirit in Islam,' *Acta Orientalia* 9 (1931): 308.

<sup>505</sup> Macdonald, 308.

<sup>506</sup> Macdonald, 308.

<sup>507</sup> Macdonald, 308, also mentions that later theologians refer to a specific group of angels as *rūḥānī*; angels who constituted a higher class than those created from light.

and/or metamorphosis of the (Holy) Spirit and angels.<sup>508</sup> An independent, personified *rūḥ* posed a threat to God's oneness, and could explain why, by the Medinan period, it was relegated to an impersonal attribute of God.<sup>509</sup> It may also be the case that Christian discomfort with the personification of the (Holy) Spirit as the (female) second person of the Trinity, owing to the feminine grammatical gender of *ruḥa* in Syriac/Arabic, fed into this. The feminine grammatical gender of *ruḥa* led some Christian groups to conceive of the Trinity as consisting of

---

<sup>508</sup> The problems with the term, "Gnostic," which, as noted by Karen L. King, was "invented in the early modern period to aid in in defining the boundaries of normative Christianity," and which have led to it becoming understood as referring to a specific Christian heresy, or religion, are widely recognised, Karen L. King, 'Introduction', in *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2. Despite, or perhaps because of this, no new term has been suggested, that sufficiently encompasses the diversity of non-orthodox Christian groups, beliefs, texts, and practices, encompassed by the term, which King herself continues to use, while noting its inadequacies. Although she refrains from putting the term in quotation marks, I do so only here to highlight the issues with the term, King, 3–4.

<sup>509</sup> This can be inferred from the increasingly passive role played by the *rūḥ* throughout the qur'ānic corpus. Only in references from the earliest period of revelation—whether they are actually from the first Meccan period or not, they are still the earliest references in which the *rūḥ* features—is the *rūḥ* portrayed as a definite person (Q 78:38; Q 97:4; Q 70:4). In references from the second and third Meccan periods (Q 15:29, Q 19:17, Q 38:72, Q 21:91, Q 32:9), the *rūḥ* loses its independence, a trend which continues throughout the late Meccan period (Q 17:85, Q 16:2, Q 40:15, Q 42:52), and finds full expression in the Medinan period (Q 2:87, 253, Q 4:171, Q 58:22, Q 66:12, Q 5:110), O'Shaughnessy, *Spirit in the Koran*, 16–17, 25, although note that this schema represents a revision of O'Shaughnessy's divisions, the principle behind his theory still stands.

Father, *Mother*, and Son.<sup>510</sup> A concern to avoid this association, gradually led to the *ruḥa* generally, but not consistently, being treated as masculine, in Syriac references to the Holy Spirit, from the late fifth century onwards.<sup>511</sup> Although this shift occurred later in Christian Arabic literature, with the *rūḥ al-qūds* initially being treated as feminine, before the masculine form appeared in the eighth century.<sup>512</sup> From a qurʾānic point of view, a feminine (Holy) Spirit would have been potentially more dangerous than a masculine one, as it could have been understood as a (sub-)goddess. The qurʾānic horror of female deities (or angels, who could be interpreted as such), in particular, is attested to on several occasions,<sup>513</sup> and should perhaps be read in light of Christian beliefs about the Holy Spirit as the maternal female counterpart to God the Father.

---

<sup>510</sup> As demonstrated for example, by the second-century Hebrew *Gospel of the Hebrews*, in which, according to Origen, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as his mother (*Comm. Jo.*, 2.12), while Jerome recounts how the Spirit itself referred to Jesus as “my son,” in the same text (*Comm. Isa.*, 11.2), Hans-Josef Klauch, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, trans. Brian McNeil (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 40–41; the second-century Coptic *Gospel of Philip*, 17a; the third-century Greek translation of the Syriac *Acts of Thomas*; the mid-fourth-century Syriac writer Aphrahat; and the unknown Greek author of the Macarian Homilies, Sebastian P Brock, “‘Come, Compassionate Mother . . . , Come Holy Spirit’: A Forgotten Aspect of Early Christian Imagery”, in *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*, by Sebastian P. Brock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 249, 251–52; the second/third-century (Coptic) *Gospel of the Egyptians*, e.g., NHC III 41, 7–9, 24–42, 4, 55, 9–10, NHC IV 41, 7–12, 50, 23–25, 51, 16–22, 56, 23–24, 66, 22–23, Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 11; the first-century writings of Elchasai, cited by Hippolytus of Rome, *Haer.* 9.13.2–3, refers to a female figure, who accompanies an angel, and is called the Holy Spirit, in contrast to a male figure, who is called the Son of God, Gieschen, ‘The Angel of the Prophetic Spirit’, 801. This also potentially intersects with the qurʾānic refutation of worship of Jesus, and his mother, as members of a Trinity along with God (Q 5:116).

<sup>511</sup> Brock, ‘Come, Compassionate Mother . . . ’, 249, 252.

<sup>512</sup> Brock, 256.

<sup>513</sup> E.g., Q 17:40; Q 37:150; Q 43:19; Q 53:27. On angels as potentially (female) deities, see Section 5.1.6.



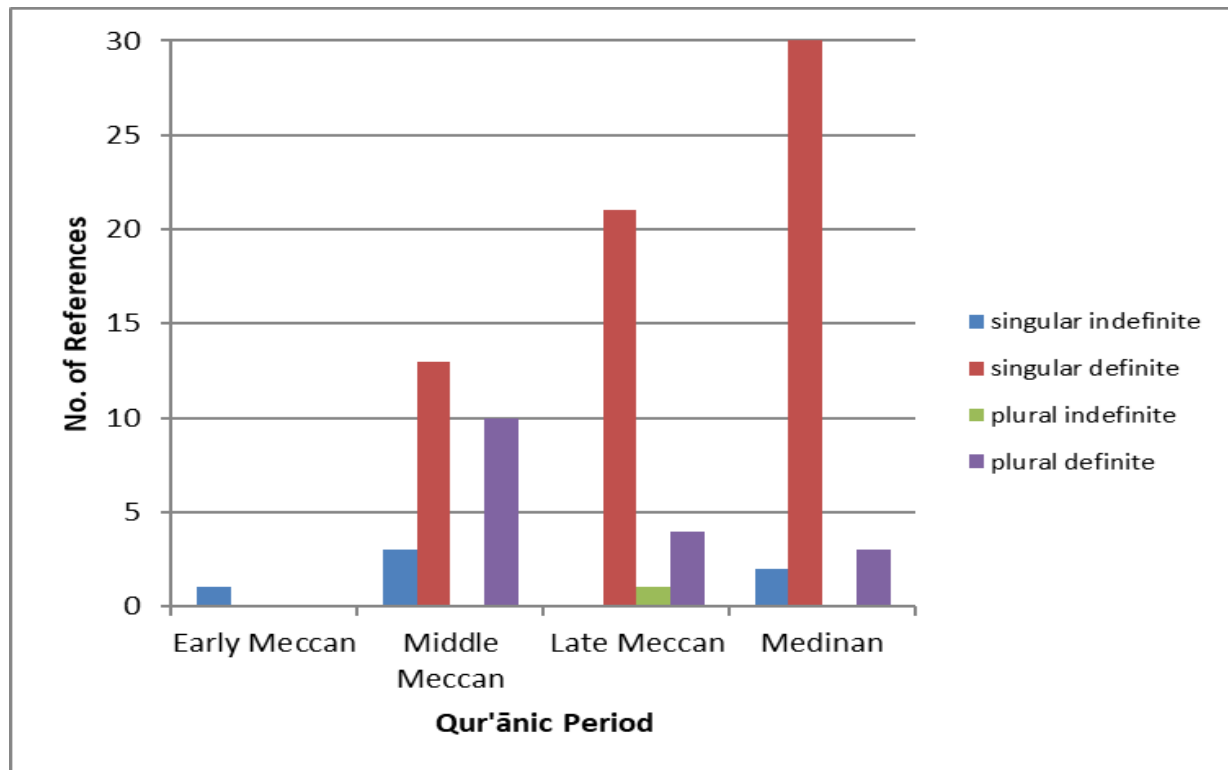
### 5.1.2 Angels and Devils

Demons,<sup>514</sup> or rather, *devils*, feature extensively in the Qur’ān, with the Arabic term *shayṭān/shayāṭīn*, from the same root as the Hebrew *śāṭān*, “accuser, adversary” occurring eighty-eight times in seventy-eight verses, in thirty-six *sūrahs* (See Chart 5.1 below).

---

<sup>514</sup> As noted by Peter G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’, in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Carlisle: Paternoster; Baker Book House, 1996), 76, the term δαίμονας, has quite different connotations from the original Greek meanings, which included deceased spirits, intermediary deities, nature spirits, and even Olympian gods, in addition to evil spirits. This Greek philosophical heritage is reflected in Philo’s equation of ἄγγελοι with δαίμονας, which he explains are one and the same entities (*Gig.* 6.2, 6.4), Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 216. Greek δαίμονες could also be good or bad, depending on the situation, G. J. Riley, ‘Demon’, in *DDD*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 235. By the time of early Christian tradition, the term had only retained the latter meaning, and were decisively evil beings, Nienke Vos, ‘Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity: Introduction, Summary, Reflection’, in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, ed. Nienke Vos and Willemien Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 5. Technically, *shayāṭīn*, translates as “devils,” but in modern usage, the two terms “demon,” and “devil,” have become synonyms of each other. Unless other stated, references to “demons” and “devils,” should therefore be understood as referring to the same entities, that is, demonic, evil spirits.

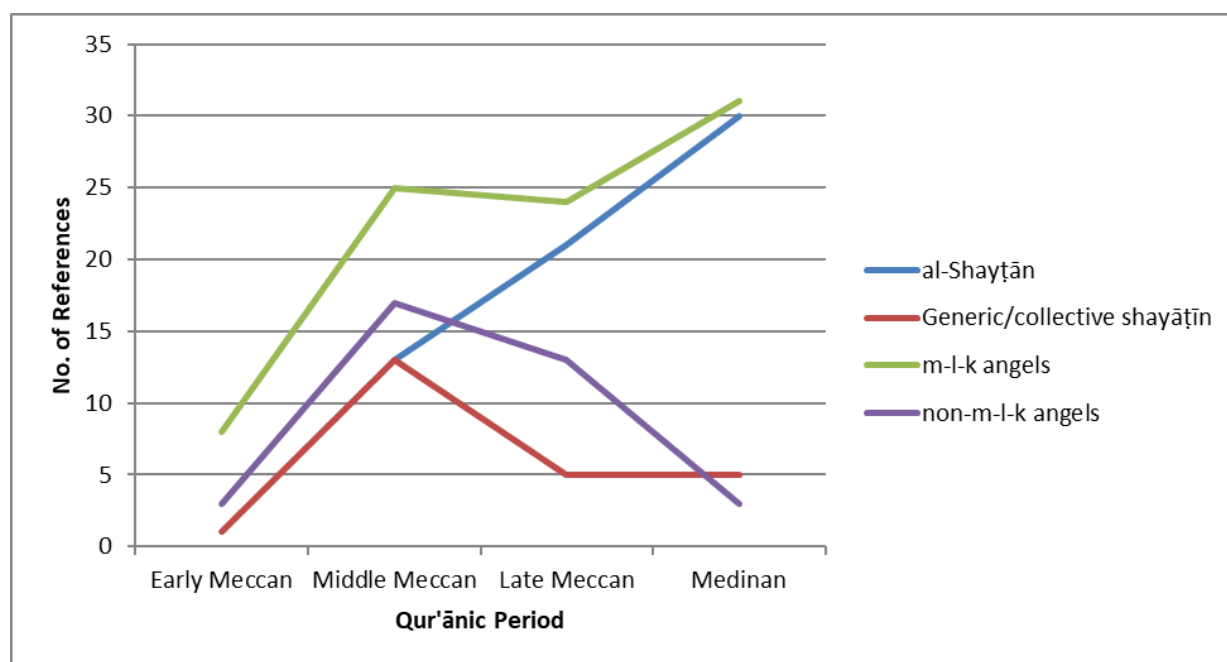
**Chart 5.1**      *Occurrences of the Root sh-ṭ-n in the Qur'ān*



Forty percent of these occurrences are Medinan, only one is from the early Meccan period, and the remaining references are divided equally between the middle and late Meccan periods. The Medinan period is also noteworthy for containing nearly half of all singular, definite references to *al-Shayṭān*, “the devil,” who does not appear at all in the early Meccan period. This increase in references to such a figure from the middle Meccan period onwards, is mirrored by a similar decrease in references to collective, anonymous evil beings.<sup>515</sup> At the same time, references to *malā’ika*, increase by the Medinan period, as Graphs 5.1 and 5.2 below illustrate.

<sup>515</sup> This also occurs throughout the New Testament, where the focus is consistently upon Satan as the source of all evil, rather than collective, anonymous demons, Trevor Ling, *The Significance of Satan: New Testament Demonology and Its Contemporary Relevance* (London: SPCK, 1961), 55.

**Graph 5.1**      *The Evolution of References to Angels and Demons in the Qur’ān*



As Chart 5.1 shows, *(al-)shayāṭīn*, “demons/devils,” mainly appear collectively, in relation to general or generic evil, in the middle and late Meccan periods. Although angels initially appear individually, by the Medinan period this is no longer the case (see Section 2.1). At no point are *(al-)shayāṭīn* contrasted with either *malā’ika*, or angels referred to by other terms. There is also no sense, either that they operate in direct opposition to each other, or that angels are tasked with keeping the Believers safe from the attempts of *(al-)shayāṭīn* to lead men astray.<sup>516</sup> Rather, angels (are sent to) defend or protect the Believers from the Unbelievers.<sup>517</sup> There are however, two key points at which angels and *(al-)shayāṭīn* intersect in the Qur’ān: these are in the Qur’ān’s references to the Enochian descent of the watchers (for a more detailed discussion of which, see Section 7.2), and the fall of *Iblīs*,<sup>518</sup> the latter of which will be examined subsequently (Section 5.1.4).

<sup>516</sup> There is a case for arguing the situation may be slightly different with *al-Shayṭān*, but this can only be inferred from general references to angels acting as guardian angels (e.g., Q 6:61; Q 82:10–11; Q 86:4), and is never implied.

<sup>517</sup> E.g., Q 3:124, 125; Q 8:9, 12; Q 15:59; cf. Q 6:61; Q 82:10–11; Q 86:4.

<sup>518</sup> As *al-Shayṭān*.

Predictably, *(al-)shayāṭīn* are portrayed negatively in the Qurʾān, where they are described as liars (*kādhībūn*: Q 26:223), rebellious (*marīd*: Q 22:3) and as having disbelieved (*kafar*: Q 2:102). They are companions (*qarīn*), to those who turn away from the remembrance of *al-raḥmān*, “the Merciful One” (Q 43:36), friends or allies (*awliyāʾa*) only to those do not believe (Q 7:27), or who take them as friends or allies (*awliyāʾa*), along with, or in preference to God, believing that they are guided (Q 7:30). In contrast, the information about angels, while limited, unquestionably presents them in a positive light: they are not proud (*lā yastakbirūn*: Q 7:206; Q 21:19), and unfailingly obedient to God (*yafaʾalūn mā yumarūn*: Q 16:50; *hum bi-amirih yaʾmalūn*: Q 21:27; cf. Q 97:4).

Among *(al-)shayāṭīn*’s principal activities are the creation of delusion (*ghurūra*: Q 6:112), enticing men (*istahwathy*: Q 6:71), causing them to turn away from the path (*yaṣuddūnahum ʾan l-sabīl*: Q 43:37) and inspiring their friends to dispute (*yūḥūn ila awliyāʾihim li-yujādilū(n)* (with believers): Q 6:121). For all this, they are perhaps rightly cursed (*rajīm*: Q 15:17), driven away from the lowest heaven by missiles (*rujūm*: Q *al-Mulk* 67:5), banished and thus prevented from hearing the divine revelation (*innahum ʾani l-samʾ lamaʾzulūn*: Q 26:212). In contrast, along with God, angels curse the Unbelievers (Q 2:161; Q 3:87), and their proximity to God presumably gives them unprecedented access to such things. Angels are also clearly present within the heavenly realm (e.g., Q 2:210; Q 53:26; Q 89:22), and thus represent the opposite to that signified by *(al-)shayāṭīn*.

On the final day, *(al-)shayāṭīn* will be gathered together with those who reject the resurrection, and brought forth on their knees around hell (*jahannam*: Q 19:68), to receive the punishment of the blazing fire (*al-saʿīr*), which has been prepared for them (Q 67:5).<sup>519</sup> Angels, on the other hand, guard and potentially protect men (Q 6:61; Q 82:10; Q 86:4), and rescue them from danger (Q 15:59), sometimes even assisting them in a military capacity.<sup>520</sup> Far from being destined for hellfire like *(al-)shayāṭīn*, the angels will greet the Believers in the garden (Q 13:25).

<sup>519</sup> Cf. Matt 13:42, 50; 25:41; Jude 1:7; 2 Pet 2:4; Mark 9:43; Rev 19:20; 20:3; 10, 14, 15; 21:8; 22:5.

<sup>520</sup> Q 3:124–125; Q 8:12; Q 36:28; Q 89:12. See also Sections 4.1.6 and 4.1.4.

*Al-Shayṭān* is described in similar terms to generic devils, as rebellious (*marīd*: Q 4:117), disobedient<sup>521</sup> to *al-raḥmān*, “the Merciful One” (*‘aṣīyya*: Q 19:44), and as a repudiator, or disbeliever (*kafūra*: Q 17:27), and is thus rejected, or cursed (*al-rajīm*: Q 3:36). He also sets out to lead men astray (*ḍ-l-l*) from the remembrance of God,<sup>522</sup> causing them to forget him,<sup>523</sup> in contrast to, or despite God’s repeated reminders.<sup>524</sup> He averts (*ṣ-d-d*) them from the straight way (Q 43:62; Q 29:38), and is held personally responsible for causing Adam and his wife to fall (Q 7:22, 27; Q 2:36),<sup>525</sup> a party of Believers to turn away in battle (*w-l-y* Q 3:155), and corrupting every messenger’s/prophet’s message (Q 22:52). In contrast to God, and perhaps the testimony of the angels (Q 3:18; Q 4:166), *al-Shayṭān*’s promises are therefore empty (Q *Ibrāhīm* 14:22; Q 4:120).

At some point, generic demonic beings appear to have had access to, or a connection with the heavenly realm, as references to them being barred from it (Q 67:5, Q 26:212), their descent (*n-z-l*), on liars (Q 26:221–222; cf. the angels’ descent on whoever God wills: Q 16:2; Q 41:30), and dissemination of magic, with its Enochian echoes<sup>526</sup> demonstrates (Q 2:102). *Al-Shayṭān*’s activities are, however, located firmly within the earthly sphere, and he has no such connection, or communication with heaven or angels.<sup>527</sup>

---

<sup>521</sup> Cf. Cav. Tr. 3, 1–2, *Civ.* 11.13–17.

<sup>522</sup> Q 25:29; Q 27:24–25; Q 36:62; Q 7:175; Q 28:15; Q 4:60, 119.

<sup>523</sup> Q 8:63; Q 6:68; Q 12:42; Q 58:19; cf. Q 5:91.

<sup>524</sup> E.g., Q 2:152; Q 7:205; Q 73:7–8; Q 74:52–56, Whitney S. Bodman, ‘Stalking *Iblīs*: In Search of an Islamic Theodicy’, in *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach; Proceedings of the International Symposium in Beirut, June 25<sup>th</sup>–June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 257.

<sup>525</sup> A role most fully developed in extrabiblical literature, e.g., LAE 16, T. Job 3:3, T. Mos. 16, Wis 2:24, 3 Bar. 4:8, Apoc. Sedr. 4:6, 5:2–4, and one that was clearly known to the writer of Hebrews (2:14 cf. Rev 12:9, 20:2).

<sup>526</sup> E.g., 1 En. 7:1–6; 8:1–4; 67: 4–7; 69: 1–14; 2 *Apol.* 5.

<sup>527</sup> E.g., he caused Job suffering, Q 38:41; sowed discord between Joseph and his brothers, Q 12:100; his promises result in poverty, Q 2:268; he caused a party of the Believers to turn away in battle, Q 3:155; he is responsible for intoxicants, gambling (sacrifices) at altars, and divination by arrows, Q 5:90–91; he orders immorality, Q 2:268; Q 24:21.

In addition to being subject to (eternal) punishment like *(al-)shayātīn* (Q *al-Ḥashr* 59:17), *al-Shayṭān* is instrumental in calling those who follow him to the blazing fire (Q *Luqmān* 31:21), where they will become companions of the fire (Q 35:8), along with those who deny God, who will be sent there along with him (Q *al-Ḥashr* 59:17).<sup>528</sup> Although angels are tasked with delivering the Unbelievers to hell,<sup>529</sup> there is no exchange, handover, or interaction, between them and *al-Shayṭān*. This stands in stark contrast to (extra)biblical literature, in which angels are tasked with protecting and rescuing humans from the devil's clutches<sup>530</sup> and defeating the antichrist.<sup>531</sup> In the Qur'ān, not only is there no great battle at the end of time, there appears to be no need for one: God's power, and punishment are absolute. Humans, angels, *(al-)shayātīn*, and *al-Shayṭān*, are merely puppets through which he makes this clear, as the accusation that he was responsible for leading *Iblīs* astray (Q 7:16; Q 15:39), and references to him choosing who to guide (or not) demonstrate.<sup>532</sup>

Given the Qur'ān's apparent familiarity with the Enochic tradition in particular, the figure of *al-Shayṭān* might be expected to be mirrored by an equivalent angelic figure, who would create a counterbalance to him. Not only is *al-Shayṭān*, not compared to, or connected with angels generally, the few qur'ānic references to the (Arch)angels Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mikāl* do not connect them with him in any way. Given that these (arch)angels are only mentioned in Medinan material, this cannot be explained by the need to avoid the unchecked

---

<sup>528</sup> Cf. Matt 25:31, 41; Rev 19:19, 20:10–15, 21:1–22:5.

<sup>529</sup> Q 4:97; Q 6:61, 93; Q 7:37; Q 8:50; Q 16:28; Q 25:22; Q 32:11; Q 47:27.

<sup>530</sup> E.g., 1 En. 61:3, 99:3, 100:5, 104:1; Sib. Or. 2:315; Mark 13:27; Matt 13:49, 24:31; Rev 7:1–3; 4 Ezra 7:85, 95; Apoc. El. (C) 1:10, 5:2–6; Apoc. Ad. 5:9, 12.

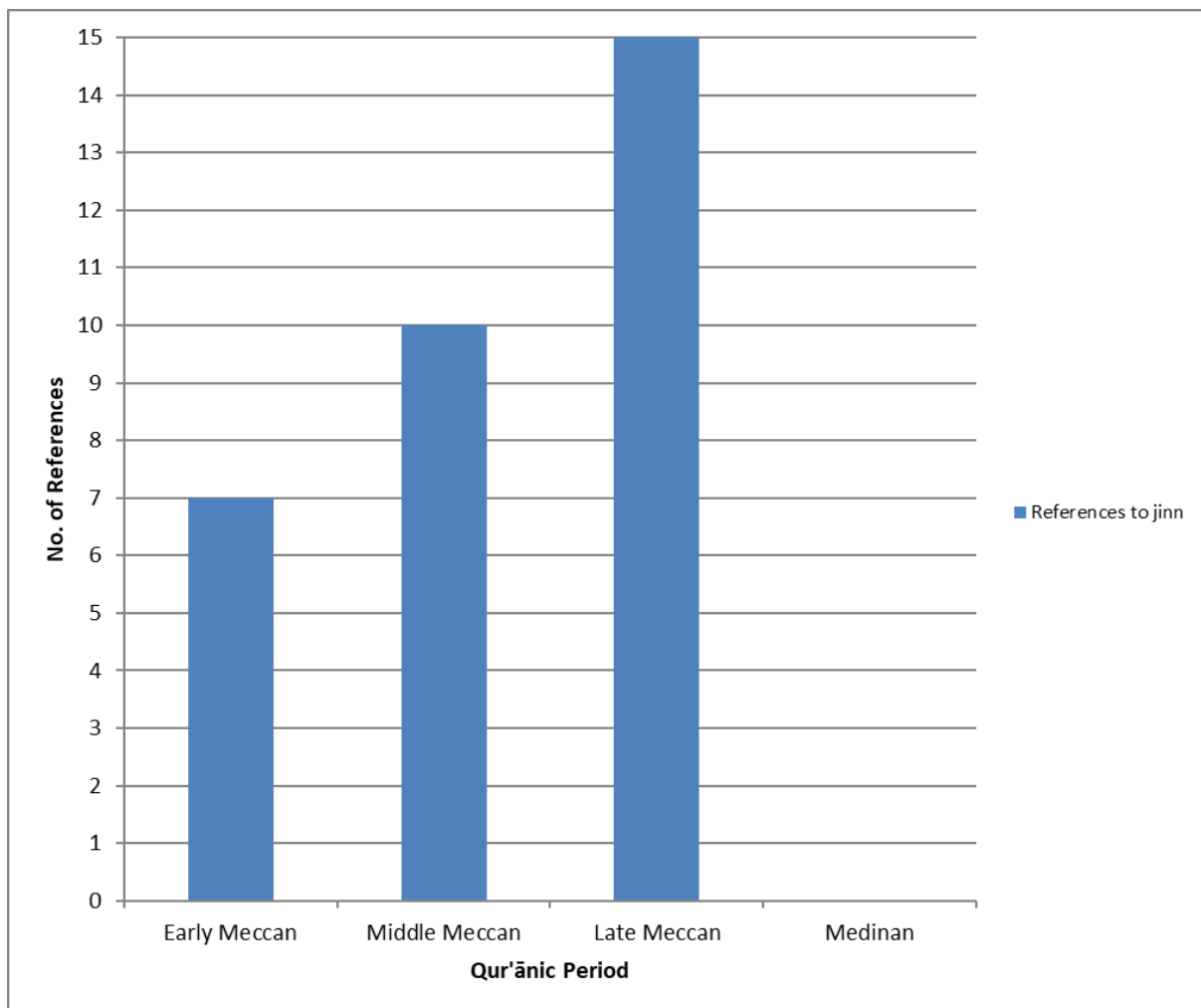
<sup>531</sup> E.g., Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7, 20:1–3; Apoc. El. (C) 5:21. Originally this was usually the responsibility of the Archangel Michael, before this feat was assigned to the Messiah, who had previously not been involved in this at all, but who, note, remains responsible in 2 Thess 2:8, Bousset, *Der Antichrist*, 151.

<sup>532</sup> E.g., Q 2:26, 142, 213, 258, 264, 272; Q 3:86; Q 4:88, 98, 137, 143, 168; Q 5:51, 67, 108; Q 6:39, 77, 88, 125, 144, 149; Q 7:30, 43, 155, 178, 186; Q 9:19, 24, 37, 80, 109, 115; Q 10:25, 45, 88; Q 11:34; Q 12:52; Q 13:27, 31, 33; Q 14:4, 27; Q 16:9, 36, 37, 93, 104, 107; Q 17:15, 97; Q 18:17; Q 19:58; Q 22:16; Q 24:35, 46; Q 28:50, 56; Q 30:29; Q 35:8; Q 39:3, 23, 36, 37, 57; Q 40:28, 33, 34, 74; Q 42:13, 44, 46, 52; Q 45:23; Q 46:10; Q 61:5, 7; Q 62:5; Q 63:6; Q 74:31.

development of any personalities, who might potentially, and legitimately, be assigned a share of God’s power, constituting *shirk*. The figures of Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāīl* will be discussed in more detail in Section 7.1, but the resulting impression of this comparison of angels and *(al-)shayāṭīn/al-Shayṭān*, is that they exist not just in separate spheres (heavenly versus earthly), but within entirely different concepts of how heaven and earth relate to each other and man’s place in it.

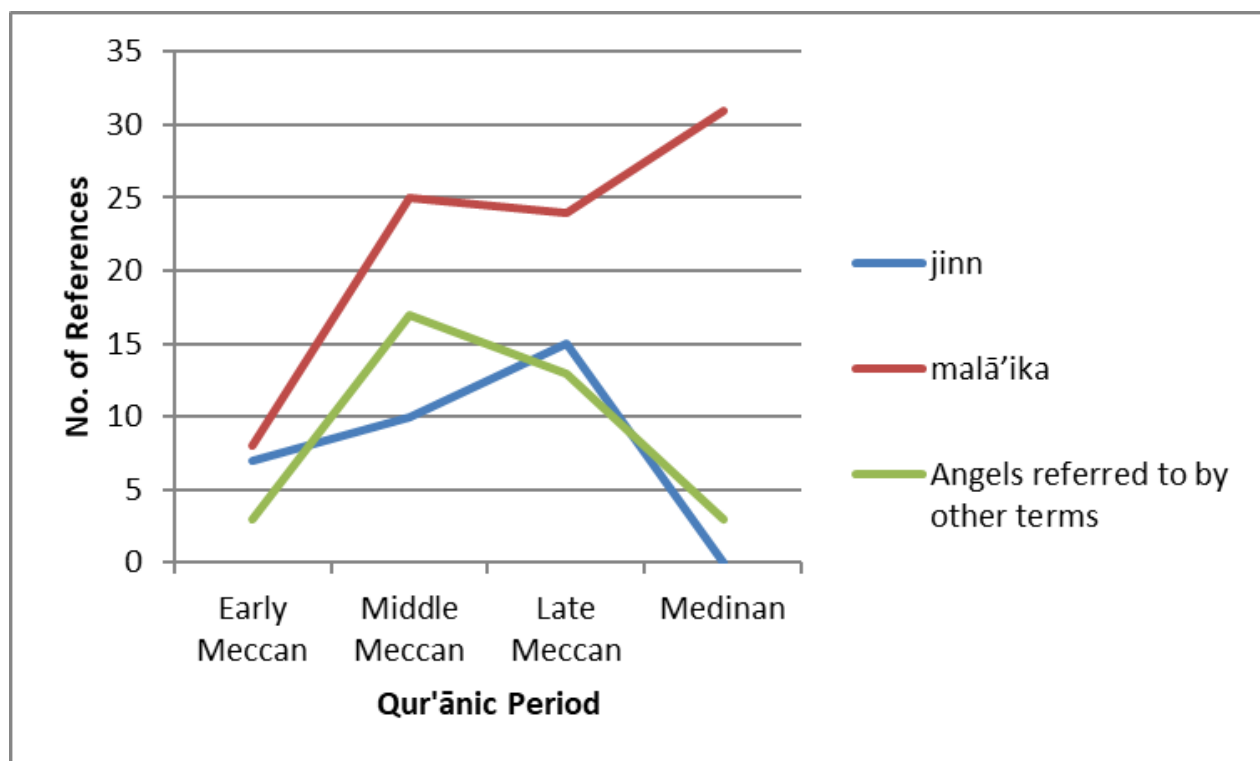
### 5.1.3 Angels and *jinn*

**Chart 5.2**      *References to jinn in the Qur’ān*



The noun *jinn* appears thirty-two times in sixteen different *sūrahs*; as Chart 5.2 (above) shows, just under half of these references are from the late Meccan period, a third from the middle Meccan period, and the remaining 20 percent from the early Meccan period, according to Nöldeke's chronology. This clearly demonstrates that *jinn* were a feature of the qur'ānic world from its beginnings, before suddenly disappearing in the Medinan period.<sup>533</sup> This stands in stark contrast to angels, or at least, to *malā'ika*, whose importance would appear to increase significantly throughout the qur'ānic corpus, as the increase in references to them, compared to the decline in references to *jinn* demonstrates (see Graph 5.2 below).

**Graph 5.2**     *The Evolution of References to Angels And jinn in The Qur'ān*



<sup>533</sup> This remains the case, whichever dating system is used, Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings', 744.



Like *Iblīs*, the *jinn* are said to have been made from fire/wind<sup>534</sup> (Q *al-Raḥmān* 55:15, Q 15:27), but while *Iblīs* cites this nature as justification for not bowing to Adam (Q 38:76; Q 7:12), the *jinn* are said to have been created prior to man (Q 15:27). This raises the question why *Iblīs*, if he was in fact a *jinn*, did not argue for an exemption on the grounds of seniority, as is the case in Jewish and Christians traditions before the *Cave of Treasures*.<sup>535</sup> The *jinn* are never paired or contrasted with angels, (*al-*)*shayāṭīn*, or *al-Shayṭān*; rather they are categorised along with certain types of humans.<sup>536</sup> This suggests that, while spiritual, rather than physical beings, they are closer to earth and men than heaven and its residents. Many negative characteristics are attributed to the *jinn* though: they are heedless, or misguided/astay (*ghāfilūn*; *aḍall*: Q 7:179); deluded (*gharrat(ūn)*: Q 6:130); lost/losers (*khāsirīn*: Q 41:25; Q 46:18); disbelievers (*khāfirīn*: Q 6:130). And yet, when given the opportunity to hear the revelation sent by God (Q *al-Jinn* 72:1; Q 27:40; Q 46:29–30), many of them accept it (Q 72:13), commit to no longer associating anything with their *rabb*, “Lord” (Q 72:2), submit to him (*al-muslimūn*: Q 72:14), and return to their people (presumably other *jinn*), as messengers (*rusul*: Q 6:130), and warners (*mundhirīn*: Q 46:29).<sup>537</sup> These are all attributes and activities denied angels, who only act upon God’s instruction (Q 16:50; Q 21:27; Q 97:4). God may choose *rusul* from amongst angels (*malā’ika*) as well as men (Q 22:75; Q 35:1), but the former are never sent to their own kind, as the *jinn* appear to be (Q 6:130; Q 46:29, 31)

Despite apparently exercising their free will to become Muslims, the *jinn* are prevented from listening in on what happens in heaven (Q 72:9, 10), and blocked by fire from touching the sky (Q 72:8). Previously, they were able to move between the heavenly and earthly spheres (Q 55:33), so the cessation of this movement echoes the punishment meted out to the

---

<sup>534</sup> This contradicts Q 21:30, which states that God created every living thing from a drop of water. Some tension is thus palpable; if the *jinn* were not made from water, can they be considered living beings in the same way as animals and humans?

<sup>535</sup> E.g., Ques. Bart. 4:54; *Invest. Abbat.* 6:1; Bk. Adam and Eve 9, 6–9.

<sup>536</sup> Q 51:56; Q 55:33, 39, 56, 74; Q 114:4, 6; Q 17:88; Q 27:17; Q 72:5, 6; Q 6:112, 130; Q 7:38, 179; Q 11:119; Q 32:13; Q 41:25, 29; Q 46:18.

<sup>537</sup> Cf. Col 1:20; Eph 1:10; Augustine, *Div. quaest. Simpl.* 2.3.3; on the basis of Mark 1:24 and Jas 2:19, demons could recognise God’s power but shuddered out of fear of punishment, not out of hope for eternal life (*Civ.* 9.21).

*shayāṭīn*, (Q 26:212; Q 67:5).<sup>538</sup> For reasons that are never fully explained, they attempt to mislead men (*q-l-l*: Q 41:29; *k-th-r*: Q 6:128), create delusion among them and inspire them with flowery words (*zukhruf al-qawl*: Q 6:112), in much the same way as (*al*-)*shayāṭīn*, *Iblīs* and *al-Shayṭān*, but to a far more limited degree. In Q 6:112, men and *jinn* are described as working together to corrupt the prophets' message(s) and yet, this is apparently part of the Lord's plan, so the *jinn* are not rebels, the unrighteous among them are simply on a different path to the righteous (Q 72:11, 14). Indeed, of all the "demonic" characters that appear in the Qur'ān, the *jinn* are portrayed most positively: in addition to accepting the revelation (of the Qur'ān) and submitting to God, as already discussed, at least some of them can be said to be strong, trustworthy (*qawiyy/amīn*: Q 27:39), and righteous (*sāliḥūn*: Q 72:11). Unlike men, they will avoid being questioned about their sins at the final judgment (Q 55:39). Despite this, they are described as enemies to men (Q 6:112; cf. Q 18:50), who, on the basis that *Iblīs* is a *jinn*, are warned not to take them as protectors (*awliyā'*: Q 18:50) instead of God, who created them to serve him (Q 51:56), as angels perhaps also were (Q 16:50; Q 21:27, cf. Q 43:19). Along with *Iblīs*, *al-shayāṭīn*, and *al-Shayṭān*, however, the *jinn*s' ultimate destination is hell(fire),<sup>539</sup> except at God's discretion (Q 6:128), or for those among them who are Muslims (Q 72:14–15). Despite this, the *jinn* hardly feature in eschatological descriptions or events, in which (as discussed), angels play significant roles (see Section 4.1.8).

*Jinn* are not, as some have, and continue, to assume, simply "Arabian" evil spirits or "interchangeable" with them,<sup>540</sup> but far more complex characters, who clearly predate the Qur'ān, and, at least initially, were sometimes portrayed positively.<sup>541</sup> Subsequently, the text

---

<sup>538</sup> Although the description of the latter, as being "banished" (*gh-z-l*, Q 26:212), suggests their permanent removal from one sphere to the other (heaven → earth), rather than the cessation of previously permitted movement between the two, as in the case of the *jinn*. This parallels the fate of the watchers, who are informed by Enoch that they will no longer be able to ascend to heaven (1 En. 14:5–6).

<sup>539</sup> Q 72:15, Q 6:128; Q 7:38, 179; Q 11:119; Q 32:13; Q 34:12.

<sup>540</sup> Michael E. Pregill and Zohar Hadromi-Allouche, 'Devil: IV Islam', in *Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Dale C. Allison Jr. et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Tobias Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 1.

<sup>541</sup> E.g., Q 27:39; Q 72:5, 11

needed, or was concerned to discredit them, perhaps in order to make them fit into a worldview in which everything was either clearly “good,” or definitely “bad.” Metamorphosis (both physically and in terms of character), either does not occur in this world, or if it does, it constitutes a threat to the natural order of things. One explanation for this could be the transition from a pre-qur’ānic understanding of the cosmos, in which the boundaries between the physical and spiritual worlds, and thus between good and evil, were less clear-cut, to a Jewish-Christian, more dualistic, and yet, still monotheistic worldview. In this world, evil was personified and diametrically opposed to God, all creatures thus falling into one of two categories or states (good or bad), pre-determined by their natures. Welch sees this as part of the gradual development of the doctrine of *tawhīd*, which necessarily involved the polarisation of all other supernatural powers, including the *jinn*, for whom there was no place in what was “an essentially Judaeo-Christian view of One God, His angels, and Satan.”<sup>542</sup>

On the basis of evidence from pre- and post-qur’ānic material, at some point the *jinn* were able to intermarry with humans, without the chaos that ensues in the Enochic tradition, when the watchers conceive offspring with the daughters of men.<sup>543</sup> Subsequently, a concern to limit such mingling to angels and the *rūḥ*, who only descend/ascend with the permission of, or on the instruction of their *rabb*, “Lord,” emerges in the Qur’ān.<sup>544</sup> This could be a consequence of the development of the concepts of heaven and hell as distinct spheres and the need to keep things in their rightful place. Figures capable of both good and bad, did not fit with the ensuing black-and-white view of the division of goodness and badness espoused by Jewish-Christian views of created beings, heaven, earth, and hell. As (*al-*)*shayāṭīn* perhaps became identified with evil *jinn*, they took over much of the sphere of evil and mischief. The

---

<sup>542</sup> Welch, ‘Allah and Other Supernatural Beings’, 733. The findings of this analysis concur with those of Welch, even though he rejects the Weil-Nöldekan chronology that provides the chronological framework for this thesis, in favour of that of Bell’s.

<sup>543</sup> As detailed in e.g., 1 En. 7–10. Cf. 4Q180 = 4QAgnesCreat A–B, 1, 7; Jub. 4:22; T. Reu. 5:6; T. Naph. 3:5; Philo, *Gig.* 6.2; Jude 1:6–7; 2 Bar. 56:12; Ps.-Philo, LAB, 3:1; Justin Martyr, 2 *Apol.* 5, demonstrating just how widespread this tradition was in Second Temple Judaism, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 224. Although note that demons were able to marry humans in rabbinic tradition.

<sup>544</sup> Q 70:4; Q 97:1 (early Meccan); cf. Q 16:2; Q 40:15, and Q 42:52.

unequivocally good, obedient figures of angels thus formed a counterpart to them, and the *jinn* became not only obsolete but an inconvenient anomaly. Hence references to the *jinn* become increasingly negative, perhaps in an attempt to relegate them to the level of pre-qur'ānic, Arabian, demonic beings, and downplay, or deny the possibility that some of them were in fact Muslims.<sup>545</sup> Unlike *al-shayāṭīn*, who are clearly always conceived of as intrinsically evil, with there being no question of them being redeemed, the *jinn* are more ambiguous.<sup>546</sup> They both fall somewhere between *shayāṭīn*, and angels in terms of the “goodness,” or “badness,” of their characters and actions, and can move between the two. In this, they have more in common with Israelite and Hellenistic concepts of δαίμονες, who, like humans, could be good, bad, or neutral.<sup>547</sup> Their apparently innate free will distances them further from (qur'ānic) angels, however, who appear to have no such autonomy or ability to act independently.

#### 5.1.4 “Fallen” Angels: *Iblīs*

*Iblīs*' refusal to bow down before Adam, and subsequent expulsion from heaven features prominently in the Qur'ān, occurring seven times in both Meccan and Medinan material,<sup>548</sup> leading Reynolds to conclude that it is “an account of fundamental importance to the Qur'ān.”<sup>549</sup> It also places *Iblīs* in direct opposition to angels (*malā'ika*), and yet still intimately connected to them. The story is repeated almost word for word in two versions (Q 15:28–35, and Q 38:71–78), both of which stem from the second Meccan period, while two further

---

<sup>545</sup> Krzysztof Kościelniak, ‘Les éléments apocryphes dans la démonologie coranique’, in *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam*, ed. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Andrzej Pikulski (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2006), 48–49.

<sup>546</sup> Col 1:20 (cf. Eph 1:10), hints at the possibility of such ambiguity in relation to demons, and it was proposed by Origen, whose doctrine was condemned by both the Church, and Augustine (*Civ.* 9.19; 21.17). Tertullian, on the other hand, held that every Christian was capable of forcing demons to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God (*Apol.* 23).

<sup>547</sup> Vos, ‘Demons and the Devil’, 14; Bodman, ‘Stalking *Iblīs*’, 249. Cf. Josef Henninger, ‘Beliefs in Spirits among the Pre-Islamic Arabs’, in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 35.

<sup>548</sup> Q 2:33–34; Q 7:11–18; Q 15:28–35; Q 17:61; Q 18:50; Q 38:71–78; Q 20:116.

<sup>549</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), 39.

references from the same period (Q 18:50, and Q 20:116), and one Medinan one (Q 2:34), mention in single verses that the angels were commanded to bow (*s-j-d*), to Adam, but that *Iblīs* refused. Two versions from the second (Q 17:61), and third (Q 7:11–18) Meccan periods, provide slightly shorter versions of the story as it appears in Q 15:28–35, and Q 38:71–78.

Whitney Bodman has argued that Islamic exegetes, and, often, modern scholars, tend to read the seven occurrences of the *Iblīs* story in the Qurʾān as a composite, either in a linear fashion, or chronologically.<sup>550</sup> However, Bodman has shown that this is not the texts’ intention, and that although the Qurʾān tells essentially the same story, in each of the seven versions it does so “with significantly different ranges of meaning.”<sup>551</sup> By examining each version of the story within the larger context of the *sūrah* in which it appears, Bodman has demonstrated that each occurrence has a purpose particular to the message of the *sūrah* in question.<sup>552</sup> This finding is of greatest importance to an examination of the narratives’ structure(s), and the story as a whole, but for reference, the parallels between all seven versions are laid out in Tables A5.1 and A5.2 in the Appendix.

Although the *Iblīs* pericope has been examined in detail by several scholars,<sup>553</sup> the figure of *Iblīs* himself remains somewhat elusive, and his relation to *al-Shayṭān*, and angels, an unsolved mystery. In the Qurʾān, *Iblīs* is subject to a command given to the angels, and yet, he is

---

<sup>550</sup> Whitney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾān* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press for Harvard Theological Studies, 2011), 49–50.

<sup>551</sup> Bodman, 190.

<sup>552</sup> Bodman, 57.

<sup>553</sup> E.g., Bodman, ‘Stalking *Iblīs*’; Gabriel Said Reynolds, ‘Case Study 2: *Al-shayṭān al-rajīm*’, in *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext*, by Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2010), 54–64; Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs*; Andrew G. Bannister, ‘*Iblīs* and Adam: A Comparative Application of Computerized and “Manual” Methods of Formulaic Analysis to the Seven Retellings’, in *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qurʾān* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), 195–211; Zellentin, ‘Triological Anthropology’.

not simply a “fallen” angel, as is the case in many Jewish and Christian traditions.<sup>554</sup> Although this pericope does not appear in the biblical text itself, *haśāṭān*/ο διάβολος is at least clearly present among, if not a member, of the heavenly host (Job 1:6, Ps 108:6 [LXX], Zech 3:1–2), and the interpretation of Isaiah 14:12–15, as referring to the fall from heaven of a (previously good) angel, was clearly a widely accepted interpretation of this passage, by the time of the church fathers.<sup>555</sup> The discovery of Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch at Qumran has forced scholars to rethink the date of this literary tradition, now placing it as early as the third to first centuries BCE. That some form(s) of the Enochic tradition was/were current in the qur’ānic milieu must therefore be a serious consideration. Nowhere is this more so the case than in the fallen angel narrative, with Sullivan concluding that, “virtually all subsequent interpreters of the watchers’ narrative likely had some awareness of the kinds of ideas that developed in 1 Enoch.”<sup>556</sup> This background must thus be borne in mind, but not taken as a given, when examining the figure of *Iblīs* in the Qur’ān.

Unlike angels, the Qur’ān provides a lot of information about *Iblīs*’ physical and emotional make-up: he was created from fire<sup>557</sup> (*nnār*: Q 38:76; Q 7:12), a quality he proudly claims makes him better<sup>558</sup> than Adam (Q 38:76, Q 7:12), which demonstrates his arrogant haughty pride<sup>559</sup> (*istakbar*: Q 38:74–5; *tatakabar*: Q 7:13; *istakbar*: Q 2:34), a trait not suffered by the angels (Q 4:172; Q 21:19). This pride perhaps explains why he is a disbeliever (*al-kāfirīn*: Q 38:74; Q 2:34). The reason given by *Iblīs* in the Qur’ān for not bowing to Adam (because he is

---

<sup>554</sup> E.g., LAE [Lat./Arm./Geo.] 12:1–16:1; Ques. Bart. 4:25, 28, 54–56; 2 En. [J] 29:4–5; 31:4–5; Apoc. Sed. 5:1–2; Isa 14:12–15; Tertullian, *Pat.* 5; Irenaeus, *Haer.*, IV 40,3. The postbiblical period saw an explosion of interest in the fallen angel myth, but this was not a new concept, rather, one which appears to have been “common to all Semitic peoples,” Marmorstein, ‘Fallen Angels’, 155. Note though, that fallen angels as a concept do not appear in the Talmud or midrash, Rubio, *La angelología*, 50.

<sup>555</sup> E.g., Origen, *Princ.* 1, 5.5.

<sup>556</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 201, 204–5.

<sup>557</sup> Cf. Apuleius, *De deo Socr.* 13; Cav. Tr. 3, 1–2; Ques. Bart. 4:28, 54. Cf. Augustine, *Trin.* 4.14; *Civ.* 21.10.

<sup>558</sup> Cf. Cav. Tr. 3, 1–2; Augustine, *Pat.* 5, *Civ.* 11.13–17; *Invest. Abbat.* 6:1; *Invest. Gab.* 93.

<sup>559</sup> Cf. Cav. Tr. 3, 1–2; Augustine, *Civ.* 11.13–17.

made of fire, while Adam is made of clay), mirrors that found in the *Cave of Treasures*,<sup>560</sup> rather than that from the primary Adam literature, where he cites his posterity as justification.<sup>561</sup> It is not the case, however, that one reason came to be preferred over the other, with both appearing separately in traditions that pre- and postdate the Qur'ān. Sometimes both reasons are given, suggesting the two did not exist or circulate in isolation from each other but constituted complimentary, rather than competing traditions.<sup>562</sup>

After being expelled from heaven, rejected, and cursed,<sup>563</sup> *Iblīs* vows to mislead men (*la-ughwiyannahum*: Q 15:39; Q 38:82), lying in wait for them<sup>564</sup> (*ajlib 'alayhim*: Q 17:64, *la-aq'udann lahum*: 7:16–17), inciting them with his voice (Q 17:64), and making evil seem fair to them (*la-uzayyinān lahum*: Q 15:39). He threatens to take a portion of God's servants (Q 4:118), and destroy Adam's offspring (Q 17:62). On one occasion, *Iblīs* is blamed for having caused Adam and his wife to leave the garden (Q 20:117), a crime otherwise attributed to *al-Shayṭān*, (Q 7:22, 27; Q 2:36). It is therefore clear, why, like (*al-*)*shayṭān*, and *al-Shayṭān*, *Iblīs* should not be taken as a protector (*awliyā'*: Q 18:50), and that he and his offspring constitute enemies to men (*'adūw*: Q 18:50; *'aduww*: Q 20:117). Despite this, *Iblīs'* actions are to a certain

---

<sup>560</sup> Cav. Tr., 3, 1–2.

<sup>561</sup> E.g., LAE [Lat./Arm./Geo.] 14.3; *Invest. Abbat.* 6:1; *Invest. Mich.*, 3,9; Ques. Bart. [C] (Latin). The extent to which the Qur'ānic account is reflected in Coptic material is striking, but Wilson B. Bishai's conclusion that "Coptic [is] the most likely source of the Qur'ānic text" (Bishai, Wilson B., 'A Possible Coptic Source for a Qur'ānic Text', *JAOS* 91, no. 1 (1971): 125), is methodologically over-simplistic. He also does not appear to be referring to the limited Coptic fragments of primary Adam material. The presence of the motif of Satan's desire for revenge on Adam, after being cast out of heaven (on which Bishai's claim for a Coptic "origin" hinges), in the Latin, Armenian, and Georgian primary Adam literature, suggests it was part of an earlier, no-longer-extant, alternative Greek *Vorlage* (although de Jonge and Tromp disagree: Johannes Tromp and Marinus de Jonge, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 41). Since Wilson was writing before Michael Stone's and Gary Anderson's seminal work(s) on these texts, this material would not, however, have been available to him.

<sup>562</sup> E.g., Ques. Bart. [G], and [C] (Latin). As is also the case in early Islamic tradition, e.g., al-Ṭabarī cites Ibn 'Abbās as giving both reasons, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:213; Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>563</sup> *d-ḥ-r*: Q 7:18; *r-j-m*: Q 15:34; Q 38:77; *l-'-n*: Q 15:35; Q 38:78; Q 4:118. Cf. LAE [Lat./Arm./Geo.] 16:1; Ques. Bart. 4:55–56; Cav. Tr. 3, 1–2; Disc. Abbat.; Bk. Adam and Eve vi, 7, iv, 8–14.

<sup>564</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus *Ep.* 6, 101; *Invest. Abbat.* 7:5–6.

extent ordained, or at least permitted by God, who grants him respite in three of the seven retellings of the angelic prostration.<sup>565</sup> *Iblīs*' power over God's servants is limited however (Q 15:42; Q 17:65), to those who follow him of their own volition (Q 15:42). That those who are sincere servants of God (Q 15:40; Q 38:83), are excluded from *Iblīs*' influence is a fact recognised by *Iblīs* himself. *Iblīs* at least, considers God to be partly responsible for the state of affairs, by having sent him astray (*gh-w-y*: Q 15:39; Q 7:16).<sup>566</sup> Rightly or wrongly, *Iblīs* will not evade justice in the end, as God indicates his intention to fill hell with his hosts and followers along with him (Q 26:94–95; Q 38:85; Q 7:18).

In the retellings of the angelic prostration to Adam, *Iblīs* has an infamous role, as (the only) one who refuses to obey God's command (Q 15:31; Q 20:116; Q 2:34). The description of him as refusing to be among those who prostrate suggests there may have been, or will be, others, who will also disobey such a command;<sup>567</sup> and/or is a clear reference to the multitude of angels, who follow suit and refuse to prostrate to Adam.<sup>568</sup> *Iblīs* appears mainly in material from the middle and later Meccan periods; Medinan references tending to be just that, brief references to the more developed descriptions from earlier periods (e.g., Q 2:34; Q 4:118). Familiarity on the part of the qur'ānic audience with the details of the narrative from earlier periods appears to be taken for granted. Zellentin has noted that while the Meccan versions clearly draw on the *Cave of Treasures*' tradition, the Medinan references include elements from rabbinic tradition, such as *Genesis Rabbah*.<sup>569</sup> This suggests a didactic approach, with either the Qur'ān gradually becoming familiar with a wider range of traditions about the story, and/or gradually wishing to make its audience aware of (more of) them.

Perhaps the most curious thing we learn about *Iblīs* from the Qur'ān, is that he was one of the *jinn* (Q 18:50). *Iblīs* is thus in the strange position of being subject to a command (to

---

<sup>565</sup> Q 15:37; Q 38:80, and Q 7:15, more explicitly so in Q 17:61.

<sup>566</sup> *Haṣātān*'s activities against Job are also permitted, Ling, *The Significance of Satan*, 6. Note also, that unlike Christianity, post-qur'ānic Islam displays no embarrassment at the concept of God being the source of evil, Bodman, 'Stalking *Iblīs*', 248.

<sup>567</sup> Q 15:33; Q 17:61; Q 18:50; Q 7:11.

<sup>568</sup> Cf. Cav. Tr. 3, 1–2; *Civ.* 11.13–17.

<sup>569</sup> Zellentin, 'Trialogical Anthropology', 68.



prostrate to Adam) given to the angels,<sup>570</sup> described as a *jinn* (Q 18:50), who, admittedly are also said to have been created to serve God (Q 51:56), and yet intimately connected with the figure of *al-Shayṭān*. If *jinn* were simply a class of angel, or even *shayāṭīn*, it would be easy to explain *Iblīs*' 'fall' in terms of the transition from 'good' to 'bad,' or as being due to his intrinsic badness.<sup>571</sup> However, as I have sought to show (Section 5.1.3), the *jinn* are neither angels nor demons, and, at least initially, are sometimes portrayed positively in the Qur'ān.<sup>572</sup> There also appears to be great discomfort in the Qur'ān with the idea that angels could be bad, or even disobedient. A simple 'fall' from grace would thus be at odds with its depiction of them. The designation of *Iblīs* as a *jinn* provides a neat solution to this problem: if, as it appears, there were both "good" and "bad" *jinn* (e.g., Q 72:11, 14), presumably they could also change from one state to another. Even if this was part of God's plan, it avoids the need for *Iblīs*, if he had been an angel, to have free will in order to rebel in the Qur'ān.<sup>573</sup> In addition, as a *jinn*, *Iblīs* is more easily able to make the geographical journey from heaven to earth. Although angels can and do descend to earth, these sojourns are temporary, and it is hard to see God casting a fully-fledged angel out of heaven to be left to its own devices on earth. Without God's

---

<sup>570</sup> Q 18:50; Q 20:116; Q 38:72; Q 7:11; Q 15:29; Q 17:61; Q 2:34.

<sup>571</sup> In fact, we find that al-Ṭabarī reports the views of al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Ibn 'Abbās, who explain that *Iblīs* was from a tribe of angels called *al-Ḥinn/al-Jinn*, who were assigned to guard the garden, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:211–12, 214. Al-Rāzī's understanding of *Iblīs* as an angel could also be a reflection of this, Nasr, *The Study Quran*. Eichler considers such views to be erroneous because even "good" *jinn* are never categorised along with angels, Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, 14–15. Note also that Ambros and Procházka describe *Iblīs* as "originally an angel, then a rebel against God," but give no grounds for this identification, Arne A. Ambros and Stephan Procházka, eds., *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004), 305.

<sup>572</sup> E.g., Q 27:39, Q 72:5, 11

<sup>573</sup> Which appears not to an acceptable course of action in the Qur'an, as is also the case in rabbinic literature, Bodman, 'Stalking *Iblīs*', 255. In contrast, Coptic material in particular, takes the view that angels originally had free will because otherwise Satan's "fall" would make no sense. Following this, "good" angels remained consistently good, Caspar Detlef Gustav Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959), 115. Generally, though, free will is understood as an identifying characteristic of humans, which is one of the things that differentiates them from angels, Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 80.

permission and assistance, it seems unlikely it would be able to survive for long. Additionally, the information that *Iblīs* has descendants further suggests that he cannot be an angel, because, on the basis that angels are not female, it would be logical to presume they do not, and cannot reproduce (Q 53:27, 28).<sup>574</sup> Thus *Iblīs' jinn* nature explains his disobedience while not excusing it.<sup>575</sup> The Qur'ān's increasing concern to categorise things as either good or bad, earthly, or heavenly, meant *Iblīs*, as an angel, belonged to neither one category nor the other, transitioning as he does, from good to bad, and from heaven to earth. The ambiguous nature of the *jinn* placed them in a similar position, until they were gradually classified as negative beings for their failure, both to remain in one sphere or the other, and tendency to transmogrify between categories. The discredit with which the *jinn* came to be tarred by the later Meccan period, before their eventual disappearance from the Qur'ān in the Medinan period, presented an opportunity to explain the figure of *Iblīs*. He would subsequently transform into, or merge with, the figure of *al-Shayṭān*, but could not be permitted to do so as an angel.

### 5.1.5 Angels as *khulafā'*

The Muslim/Islamic *khalīfah*, which has come to denote the civil and religious leader of the Islamic world, albeit in varying forms, is, of course, a post-qur'ānic designation. The root meaning of *kh-l-f* is in fact “to succeed,” or “come after temporarily.” The tenth form of the root “to come after another and act on his behalf as a substitute or deputy,” provides a logical translation for the term *khalīfah* in the Qur'ān as “deputy,” or “viceregent.”<sup>576</sup> A Sabaic reference to a *kh-l-f-t* “governor,” or “representative,” of King 'Abraha in the Hadramawt, both supports such a reading, and demonstrates the pre-qur'ānic usage of the term, even if it was originally a loanword from Arabic.<sup>577</sup> The majority of qur'ānic occurrences of the root describe

---

<sup>574</sup> Nünlist, *Dämonenglaube im Islam*, 53.

<sup>575</sup> Nünlist, 51.

<sup>576</sup> Ruben Schenzle, ‘If God Is King, Is Man His Vicegerent? Considering *ḥalīfah* in Regard to Ancient Kingship’, in *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur'ānic Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity*, ed. Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin I. Cicek (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), 140.

<sup>577</sup> Schenzle, 141–42.

God's, or the Lord's, ability, will, or desire, to reward certain people(s) by making them *khulafā'* on the earth.<sup>578</sup> These include historical references to figures such as Adam<sup>579</sup> (Q 2:30), Noah's people (Q 7:69; Q 10:73), the *Thamūd* (Q 7:74), the Children of Israel (Q 7:129), the 'Ād (Q 11:57), and David (Q 38:26), mostly from the late Meccan period.<sup>580</sup> Upon being appointed *khulafā'*, these replace or succeed previous people(s), who had failed in this role, and were consequently destroyed.<sup>581</sup> The reward constituted by being made God's *khulafā'*, is thus frequently contrasted with his equal capacity to inflict punishment.<sup>582</sup>

It therefore comes as something of a surprise to find that God could apparently also *laja' alnā minkum malā'ikatan fī l-arḍ yakhlufūna*, "make angels from amongst you [=men], succeeding each other on the earth" (Q 43:60)—not least because the Qur'ān implies that angels (*malā'ika*), do not live on earth (Q 17:95).<sup>583</sup> As a verbal root that occurs less than three times in angelic references, *kh-l-f* did not fulfil the criteria set for the examination of verbal roots in Chapter 3, and for this reason was not examined there. A full analysis of the term in the Qur'ān cannot be given here, and would extend beyond the topic at hand. However, the use of

---

<sup>578</sup> E.g., Q 2:30; Q 6:133, 165; Q 7:69, 74, 129, 169; Q 10:14, 73; Q 11:57; Q 24:55; Q 27:62; Q 35:39; Q 38:26; Q 43:60; Q 57:7.

<sup>579</sup> The common translation of *khalīfah* as "successor," is problematic because it is unclear whose successor Adam could be. Paret concludes, that as the representative of the entire human race, he is the successor to the angels, on the basis that, prior to the creation of man, the angels were designated to inhabit the earth, but this is far from satisfactory, as noted by Schenzle, 'If God Is King, Is Man His Vicegerent?', 140–41; Rudi Paret, 'Signification coranique de *ḥalīfa* et d'autres dérivés de la racine *ḥalafa*', *SIs* 31 (1970): 215. Schenzle reads Adam's appointment to the position of *khalīfah*, as reflective of his function as God's representative or viceregent, Schenzle, 'If God Is King, Is Man His Vicegerent?', 136–38, 140.

<sup>580</sup> The exceptions being the references to Adam (Q 2:30), which is Meccan, and David (Q 38:20), which is from the middle Meccan period. Note also, that on one occasion Moses appoints his brother as his *khalīfah*, during his own absence (Q 7:142).

<sup>581</sup> Paret, 'Signification coranique de *ḥalīfa*', 213.

<sup>582</sup> E.g., Q 6:133, 165; Q 7:129; Q 10:13–14; Q 24:55; Q 35:39; Q 38:26; cf. Q 19:59.

<sup>583</sup> Although several scholars understand this as a threat by God to destroy men and replace them with angels instead, e.g., ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

this term in relation to angels is both perplexing, and has the potential to explain more than just this one verse.

An examination of the structure of *sūrah* 43 reveals a number of key themes and ideas: that God has sent something, or someone (a *kitāb*, “book/qur’ān,” *thīkr*, “reminder,” *rasūl*, “messenger,” *nabī*, “prophet,” *nathir*, “warner”), to bring clarity, often through *āyāt*, “signs.” Any form of association or division of the Godhead is strongly condemned, and even ridiculed. The intransient nature of earthly wealth is contrasted with the reward to come from God. The inevitability of the final judgment, and God’s lack of hesitation in seeking retribution against those who reject what he has sent, commit *shirk*, “association,” and/or turn away from him, both loom large on the horizon. The application of the root *kh-l-f* to *malā’ika* in Q 43:60, is actually the third time the term *malā’ika* appears in this *sūrah*. In verse 19, those who attribute a share in God’s power or divinity, to those who serve him (v. 15), are said to *ja’alū al-malā’ikah al-ladhīn hum ‘ibād al-rraḥmān*, “make the angels, who themselves serve *al-rahmān*, females.” This is commonly understood as condemnation of the practice of angelic veneration, and/or of the deification of angelic beings by the *mushrikūn*.<sup>584</sup> This verse is thus discussed in more detail in Section 5.1.6, on angels as objects of veneration. In verse 53, Pharaoh questions the legitimacy of Moses’ claim to be a messenger (*rasūl*), when he has not come wearing bracelets of gold, or accompanied by angels (*malā’ika*). The almost messianic expectation that genuine messengers would be (accompanied by) angels (*malā’ika*), is expressed on numerous other occasions in the Qur’ān, in polemical attacks against a/the qur’ānic messenger,<sup>585</sup> as well as Noah (Q 11:31; Q 23:24), and Hūd/Ṣāliḥ (Q 41:14), which are all from the middle and later Meccan periods of the corpus. As was shown in Section 4.1.6, the description of the *rusul* in Q 43:80, who write man’s good and bad deeds, logically refers to angelic scribal guardians, rather than human messengers. Including verse 60, *sūrah* 43 thus includes five references to angels, three of which are to *malā’ika*, both of which mean it has a higher than average number of angelic references for material from the middle Meccan period (see Tables 2.1–2.4 in Sections 2.1 and 2.2).

---

<sup>584</sup> E.g., Crone, ‘The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans’, 174, 185.

<sup>585</sup> Q 6:8, 50, 158; Q 11:12; Q 15:7; Q 17:92; Q 25:7, 21; cf. Q 17:94.

How then should we understand Q 43:60, and the idea that God could not only make angels succeed each other on the earth, but make them from among men? On the basis that human *khulafā'* are appointed to replace failed ones, this could be interpreted as a threat: God will make angels his *khulafā'* on earth, if humans fail to perform the role satisfactorily.<sup>586</sup> However, this does not explain how, or why God would, or could, make angelic *khulafā'* from among men. There are a number of other verses, where similarly perplexing claims are made, the analysis of which can perhaps help to elucidate the meaning of this verse. In Q 22:75, we learn that God *yaṣṭafī min al-malā'ika rusulan wa-min al-nās*, "chooses *rusul* from among angels (*malā'ika*) and from among men," but, as the examination of references to angels as *rusul* in Sections 2.2.2 and 4.1.3, has shown, there are clear differences between angelic and human *rusul* that extend beyond their natures (cf. Q 35:1).<sup>587</sup> In response to the Unbelievers' incredulity that a (mere) mortal could have been sent to them as a *rasūl*, "messenger" (Q 17:94), the recipient of the Qur'ān is instructed to explain, that *if* angels lived on earth, God would indeed have sent them down from heaven as *rusul*, "messengers" (v. 95).<sup>588</sup> God's ability to *send (down)* angels (*malā'ika*), as messengers (*rusul*), is stressed on two other occasions (Q 6:8–9; Q 15:8). The reasons given for not sending (an) angel(s) are that it would not allow (the recipients) any respite (Q 6:8; Q 15:8).<sup>589</sup> Presumably, this is because there would be no excuse for doubting the veracity of the message brought by an angelic *rasūl*. This is underlined by the stress in Q 17:96 that God alone suffices as a witness, the implication being that an angel should not be required, or demanded. Finally, Q 6:9 claims that an angel would have to be sent in the form of a man, which would only further confuse, or obscure, an already confusing

---

<sup>586</sup> See footnote 584.

<sup>587</sup> Al-Ṭabarī views this simply as an affirmation that God sends angels, such as Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mikāl*, as well as human *rusul*, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>588</sup> Since it is humans, not angels, who live on earth, it is thus humans who are sent as *rusul*, as explained by e.g., al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabarī, Nasr.

<sup>589</sup> According to al-Ṭabarī, this is because the sending of an angelic *rasūl* would indicate the arrival of the day of judgment, meaning there would be no opportunity or time for respite, Nasr.

situation.<sup>590</sup> These references show that God can assign the same, or a similar purpose to angels and men by appointing them as *rusul*, without assigning them the same nature: i.e., angels do not need to become men to act as *rusul*, and men do not need to transform into angels to do likewise. They also point to a desire to maintain the status quo by keeping everything in its rightful place: angels in heaven, and men on earth, thus explaining why angels would need to, and in fact do, always appear as men on earth.<sup>591</sup> To return to the revelation that, if he so desired, God could make angels from among men, is Q 43:60 in fact suggesting the opposite, that God could, or would, turn men into angels? Given the Qur'ān's apparent discomfort with metamorphic change, it would seem unlikely that this is a serious suggestion. Rather, while accepting God's unlimited creative ability, it again appears to affirm the strict demarcation between the heavenly and earthly spheres. God *could* make men into angels, who would then function as his *khulafā'* on the earth (in the same way that humans are said to),<sup>592</sup> but he will not; not because he is not capable of doing so, but because angels do not live on earth (Q 17:95).<sup>593</sup> This also explains why God does not send angels as *rusul*, in the sense of human messengers: the necessary crossing of boundaries would require angels to appear as, or even transform into men, and lead to an Enochian level of confusion and chaos

#### 5.1.6 Angels as Objects of Veneration

That the Qur'ān should be vehemently opposed to the veneration of any other beings besides God is hardly surprising, since the claim that “there is no god but God is the refrain of the book.”<sup>594</sup> That angelic veneration was practised to some extent by both Jews and Christians is

---

<sup>590</sup> According to al-Ṭabarī, the sight of an angel not in such a form might be enough to cause the death of those to whom it was sent. Al-Qurṭubī explains that the human form in which an angel would have to be sent would result in it being no more convincing than a human messenger, and provide the Unbelievers with ammunition as to its inauthenticity, Nasr.

<sup>591</sup> Q 11:78; Q 15:51, 68; Q 51:24, 37; Q 19:17.

<sup>592</sup> Q 2:30; Q 7:69, 74, 129; Q 10:73; Q 11:57; Q 38:26.

<sup>593</sup> See footnote 589.

<sup>594</sup> Crone, ‘The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans’, 155.

undisputed, although the many textual references do not necessarily add up to prove the existence of an organised cult of angel worship.<sup>595</sup> The soldier angel before whom Joshua falls to his feet in worship tells him to remove his shoes, but does not explicitly rebuke Joshua for appearing to worship him (Josh 5:14). Tobit offers praise to all the holy angels, at his own initiative (Tob 11:14), while Isaiah is actively encouraged to worship the angel of the Holy Spirit in the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 9:36, having previously been reprimanded for attempting to worship an angel in 7:21.<sup>596</sup> In the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 6:4–15, the angel Eremiel chastises Zephaniah for mistaking him for a legitimate object of worship (i.e., God).<sup>597</sup> In the New Testament, Paul advises the Colossians to avoid those who worship angels (Col 2:16, 18; Gal 1:8), thought to have been Jews, or Judaizers, within the Jesus movement,<sup>598</sup> and yet in Acts 27:23, he is cited as saying he himself worships, or serves the angel present. Perhaps his condemnation of the Galatians is because they initially welcomed him as an ἄγγελον θεοῦ/ἄγγελον θεοῦ (Gal 4:14). Like Muhammad, Paul does not question the existence of angels, but rather their complete, final, and, in Paul's eyes, justified usurpation by Christ.<sup>599</sup> The angel in Revelation 19:10 and 22:8–9, chastises John for attempting to worship him, stressing that he should, rather, worship God. The second-century Syriac *Apology of Aristides* claims the Jews think they are serving God, but are actually serving angels, while the first/second-century *Kērygma Petrou*, subsequently cited by Clement of Alexandria, accuses Jews of adoring (arch)angels. Schäfer believes polemic against making images of angels, or stressing that sacrifices offered to them were invalid, constitutes clear evidence that angelic

---

<sup>595</sup> Crone, 192; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 269.

<sup>596</sup> Gieschen, 'The Angel of the Prophetic Spirit', 801.

<sup>597</sup> Ioan Culianu P., 'The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism', in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. R. van den Broek, M. J. Vermaseren, and Gilles Quispel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 90.

<sup>598</sup> Crone, 'The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans', 193.

<sup>599</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 9.

veneration was an established practice in the later rabbinic period.<sup>600</sup> Carrell agrees that angels were not venerated by Jews before the advent of Christianity.<sup>601</sup> Sanh. 38b, 20 “may imply that angel worship was practiced by certain sects who were close to Christianity, but the talmudic sages took strong exception to this practice.”<sup>602</sup> In a similar vein, but from a Christian perspective, the pronouncement of canon 35 of the Synod of Laodizea (c.365 CE), declares that Christians should not invoke angels, as this is a form of idolatry.<sup>603</sup>

This background, has, however, perhaps led to the relatively few qur’ānic passages that accuse the Messenger’s opponents, whom the Messenger presents as polytheistic idolators,<sup>604</sup> of infractions involving angels, to be interpreted as evidence that the pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped angels.<sup>605</sup> Despite claims that, at the time of Muhammad, “il est manifest que la plupart des Arabiques croyaient aux “anges”, ”<sup>606</sup> and that angel worship was a “distinctive feature of Arabian *shirk*,”<sup>607</sup> there is in fact, no epigraphic or other conclusive evidence that *angels* were worshipped in any way, in pre-Islamic Arabia.<sup>608</sup> Although the terms *ml’k/ml’kt/Ml’k<sup>m</sup>* do appear in pre-Islamic inscriptions from Southern Arabia, they do not clearly

---

<sup>600</sup> E.g., t. Hul. 2:18; m. Hul. 2:8; b. Gem. Hul. 40a; y. Ber. 9.1, 13a; Tg. Ps.-J. Exod. 20:2, Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 67–72.

<sup>601</sup> Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 73.

<sup>602</sup> Marmorstein, ‘Fallen Angels’, 158; Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens*, 292.

<sup>603</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*, vol. 14, 14 vols, 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

<sup>604</sup> Crone, ‘The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans’, 189, but scholars believe they are better understood as “inclusive monotheists,” or monists, who saw many lesser gods (or, possibly, angels), as manifestations of the one God. They were only pagans in the sense of not being Jews or Christians, Patricia Crone, ‘The Quranic *mushrikūn* and the Resurrection (Part I)’, *BSOAS* 75, no. 3 (2012): 449–50.

<sup>605</sup> E.g., Q 3:80; Q 17:40; Q 34:40; Q 37:150; Q 53:27.

<sup>606</sup> Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 70.

<sup>607</sup> Mir Mustansir, ‘Polytheism and Atheism’, in *EQ* (Washington DC: Brill Online, n.d.).

<sup>608</sup> Al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī report that the angels were God’s daughters was a belief held by the Kinānah and Khuza’ah tribes in particular, but this does not necessarily mean that they worshipped them, although this is what e.g., al-Qurṭubī claimed, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.



refer to heavenly messengers.<sup>609</sup> Epigraphic references to the “daughters of God,” for which there is evidence were objects of worship, do not equate them with angels, or messengers.<sup>610</sup> As noted by Robin, although the term *malak* may have pre-Islamic, Arabic origins, this is not the case with the term’s meaning of an angel (as opposed to simply a messenger).<sup>611</sup> There is evidence that winged, supernatural, female beings called *shams*, manifestations of the sun-goddess *Shams<sup>um</sup>*, were venerated in Southern Arabia, from the first to the fourth centuries CE.<sup>612</sup> That these were depicted in human form (with wings), suggests they were not major deities, but intermediary beings of some kind,<sup>613</sup> that they had wings, that they were able to move between the earthly and heavenly worlds.<sup>614</sup> On the basis of these commonalities, Robin thus concludes that “on peut donc considérer que les *shams* sont les “anges” de l’Arabie du sud antique,” making it all the stranger that the Qur’ān does not refer to them as a separate category of beings, or any winged beings in fact.<sup>615</sup>

Although (some) members of the Messenger’s audience are frequently accused of serving, or worshipping, others besides God, there is only one which claims these beings were angels (*malā’ika*: Q 34:40–41). Even then, the angels themselves refute the accusation, claiming

---

<sup>609</sup> Christian J. Robin and Alessia Priolella, ‘Nouveaux arguments en faveur d’une identification de la cité de Gerrha avec le royaume de Hagar (Arabie orientale)’, *Semitica et Classica* 6 (2013): 169; Christian J. Robin, ‘Before Ḥimyar. Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms of South Arabia’, in *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, ed. Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 116; Christian J. Robin and A. de Maigret, ‘Le royaume sudarabique de Ma’īn: nouvelles données grâce aux fouilles italiennes de Barāqish (l’antique Yathill)’, *Comptes rendus des séances de l’académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 153, no. 1 (2009): 84; Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 122.

<sup>610</sup> Crone, ‘The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans’, 185; Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 104.

<sup>611</sup> Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 124.

<sup>612</sup> Robin, 71, 73.

<sup>613</sup> Robin, 73.

<sup>614</sup> Robin, 95.

<sup>615</sup> Robin, 95.

it was in fact the *jinn* who were the objects of worship.<sup>616</sup> Unless we follow Crone's view that, for the *mushrikūn*, "gods," "God's children," and "*malā'ika*," were synonymous terms for any being who shared in God's nature,<sup>617</sup> on the basis of the qur'ānic evidence, there are no grounds for believing that angelic veneration formed part of pre-qur'ānic religion. Crone herself notes the absence in the Qur'ān of any "reference to the practicalities of a cult of deities or angels separate from that of God."<sup>618</sup> She concludes that there are no grounds for thinking the *mushrikūn* saw their lesser gods as angels,<sup>619</sup> in the sense of *malā'ika*, an identification which Welch further concludes was a qur'ānic development.<sup>620</sup> If anything, the beings who most closely parallel *malā'ika*, are the winged, messenger *shams*, but, as noted, these do not feature in the Qur'ān's presentation of members of the divine world of the *mushrikūn*.<sup>621</sup>

An examination of those qur'ānic passages which rail against behaviours vis-à-vis *malā'ika*, shows that they are solely, or mainly, concerned with the purported (re-)gendering of them (as female).<sup>622</sup> This concern is noticeably absent from those passages which accuse some

---

<sup>616</sup> That this is a late Meccan *sūrah*, when the negative portrayal of the *jinn* was at its peak, is almost certainly a factor that must be taken into account here (see Section 5.1.3). A reading of demons/devils is thus justified, not because they are one and the same, but because the *jinn* are increasingly depicted as equivalent to them throughout the Qur'ān, possibly in an attempt to discredit them, as they became redundant, and inconvenient, figures with no role within the developing qur'ānic worldview. Welch views these verses and Q 37:158–66; Q 6:100, as attempts to demote the Meccans' gods yet further, Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings', 741.

<sup>617</sup> Crone, 'The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans', 156. A view partly shared by Robin, who notes that references to "sons/daughters" of the main deity, could refer to a range of supernatural beings, Robin, 'Les "anges" (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels', 103.

<sup>618</sup> Crone, 'The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans', 164.

<sup>619</sup> Crone, 189.

<sup>620</sup> Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings', 740. As for example, ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Zamakhsharī claim in their interpretations of Q 17:57, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>621</sup> See footnote 616.

<sup>622</sup> Which begs the question why the *shams* do not feature in this respect, since they were clearly considered female, and appeared to have been worshipped after the rise of Christianity, in contrast to the "daughters of god," worship of whom seems to have been limited to the pre-Christian period, after which they were usurped by the *shams*. See footnote 613, and Robin, 'Les "anges" (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels', 113.

members of the Qur'ān's audience of worshipping others besides God.<sup>623</sup> The identification of lesser gods (or perhaps, the angel-like *shams*), as angels, could, of course, have been an attempt to downgrade them from deities to servants of (the one) God, but this does not explain the focus on their gender. The *shams* were always portrayed as female, and the *mushrikūn* may well have worshipped them, and/or other goddesses. Q 53:19–20, which names three of these goddesses, *al-Lāt*, *al-'Uzzā*, and *Manāt*, suggests they did. Southern Arabian epigraphic references to these three, various other goddesses, and so-called “daughters of god,” provides further evidence that female deities were widely worshipped by the pre-Islamic Arabs.<sup>624</sup> They could have worshipped angels, but they are neither reprimanded for making male deities *female*, nor for worshipping *male malā'ika*. The issue is that they dare to assign a gender to *malā'ika*, specifically that they consider them to be female.<sup>625</sup> It is the application of human characteristics that is the problem here, because it threatens the distinction between the earthly and heavenly realms. It also allows for angels, who, by their very natures are constant, and unchangeable, to transform from male/genderless beings to female ones. As the discussion of angelic roles (Section 4.1.11), has shown, the Qur'ān appears to be uncomfortable with the notion of metamorphism, and becomes increasingly concerned to distinguish between the earthly and heavenly spheres by the Medinan period.

---

<sup>623</sup> E.g., Q 4:117; Q 6:56; Q 7:194, 197; Q 10:66, 106; Q 13:14; Q 16:20, 86; Q 17:56, 57, 67; Q 18:52; Q 19:48; Q 22:12, 62, 73; Q 23:117; Q 26:72, 113; Q 28:64, 87, 88; Q 29:65; Q 30:33; Q 31:30; Q 34:22; Q 35:14, 40; Q 39:8, 38; Q 40:12, 20, 66; Q 41:48; Q 42:13; Q 43:86; Q 46:4, 5; Q 72:18, 20.

<sup>624</sup> Crone, ‘The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans’, 183–84. Ibn al-Kalbi claims *Manāt* continued to be worshipped at Mecca and Medina for eight years after the *hijrah*, before the Arabs switched their allegiance first to *al-Lāt*, and then to *al-'Uzzā*, Ibn al-Kalbi, *Book of Idols Being a Translation from the Arabic of the Kitāb al-Aṣnām by Hishām Ibn-al-Kalbi*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 12–23. *Al-Lāt* in particular appears to have been worshipped all over Arabia, a far wider area than any other Arabia god, from the fifth century BCE, to the seventh century CE. Furthermore, given that *al-Lāt* appears to have been the Arabian deity “par excellence” (Susanne Krone, *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1992), 11, 21), it would be odd if she were “merely,” an angel, Robin, ‘Les “anges” (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels’, 71, 119. Robin further sees the pre-Islamic “daughters of god,” as simply supernatural beings, like angels or demons, and not deities, Robin, 117.

<sup>625</sup> An accusation levied by e.g., al-Rāzī against some pre-Islamic Arabian tribes, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

Another point that should be noted, is that most of these references are indirect, that is, they make accusations about one group to another, but do not engage directly with the accused.<sup>626</sup> They also rarely cite any reported speech: in references which do, the accused talk of “gods,” not *malā’ika*, or *shams*.<sup>627</sup> Although the *mushrikūn* may not have been familiar with angels (*malā’ika*), some of the Qur’ān’s audience must have been, since the term is never explained, as discussed (see Section 2.1). The evidence of Q 3:80, which is directed at some of the people of the book, who must therefore have understood what angels were, if they were to avoid taking them as lords along with prophets, further supports this view. Could the Qur’ān have tailored its terminology to suit its audience? This would imply that those accused of transgressions involving angels were not present when Q 3:80; Q 17:40; Q 34:40; Q 37:150; Q 43:19, and Q 53:21 (cf. Q 21:26–27), were revealed: It would clearly make little sense to accuse the *mushrikūn* of something if they would not understand the terminology used to describe the crime of which they were accused. In using the term(s) *malak/malā’ika* when addressing the remainder of its audience, the Qur’ān aligns accusations of association along biblical lines, which may have had more resonance for that particular subsection of the audience. This raises questions both about the extent of Jewish-Christian angelic veneration, and the degree to which awareness of it had penetrated the qur’ānic milieu. This includes groups which subscribed to an angelomorphic Christological understanding of Jesus’ nature. This does not mean that the *mushrikūn* worshipped angels, rather that the qur’ānic Messenger spoke to a particular group using terms they could understand, and/or attempted to write off the gods worshipped by the *mushrikūn* as merely *malā’ika*. He did not necessarily understand,

---

<sup>626</sup> The exception being Q 17:40, addressed to a group which apparently believes God has daughters, who are described as (actually) angels, although the absence of any direct or reported speech, or claims by this group means this could be an interpretation on the part of the Messenger. Note also that Q 16:57 makes the same claim, but the group are not present. In Q 43:16, the direct address could be to the group addressed in verse 15, who are not those accused of the perpetration. Q 53:21 clearly refers back to the goddesses, who are not identified as such, but are known from the presence of their names in epigraphic material to have been worshipped in the Arabian Peninsula, prior to the rise of Islam (vv. 19–20).

<sup>627</sup> E.g., Q 21:36; Q 25:42; Q 37:36; Q 38:5; Q 43:57.

or accept these gods as angels in the sense of *malā'ika*, but used this term when it suited his means.

#### 5.1.7 Summary

As the above summary has sought to demonstrate, what may, on the surface, appear to be more minor aspects of angels in the Qur'ān, in fact highlight the interconnectedness of angels to some of the major themes in the Qur'ān, such as *tawhīd*, *shirk*, sources of authority, or power, the definition of good and evil, and the demarcation between the heavenly and earthly spheres. The brief analysis of the relationship between angels and the *rūḥ* in the Qur'ān has highlighted the need for further research to address this topic more fully. The widespread acceptance of the traditional understanding of the *rūḥ* in the Qur'ān as a manifestation of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* (and/or vice versa), has hindered previous attempts at this. This has also led to the angelomorphic, Christological background against which qur'ānic ideas about Jesus, angels, and the *rūḥ* clearly developed, to remain under investigated. O'Shaughnessy's conclusions regarding the *rūḥ* in the Qur'ān need not be dismissed entirely, but do require revision in light of more contemporary approaches to the Qur'ān.

The clear biblical origins of *al-Shayṭān/al-shayāṭīn* have also perhaps contributed to the almost complete absence of any modern studies dedicated to these figures in the Qur'ān.<sup>628</sup> As has been shown, understanding their place in the qur'ānic worldview is, at the very least, helpful in understanding angels. The Qur'ān's views of *al-Shayṭān/al-shayāṭīn* also says a lot about its approach to the concepts of heaven and earth, and good and evil, more generally. The *jinn* are another good example of how the acceptance of traditional beliefs about qur'ānic characters has led to their (continued) misinterpretation and underestimation. The designation of the *jinn* as "Arabian" demons has not only been shown to be incorrect, but a re-examination of these figures has shed a great deal of light on development of the role of angels in the Qur'ān. This misunderstanding around the natures, and roles, of the *jinn*, has also perhaps contributed to *Iblīs* continuing to be viewed as a "fallen" angel, and to a certain extent

---

<sup>628</sup> The work of Whitney Bodman remains a notable exception.

obscured the significance of the retellings of the angelic command to prostrate to Adam in the Qur'ān.

The impact of the unquestioned acceptance of traditional explanations for qur'ānic terms and figures is no more clearly demonstrated than in relation to the question of whether or not the *mushrikūn* worshipped angels. Reading the *mushrikūn* as idol-worshipping polytheist pagans (all terms which, it must be stressed, are open to interpretation), it follows that this may have included the veneration of angels. There is also evidence for the existence of angel-like beings in pre-Islamic Arabia, in the form of the *shams*. However, the Qur'ān does not contain any critique of them, or of the cult that may have been associated with them, making it unclear whether they can really be understood as Arabian counterparts to *malā'ika*.

The key theme, besides angels themselves, that connects all these aspects, is the clear effort, to define both the heavenly and earthly spheres, and the things that belong in them more strictly. This appears to increase exponentially throughout the qur'ānic corpus. By the Medinan period, certain characters, namely the *jinn*, who were previously free to migrate between the two areas, were now seen to pose a threat to the natural order.

## 6 Narratives Involving Angels in the Qur'ān

Although the Qur'ān does not offer the overarching historical narrative that stands behind the biblical text, it presupposes, and develops a lot of it, frequently referring to biblical figures and events.<sup>629</sup> These references rarely follow a comprehensive chronological structure, or include all elements of the narrative(s) in question, as they appear in the Bible, or other, often more extensive, extrabiblical retellings.<sup>630</sup> More often than not, such references consist of linguistic, and/or thematic triggers. Such triggers were clearly considered sufficient for at least part of the audience to know which figures, or events were under discussion.<sup>631</sup> Sometimes the name of the figure in question need only be mentioned to evoke the memory of their stories.<sup>632</sup> Despite this, it is possible to partially reconstruct coherent narratives from what sometimes appear to be scattered references to them in the Qur'ān. This does not mean that the resulting narratives will, or should, mirror their biblical, or other late antique antecedents, in every detail. Rather, it implies that a chronological narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, can be discerned, as it may well have been understood by some of the audience. There are two such narratives involving angels, known from the biblical tradition, with which at least part of the Qur'ān's first audience seems to have been familiar. These are the visitations to Abraham (Q 11:69–81; Q 51:24–37), and Lot (Q 15:51–77), which appear in Genesis 18–19:29, as well as in extrabiblical and exegetical material,<sup>633</sup> and the annunciations to Zechariah (Q 3:38–41; cf. Q 19:2–15), and Mary (Q 3:42–48; Q 19:16–19), from Luke 1:5–2:20, 26–38 respectively. The presence of angels in identifiable, known, narratives is important as it enables us to analyse them in context, which has the potential to reveal more about the way in which the Qur'ān understands and employs

---

<sup>629</sup> On the use of this term, see footnote 163

<sup>630</sup> *Sūrah* 12 constitutes a notable exception.

<sup>631</sup> E.g., (*wa*)-*idh*, “(and) when,” which Sidney Griffith has shown indicates a biblical origin, and one which the Qur'ān expects its audience to know, Sidney Harrison Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 2013), 61.

<sup>632</sup> Fred Leemhuis, “*Lūṭ* and His People in the Koran and Its Early Commentaries,” in *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, ed. Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 99.

<sup>633</sup> E.g., Jub 16:1–9; Tg. Neo.; Tg. Ps.-J.; b. Meṣ. 86b; Gen. Rab. 48:1–51:7; Exod. Rab. 3:16, 48:5; Lev. Rab. 11:5; Eccl. Rab. 3:14, 1; Lam. Rab. 1:10, 38.

them, than otherwise passing references.

## 6.1 The Three Visitors to Abraham and Lot

The story of the angels sent to Abraham and Lot is not, as Reynolds would have it, “retold” but rather, commented on, in Q 11:69–81, and Q 15:51–77.<sup>634</sup> The Qur’ān is not concerned to provide a chronological narrative, but still includes the key elements of the stories, and focusses on the moral, or message of each it wishes to emphasise. The angelic visitation to Abraham is mentioned again in Q 51:24–37, and, very briefly, Q 29:31, all *sūrahs* being Meccan, predominantly from the middle and late periods. The destruction of Lot’s people is recounted numerous times in the Qur’ān,<sup>635</sup> and the fact that Abraham was blessed with a son in his old age is mentioned in Q 37:83–101, and Q 29:27. Since no angels are involved in these last two versions, they are of less interest to us here. In the versions which do feature angels, in the Qur’ān, neither Abraham’s nor Lot’s visitors are referred to as *malā’ika* but rather, as *rusulunā*, “our messengers,” Q 11:69, 77; Q 29:31; *rusul rabbika*, “the messengers of your Lord,” Q 11:81; *ḍayf*, “guests,” Q 11:78; Q 15:51, 68; Q 51:24; *mursalūn*, “messengers,” Q 26:160; *al-mursalūn*, “those who are sent,” Q 15:57; Q 15:31; or *qawm munkarūn*, “an unusual/strange/foreign people,” Q 51:25.<sup>636</sup> Given the almost complete consistency with the terminology used to refer to these characters in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, as well as in all pre-modern Bible translations, this is particularly striking (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6). Either the Qur’ān knew of a different, no longer extant, or as yet, still undiscovered version of the story, or deliberately did not follow the biblical sequence of terms used to refer to the visitors. Perhaps it took issue with the lack of clarity surrounding the visitors’ identities, which the biblical text clearly did not,

---

<sup>634</sup> Reynolds, ‘The Case of Sarah’s Laughter’, 585.

<sup>635</sup> Q 54:33–39; Q 37:133–138; Q 26:160–174; Q 27:54–58; Q 29:26–35; Q 7:80–84, cf. Q 66:10.

<sup>636</sup> A description missing from the account in Genesis but alluded to in Hebrews 13:2, and explained in many postbiblical sources, most strikingly, in a homily by Jacob of Serugh. His description, in common with the account in *sūrah* 51, also focuses on the visitors’ foreignness, presents Abraham’s speech, or thoughts upon seeing them, and uses a word derived from the root *n-k-r*, Witztum, ‘Thrice upon a Time’, 283–85. On the terms the Qur’ān uses to refer to angels besides *malā’ika*, see Chapter 2.



alternating, as it does, between referring to the visitors as men and angels “with seeming arbitrariness.”<sup>637</sup> The ambiguity generated by this gave rise to an extensive exegetical tradition, which sought both to explain and justify the identification of the visitors, who were probably generally understood as angelic by the late Second Temple period.<sup>638</sup> The author of Hebrews reminds people of the obligation to show hospitality to strangers, cautioning that some have previously entertained ἀγγέλους, “angels,” without being aware of it (Heb 13:2). This appears to be a reference to Abraham and his visitors in Genesis 18–19.<sup>639</sup> Some early Christian writers argued for a pre-incarnate Trinitarian appearance, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a view that appears to have become widespread by the sixth century.<sup>640</sup>

---

<sup>637</sup> David Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels in the Rabbinic and Inter-testamental Exegesis of the Book of Genesis’ (Oxford, Oxford, 1985), 145. 4Q180 2–4, ii states that the three men who appeared to Abraham at Mamre were angels; Jubilees also identifies the three men as angels, thus removing the tension created by the visitors’ ambiguous nature(s), and the potential theophany, which is prevalent in the biblical text, Jacques van Ruiten, ‘Lot versus Abraham: The Interpretation of Genesis 18:1–19:38 in Jubilees 16:1–9’, in *Sodom’s Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, ed. Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 29–46; Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, ‘Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in *Sodom’s Sin*, 47–62; Florentino García Martínez, ‘Sodom and Gomorrah in the Targumim’, in *Sodom’s Sin*, 85. A majority of the church fathers highlighted the angelic form in which the men had appeared to Abraham, although a Trinitarian theophoric interpretation would come to dominate their overall view of the narrative, for summaries of this shift, see, Bogdan B. Bucur, ‘The Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism’, *J ECS* 23, no. 2 (2015): 245–72; Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’; William T. Miller, *Mysterious Encounters at Mamre and Jabbok* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984). See also Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.3, 3.1.3, 4.1.3, and Tables 4.5 and 4.6.

<sup>638</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 182.

<sup>639</sup> Sullivan, 193. A reference to Hebrews 13:2 appears in Tertullian, *Or.*, 26.

<sup>640</sup> For an overview see, Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’, 69–70; Miller, *Mysterious Encounters*; I. Thunberg, ‘Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Genesis 18’, in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented to the Fourth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1963*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Akademie, 1966), 560–70; Grypeou and Spurling, ‘Abraham’s Angels’. Augustine is a notable exception to this trend, since he denied any member of the Trinity could have been present in theophanies, concluding that “any appearance of a divine actor in the Old Testament was materially manifested by angels,” Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, 83–84.

The ambiguity as to the visitors' identities remains in the Qur'ān: were it not for the biblical origin of these stories, we might be forgiven for asking whether we are in fact dealing with angels here. However, the fact that the messengers do not eat when presented with food is a clear indication that Abraham's visitors are angels (Q 11:70; Q 51:27), the fear this sparks, will be discussed subsequently. We know that angels do not eat from Q 25:7, in which a contrast is drawn between a messenger who eats, and an angel, who, it can be inferred, does not. The application of this characteristic, which is in complete contrast to the biblical, and most other versions of these stories, serves to highlight the angelic nature of the men, and thus the divine origin of the message they bring.<sup>641</sup> Early biblical commentators explained the inconsistency which sees angels accept Abraham and Lot's hospitality but decline similar invitations from Manoah (Judg 13:15–16), Gideon (Judg 6:21–22), and Tobit (Tob 12:19),<sup>642</sup> in a variety of ways. Either the nature of angels, which meant they could not, and did not need to eat, was temporarily suspended on earth,<sup>643</sup> or God sent down an all-devouring spirit, which in fact consumed the food, so that it would appear to Abraham and Lot that the visitors had

---

<sup>641</sup> Witztum, 'Thrice upon a Time', 281; Zellentin, 'Sūrat yā sīn, Lot's People, and the Rabbis', 169. A notable exception to this view is that of Tertullian, who appears to suggest that the angels did in fact eat (*Marc.* 3.9). Trypho argues that, had, as Justin claimed, Christ been present in Genesis 18, as the angel who promised to return, he must have eaten what Abraham prepared, while Justin claimed the consumption at Mamre must have been symbolic. Furthermore, Trypho notes that manna is described as "angels' food," suggesting they do in fact eat, Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, 58–60.

<sup>642</sup> Although note that Raphael claims he only appeared to eat, and what Tobias and Tobit saw was in fact a vision (Tob. 12:19), "an early attestation of the idea that angels do not consume human food," Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 185.

<sup>643</sup> A similar logic explained why Moses was unable to eat or drink during his 40-day sojourn with God and the angels on Mount Sinai (Deut 9:9, 18; Exod 34:28–9), David Goodman, "Do Angels Eat?," *JJS* 37, no. 2 (1986): 162–64.

eaten.<sup>644</sup> The latter scenario was perhaps envisaged in order to limit the fear, which the realisation of the true nature of their guests would undoubtedly cause Abraham and Lot. In Genesis Rabbah 48:11–12, Abraham’s visitors tell him that they do not eat or drink, and then pretend to do just that, although verse 14 goes on to make it clear that they only pretended to do so.<sup>645</sup> Jubilees solves the problem by omitting the angelic hospitality scene altogether.<sup>646</sup> Overall, there is “broad agreement that the angels did not eat and either refused Abraham’s hospitality, or merely pretended to eat,” amongst early biblical commentators.<sup>647</sup> Although b. Yoma 75b says that angels eat heavenly bread (cf. Ps. 78:25; Wis 16:20; 4 Ezra/2 Esdr. 1:19), rabbinic works do not discuss the question of angelic sustenance much because it was generally accepted that the incorporeal nature of angels meant they had no need for food.<sup>648</sup> By stressing that the visitors did not eat, the Qur’ān appears to have been aware of the fact that the

---

<sup>644</sup> Cf. also T. Ab. [A] 4:9–10, and Michael’s concern about being commanded to accept Abraham’s hospitality and share his food, because, as an incorporeal being, he did not eat or drink. God puts Michael’s mind at rest by promising to send an all-devouring spirit, which would actually consume the food. The text continues after supper (5:2), so we have to assume Michael gave the impression of eating, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 190. On this see Goodman, ‘Do Angels Eat?’; James L Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 342–44; Thunberg, ‘Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Genesis 18’; Miller, *Mysterious Encounters*. Rather surprisingly, Josephus does not discuss the food offering in Judges, and Philo does not discuss Judges 6 and 13 at all, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 185. Pesiq. Rab Kah. pis. 6:1, states that angels do not eat. The angel who appears to Joachim in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (3:3), explains that his food is invisible and his drink cannot be seen by humans, before further instructing Joachim to offer up the lamb we can infer Joachim had been about to offer him, as a burnt offering to God. The angel then returns to heaven with the smoke, a clear reflection of Judg. 6:21, 15:20.

<sup>645</sup> Appearing to, but not actually eating, being an interpretation favoured by Philo (*Abr.* 110, 118), and Josephus (*A.J.* 1.196–197), amongst others. See J. A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions* (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 106; Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’, 42–44; 74–75; Grypeou and Spurling, ‘Abraham’s Angels’, 188–89; Miller, *Mysterious Encounters*, 27–28.

<sup>646</sup> van Ruiten, ‘Lot versus Abraham’, 34.

<sup>647</sup> Grypeou and Spurling, ‘Abraham’s Angels’, 189; Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 229.

<sup>648</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 181. The angel’s request for, and consumption of honeycomb in *Joseph and Asenath* can thus be explained by the fact that its miraculous appearance shows it was somehow special, or divine, and not simply ordinary, or actual honeycomb (*Jos. Asen.* 15:14–17:4), Sullivan, 185.

(angelic) visitors had eaten, or appeared to have eaten, in earlier versions of the story. In stressing that they did not, it both reveals its conscious rejection of what could be viewed as an earlier inconsistency, and discomfort with metamorphic change, which would have temporarily allowed the angels to eat while on earth. It also shows a clear awareness of the angelic nature of the visitors, despite not referring to them as such. A further possibility, is that the story was considered so well known to a significant enough part of the qur'ānic audience, it was unnecessary to point out the visitors' true identities by referring to the angels as such. This is in contrast to the pointed description of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* as angels (as opposed to deities), for example (Q 2:102, see Section 7.2). The Qur'ān may also have wished to maintain the tension caused by the ambiguity as to the visitors' identities, which reaches a crescendo when their failure to eat causes Abraham to fear them.

In contrast to the Bible, and most extrabiblical texts, which describe (two) angels being sent to Lot, the qur'ānic recensions maintain consistency with the first half of the story, where (three or more) *rusul*, “messengers,” visit Abraham before continuing on to Lot (Q 11:77; Q 15:61).<sup>649</sup> Perhaps the Qur'ān wanted to avoid the suggestion that one of Abraham's visitors had, in fact, been God himself, who then left before the other two set out for Sodom.<sup>650</sup> In doing so, it also refutes any suggestion of a Trinitarian appearance, either in the text itself, or in Christian exegetical explanations of this inconsistency—it consequently aligns itself more with rabbinic interpretations of the story. Viewing the two narratives as one continuous story, as the Qur'ān appears to, it would be logical to assume that the number of visitors would have remained consistent throughout. The Qur'ān also seems to be unconcerned with (or unaware of), a rabbinic tradition, which held that each angel could only perform one task, requiring

---

<sup>649</sup> Cf. Q 26:160, which also refers to *mursalūn*, “messengers” in the plural, rather than the dual. See also e.g., Josephus (*A.J.* 1:196–198), where (only) two of the angels have been sent to destroy Sodom; Origen, (*Hom. in Gen.* 4.), where only the two angels, and not the Lord, who sent them, continue on to Sodom. Tg. Ps.-J. constitutes an exception by maintaining three angels throughout the two narratives, Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’, 57.

<sup>650</sup> As per the explanation offered by Gen. Rab. 50:2, which sees the (three) “men,” who had visited Abraham, appear to Lot as (two) angels, albeit in the form of men, following the departure of the *šekinah*, García Martínez, “Sodom and Gomorrah in the Targumim,” 85.

whichever of the three had announced the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, to leave after completing this mission.<sup>651</sup> If one of the visitors was in fact God himself, it follows that Abraham, who, in Jewish tradition is portrayed as the host par excellence, would be honoured with such a visit.<sup>652</sup> In contrast, Lot, who in Genesis 19:8–35, is portrayed as weak, morally depraved, and drunken, does not warrant the honour of a personal visit from the divine. Despite this, many postbiblical, pre-qur’ānic texts<sup>653</sup> depict Lot not only as righteous and virtuous, but attribute his rescue amid Sodom’s destruction to these qualities.<sup>654</sup> It is in fact on the basis of Lot’s righteousness, rather than his kinship, that Abraham argues he should be spared.<sup>655</sup> This has led at least one scholar to conclude, both that a tradition which viewed Lot positively, existed from an early period, and that this reflected the original, or intended portrayal of him in Genesis 18–19.<sup>656</sup> Whether or not this is the case, the Qur’ān propagates a positive view of Lot by listing him alongside other definitively righteous figures, such as Abraham, and Noah. It further develops it in the frequent attestations to his good character and messengership.<sup>657</sup> As with Noah and Solomon, it omits the negative coda to his story, as it appears in Genesis 19:30–36, where Lot is seduced by his own daughters.

The qur’ānic renditions offer a composite of two biblical stories: the promise of a son (Isaac) to Abraham and Sarah, from Genesis 17:15–19, which is itself retold in Genesis 18:1–15, and the destruction of the “overthrown cities,” (Q 53:53; cf. Q 69:9), which are named as

---

<sup>651</sup> Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’, 57.

<sup>652</sup> Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 179.

<sup>653</sup> With the exception of Jubilees, the author of which holds an even more negative view than the writer of Genesis, van Ruiten, ‘Lot versus Abraham’, 29.

<sup>654</sup> E.g., Wis 10:6 describes Lot as being virtuous like Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph; 1 Clem 11:1 attributes Lot’s rescue to his hospitality; Luke 17:24–37 contrasts Noah and Lot (who *were* saved), with the behaviour of others (who were not), at the time, while 2 Pet 2:7–8 stresses Lot’s righteousness, and suggests this was the reason he was rescued, T. Desmond Alexander, ‘Lot’s Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness’, *JBL* 104, no. 2 (1985): 289; Zellentin, ‘*Sūrat yā sīn*, Lot’s People, and the Rabbis’, 117.

<sup>655</sup> Alexander, ‘Lot’s Hospitality’, 291.

<sup>656</sup> Alexander, 289, 291.

<sup>657</sup> Q 6:84–7; Q 21:74–75; Q 26:162, 164; Q 27:53–54; Q 29:26; Q 36:26–27; Q 37:132–4; Q 38:12–13; Q 50:12–14; Q 66:10.

Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:16–19:29.<sup>658</sup> Although these two narratives are intimately linked in the Bible, in contrast to the biblical versions, the Qurʾān juxtaposes the good news of the birth of Isaac (and Jacob), with that of the destruction of Lot’s people. In the Bible, the main reason these two pericopes are connected, is because God remembers Abraham, who had pleaded with him to save Lot and his family (Gen 18:23–33; 19:29). Lot’s living situation amongst the Sodomites,<sup>659</sup> presents a clear contrast to the upright way of life followed by Abraham (Q 11:75; Gen 18:18-19), and the broader biblical tensions that exist between rural versus urban, and nomadic versus settled life. Although Abraham is finally rewarded with a son, the birth of the biblical Isaac does not represent a consolation to the destruction of the Sodomites but rather, serves to highlight Abraham’s righteousness. In the biblical account, it is due to *Abraham’s* righteousness and intervention, that Lot and his family are saved (Gen 18:23–33; 19:29). In contrast, the qurʾānic versions stress that salvation cannot be acquired through the intervention, or intercession of others, who cannot, and should not attempt to change what God has already decreed or decided (Q 11:76; Q 15:60). This is most evidenced by the fact that Lot’s wife is not saved along with the rest of the family. The bonds of marriage and kinship are clearly not sufficient on their own to warrant her automatic rescue. Nora Katharina Schmid convincingly argues this shows that, even at this early stage of the Qurʾān’s revelation, sin was considered a personal choice, and thus salvation the responsibility of each individual.<sup>660</sup>

Unlike the targums, the Qurʾān does not explicitly identify Abraham and Lot’s visitors as angels.<sup>661</sup> However, it is clear that the Qurʾān either understands, and/or wishes to make the angelic nature of the *rusul/dayf*, “messengers/guests,” an unquestionable part of the stories.

---

<sup>658</sup> Which, owing to the parallels with the story of Lot in the Bible can be read as referring to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Qurʾān: Q 9:70; Q 53:53; Q 69:9. See footnote 206 and Loynes, *A Semantic Study of the Roots n-z-l and w-h-y*, 27–28.

<sup>659</sup> Q 11:70; Q 15:58; Q 51:32; Gen 19:20–21.

<sup>660</sup> Nora Katharina Schmid, ‘Lot’s Wife: Late Antique Paradigms of Sense and the Qurʾān’, in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Anthony Sells, (London: Routledge; Taylor & Francis, 2016), 66.

<sup>661</sup> All of which state that (three) angels were sent to Abraham (in the form of men), García Martínez, ‘Sodom and Gomorrah in the Targumim’, 85. This conclusion is also in evidence at Qumran (4Q180 2–4 ii), Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, ‘Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in *Sodom’s Sin*, 56.

This has the effect of authenticating the message they bring, and the actions they carry out on God's behalf, in connection with the sinful "people of Lot," as well as avoiding any suggestion of a theophany. This assertion of angelic status also occurs in Jubilees, where the angel of the presence dictates the story to Moses, and the text consequently appears more concerned with the angels' actions than Genesis does.<sup>662</sup> In the Bible, God's presence and active participation in carrying out the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah makes this unnecessary. In the Qur'ān, Abraham argues not with God to spare Lot's people, but with the messengers, and yet this is the focus of the story, not, as in the biblical versions, God's promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah.<sup>663</sup> This is borne out by both a thematic and structural analysis of the narratives, which shows the planned destruction of Lot's people (represented by "Bargaining," in Q 11:74, and "Condemnation," in Q 15:58 and Q 51:52, as laid out in the diagram below), lies at the heart of each version of the story in the Qur'ān, regardless of the amount of detail, or exact order of events. In the Bible, God's anger towards sinners is a secondary concern.<sup>664</sup>

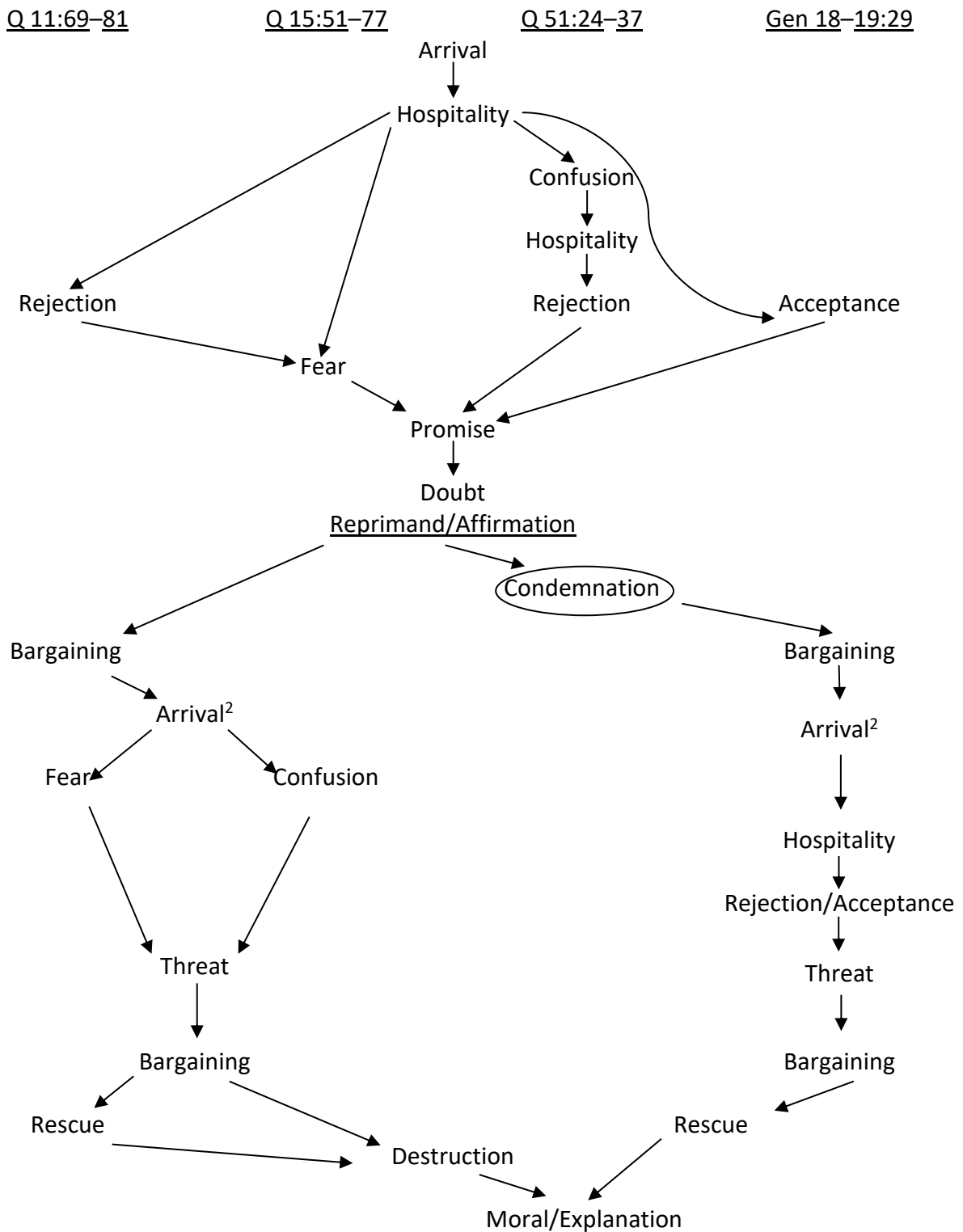
---

<sup>662</sup> A striking omission, as the author of Jubilees often incorporates theophanies into his reworking of Genesis, where they are not present in that text, van Ruiten, 'Lot versus Abraham', 30, 34.

<sup>663</sup> The judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah, and not the birth of Isaac, also appearing to be the focus of the story as retold in Jubilees, van Ruiten, 36.

<sup>664</sup> Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 56.

*Diagram 6.1 Structure of the Qur'ānic and Biblical Renditions of the Visitations to Abraham and Lot*





As the above diagram shows, in both the Bible and extrabiblical versions, the sequence of events is much more fixed, suggesting it is an important, if not key aspect of the narrative. This stands in contrast to the Qur'ān, where, in one version of the story (Q 15:51–57), Abraham also expresses doubt that he and Sarah will have a son. In the biblical versions, it is only Sarah who struggles to believe the news of the impending birth of Isaac, and is duly reprimanded by God, rather than the angels, as in the Qur'ān (Gen 18:10–12/Q 11:73; Q 51:30).<sup>665</sup> Abraham's position as a paradigm of faith and obedience, led his laughter, and the potential disbelief it implied, to be downplayed, interpreted as astonishment and happiness, and/or ignored altogether. Sarah's laughter presented less of a theological problem.<sup>666</sup> Despite this, the Bible portrays Sarah in a positive light, as opposed to the Qur'ān, which is more critical of her.<sup>667</sup> That the biblical angels explicitly ask after Sarah, suggests it is imperative that she be the one to receive the news, even though she does so only accidentally, by eavesdropping, rather than design. In Q 15:53–56, Abraham is the only recipient of this news, which he finds hard to believe. And yet, he is not reprimanded in the same way as Sarah, who makes no appearance in this version of the narrative at all. Were Isaac's birth really central to the qur'ānic accounts, we might expect some conformity to the biblical model of Sarah hearing the news, and being reprimanded for doubting its veracity. Although Sarah is reprimanded (but, as noted, by the angels, rather than God<sup>668</sup>), in Q 11:73, the angels' response to Abraham's doubt takes the form of a consolation, or affirmation (Q 15:55 cf. Q 51:30).

Having been reassured as to the truth of the news, Abraham's subsequent comment in Q 15:56 that *man yaqnaṭ min raḥmat rabbihi illā al-ḍāllūn*, "only those who go astray need despair of the mercy of their Lord," links the moral deficiency of disbelief (in God) with the

---

<sup>665</sup> Witztum concludes that Abraham's doubt reflects Genesis 17:16–21, and thus represents the retelling of a separate version of the narrative found in the Bible, Witztum, 'Thrice upon a Time', 281.

<sup>666</sup> E. Phillips, 'Incredulity, Faith, and Textual Purposes: Post-biblical Responses to the Laughter of Abraham and Sarah', in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 27–31; Reynolds, 'The Case of Sarah's Laughter', 590.

<sup>667</sup> Haggai Mazuz, 'Polemical Treatment of the Story of the Annunciation of Isaac's Birth in Islamic Sources', *RRJ* 17, no. 2 (2014): 255.

<sup>668</sup> As is also the case in Jubilees, where God does not speak directly to Sarah, van Ruiten, 'Lot versus Abraham', 34.

sending down of stones (on the “overthrown cities,” Q 53:53; cf. Q 69:9). Further on in the same verse, these are subsequently described as having been *musawwamatān ‘inda rabbika lil-musrifīn*, “marked as from your Lord for those who trespass beyond bounds,” i.e., the people of Lot. Given that Lot’s people are described as *murjrimūn*, “criminals” (Q 15:58; 51:32), this implies that they have presumably strayed from the path, and are thus among those who “trespass beyond bounds.” In addition to this, in Q 11:76, Abraham is warned that he cannot, or should not, attempt to change what has already been decreed by the Lord. This is in reference to the impending destruction of Lot’s people, and forms a negative foil to Q 11:73 (cf. Q 51:30), where Isaac’s birth, i.e., something positive, has been decreed by God. In both cases, the point appears to be that nothing and nobody can stand in the way of what God decides, or has decided to do. This is the case no matter how righteous, unlikely, or, from a biblical point of view—in relation to the destruction of Lot’s people—unjust, such a decision may be. This latter point stands in stark contrast to the biblical rendition, where Abraham directly, and successfully, chastises, and confronts God, for even considering the destruction of the righteous along with the unrighteous (Gen 18:23–26). The impression that the announcement of Isaac’s birth is not, in fact, the focus of the qur’ānic accounts, is further strengthened by the fact that Abraham asks his visitors why they have been sent, even after they have informed him of the future birth of a son (Q 15:57; Q 51:31). Clearly, he is unconvinced that this could be a valid reason for their mission. Upon being told the (true) reason for the visit, he immediately argues with them in an attempt to save Lot and his people (Q 11:74).

As discussed, the fact that in two of the three versions of the story, Abraham is only afraid of the visitors once he sees they are not eating the food that he has prepared (Q 11:70; Q 51:27), directly contradicts the biblical story. It also emphasises the human form in which they must have appeared to him, although it is striking that this detail is missing completely in

Q 15:52, where Abraham is afraid from the outset.<sup>669</sup> Witztum suggests that the motif of fear was originally an independent one, and is a “standard response of figures who encounter divine beings,” in both the Qur’ān and pre-qur’ānic texts. Such a response is thus to be expected, and does not need to be preceded by the drama surrounding the visitors eating (or not).<sup>670</sup> Either way, in all the qur’ānic versions, the visitors’ arrival provokes negative emotions in both Abraham and Lot (fear, confusion, or distress). In the Bible, their coming simply causes Abraham and Lot to offer their hospitality. In the case of Lot, he insists upon it until the angels relent (Gen 19:3), while his qur’ānic counterpart omits to offer any hospitality at all.<sup>671</sup> Although the biblical visitors are described as appearing to Abraham as men, he continues to converse with God throughout the story, which does not appear to alarm him in any way. Consequently, it has been interpreted as a theophany,<sup>672</sup> which is clearly not the case in the Qur’ān.<sup>673</sup> Lot, on the other hand, is concerned to protect his visitors from the townspeople, to the extent that he

---

<sup>669</sup> Nöldeke, Neuwirth, and Sinai’s ordering of the three versions of the Abraham narrative (*sūrahs* 11, 15, 51; 51, 15, 11), allows for the Qur’ān to omit this information on the basis that its audience would be able to recall this detail from the versions in *sūrah* 11, and/or *sūrah* 51. However, Bazargan concludes, both that *sūrahs* 15 and 51 contain material from more than one period, and that the narratives of interest to us here, would result in the chronological order 15, 51, 11, while Sadeghi groups *sūrahs* 15 and 51 together, followed chronologically some time later by *sūrah* 11. If Barzargan’s ordering were correct, and on this I make no judgment either way, it would mean that the recollection of Abraham’s fear being triggered by the rejection of his hospitality, and realisation of the angelic nature of his visitors, would have to come from some pre-qur’ānic familiarity with the story, and the question would be why the Qur’ān then reintroduces this narrative element in *sūrahs* 51 and 11. Either way, *sūrah* 15 relies on some prior knowledge of the story, and the origin of this detail, whether qur’ānic or pre-qur’ānic, cannot be determined without a full analysis of all three *sūrahs* in which the narrative appears, which is beyond the remit of this chapter, see Witztum, ‘Thrice upon a Time’, 279.

<sup>670</sup> Witztum, 281–82.

<sup>671</sup> This is in contrast to other angelic appearances in the Hebrew Bible, which usually provoke fear or terror in the recipient, e.g., Num 22:31–35; Josh 5:13–15; Judg 6:22–23, 13:20–21. For the book of Genesis, and its exegesis, see Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’, 12.

<sup>672</sup> Goodman, ‘Do Angels Eat?’, 168.

<sup>673</sup> Or Jubilees, as mentioned. In contrast, many of the early church fathers interpreted it as a theophany, not of God (the Father), but of the pre-incarnate Christ, an explanation which would develop from a minor allegory to become the dominant view in both the Eastern and Western churches, Miller, *Mysterious Encounters*, 49–94.

offers them his (plural, not just two), daughters in their place (Q 11:78; Q 15:71). This suggests that he must have been aware of their angelic nature, by this point in the narrative, if not before.

Although Lot is also unsuccessful in placating the Sodomites with the offer of his (two) daughters in Genesis 19:6–8, he is subsequently successful in negotiating to be allowed to flee to a nearby town, rather than to the mountains (Gen 19:18–23). This echoes Abraham’s successful negotiation with God not to destroy the city if he finds ten righteous men there (Gen 18:26–33). The qur’ānic Lot makes no attempt to procure such a dispensation, and, after failing to placate the people with the offer of his daughters, remains surprisingly silent in the face of the final destruction of the city. This casts Lot in a rather negative light: not only does he fail to offer the angels any hospitality; he does not immediately recognise their true natures. In this respect, he stands in stark contrast to Abraham, who, in both the Bible and the Qur’ān, represents the patriarch/prophet par excellence. This is underlined by his interaction with the mysterious (angelic) visitors in Q 11:69–81; Q 15:51–77, and Q 51:24–27, to whom he immediately offers his hospitality.

The two stories examined here underline both the homiletic quality of the qur’ānic text, and the way in which it uses such stories “as a medium by which to express a religious message.”<sup>674</sup> This consists of a warning to those who fail to heed God’s messengers to mend their ways (the Unbelievers), and a caution to the Believers, as to the futility of any attempts to intercede on their behalf. The presence of angels does not detract from God’s power and transcendence, but in fact strengthens it, and validates the divine origin of the message they bring. Although the qur’ānic narratives follow the chronological structure of the stories as they appear in Genesis, this does not extend to all the details that appear there, and “the quality of the narrative is quite different in the Qur’ān.”<sup>675</sup> The specifics of the stories are, in fact, to be found in rabbinic material, with which the Qur’ān often agrees instead of the biblical tradition.<sup>676</sup> Zellentin concludes that such parallels occur too often to be explained as simple

---

<sup>674</sup> Reynolds, ‘The Case of Sarah’s Laughter’, 585–86.

<sup>675</sup> Reynolds, 585.

<sup>676</sup> Zellentin, ‘*Sūrat yā sīn*, Lot’s People, and the Rabbis’, 144.

coincidence, although he stresses that this does not point to direct interdependency or, conclusively, to the circulation of written material.<sup>677</sup> Rather, he argues, the Qur'ān integrates rabbinic oral traditions in its reworkings of the Lot narratives (in particular), which points to an "intentionally diverging, rectified and ecotypified retelling in an oral setting."<sup>678</sup> This qur'ānic corrective explains how a shift in focus, from the birth of Isaac, to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, can occur, while drawing on familiar material. In the case of angels, it highlights how examining them within a known narrative, can reveal not only something about angels in general but potentially unlock the wider narrative in question. In the case of the (angelic) visitors to Abraham and Lot, the qur'ānic presentations demonstrate the extent to which the Qur'ān, and at least some of its audience, were familiar, not just with narratives that appear in the Bible, but with the wide range of interpretative traditions stemming from it. They show how the Qur'ān did not shy away from playing these converging traditions off against each other, in order to argue its point of view. The absence of angels in some of these retellings, does not diminish their importance, but rather, underlines their usefulness as a narrative tool, and the Qur'ān's willingness to employ them when it suited. When angels do appear in the qur'ānic versions of these stories, they appear to be used to illustrate specific points; such as the fundamental differences between the natures of men and angels, and by extension, between things that stem from the heavenly and earthly spheres, the impossibility of theophanies, and the futility of intercession. Where angels are not present, the narratives are perhaps used to illustrate other points. Angels can be dispensed with, not because they are unimportant in themselves, but because they are perhaps less relevant to the aspects the Qur'ān chooses to highlight in those instances.

---

<sup>677</sup> Zellentin, 145, 147.

<sup>678</sup> Zellentin, 145, 147.

## 6.2 The Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary

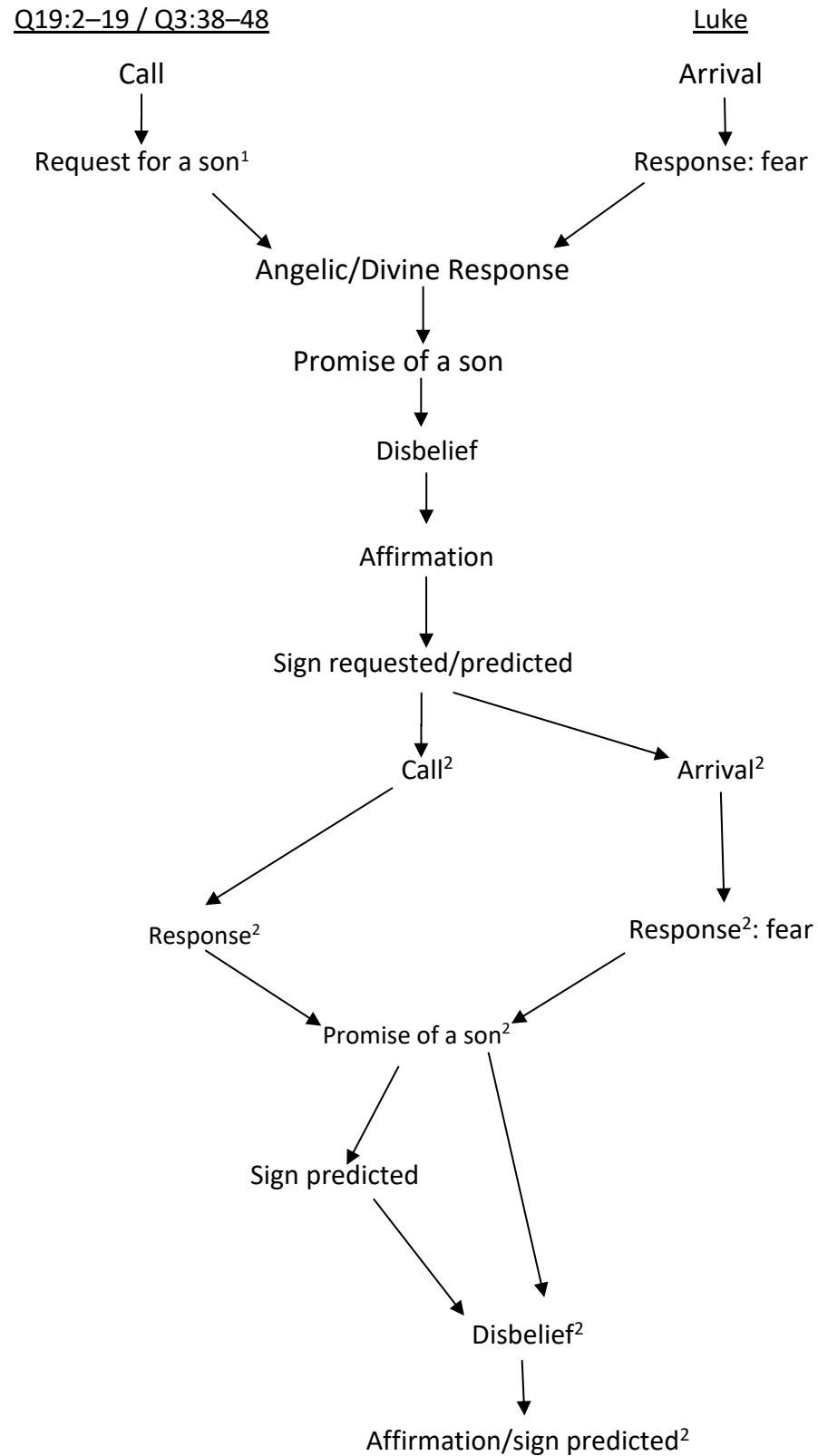
Two further episodes with a biblical background, in which angels play a role, are the annunciations to Zechariah (Q 3:38–41; cf. Q 19:2–15), and Mary (Q 3:42–48; Q 19:16–19). The first thing to be noted about these stories is the uniformity of the qur'ānic narratives with those in Luke. This stands in stark contrast to the visitations to Abraham and Lot, and suggests both a common tradition, and potentially similar purpose, or message, as Diagram 6.2 (below) demonstrates. This may, however, be less because the Qur'ān was actively engaging with canonical biblical text(s), but rather because late antique biographical literature had developed set parameters, and used common sources.<sup>679</sup> This is illustrated by parallels with the so-called (apocryphal) infancy gospels, such as the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which harmonise the infancy narratives from Luke 1–2 and Matthew 1–2, as well as adding other material.<sup>680</sup> Some aspects of the qur'ānic presentation of Jesus' annunciation and birth demonstrate that it was interacting with a broader body of material than that included in Luke and Matthew.

---

<sup>679</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 64.

<sup>680</sup> Klauck, 65.

*Diagram 6.2 Structure of the Qur'ānic and Biblical Renditions of the Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary*



Although both qur'ānic versions begin with a call to God initiated by Zechariah (Q 3:38; Q 19:3),<sup>681</sup> in Luke, the angel of the Lord appears spontaneously (1:11). However, we are told that Zechariah had been performing priestly duties in the temple (1:8–10), and that, despite their righteousness, he and Elizabeth were childless, barren and old (1:6–7). This information, as well as the angel's declaration that Zechariah's prayer had been heard (1:13; cf. Prot. Jas.4:1), suggests that the biblical Zechariah was considered to have called out to God to remedy his situation, plausibly during his time in the temple in 1:8–10. In contrast, the call, or visitation to Mary is completely unsolicited, in the Qur'ān (Q 3:41, 45; Q 19:18–19), the Bible (Luke 1:28), and the more developed extrabiblical accounts (Prot. Jas. 11:1; Ps.-Mt. 3:1). Whereas Zechariah calls to his Lord, and receives a response from God mediated by the angels (Q 3:38–39; cf. Q 19:3–7), in Mary's case, the angels, or the *rūḥ*, initiate the exchange by calling down, or appearing to her, with a message from God/her Lord (Q 3:42–43, 45; Q 19:17–19).<sup>682</sup> The Angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary in Luke 1:28, and the infancy gospels (Prot. Jas. 11:1–6; Ps.-Mt. 9:1), is just as unwarranted and unexpected by Mary.

As with Abraham and Lot's visitors, another major difference between the biblical and qur'ānic renditions of the stories, is in the number of angels present.<sup>683</sup> In Luke 1:11, Zechariah is visited by one angel, and not just any angel, but an ἄγγελος κυρίου, an “angel of the Lord,” who later reveals himself to be the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1:19; cf. Prot. Jas. 4:1, 4, 8:6; Ps.-Mt 2:3). Mary also receives a visit from the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26–38),<sup>684</sup> although we only know the angel is Gabriel from the narrator's introduction. Gabriel is otherwise not identified here, and entirely absent from the account(s) in (Pseudo-)Matthew, where Joseph is likewise visited by an “angel of the Lord” (Matt 1:20; Prot. Jas. 14:4; Ps.-Mt. 11:1). The key point

---

<sup>681</sup> Cf. Prot. Jas. 4:1; Ps.-Mt. 2:2.

<sup>682</sup> NB Ibn Kathīr, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Zamaksharī are unanimous in identifying the *rūḥ* in Q 19:17 as the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>683</sup> Although even within the biblical tradition, Abraham and Lot stand out by being visited by multiple angels; angelic visitations usually being made by just one angel at a time (e.g., Hagar, Jacob, and Joseph), Goodman, ‘Traditions concerning Angels’, 10.

<sup>684</sup> Cf. Prot. Jas. 11:3, 5, 12:5; (Arab) Gos. Inf. 1:2; Ps.-Mt. 9:1.



is that there is just one angel present in all the (extra)biblical accounts.<sup>685</sup> This angel is either identified as an “angel of the Lord,” or the Angel Gabriel. Given that the distinction between God and his angel is often unclear, this raises the question, whether we are in fact dealing with a theophany in the biblical account. In Q 3:39, on the other hand, a plurality of angels,<sup>686</sup> appear to Zechariah (Q 3:39), while in Q 19:2–15, no angels are present, and God appears to speak to him directly. Even when an angel is present, Zechariah does not address him at all but rather, appears to continue his conversation with his Lord (God), as if the angel were not there. This comes dangerously close to a theophany, with the angel as a manifestation of God, and/or as having divine power or authority. From a qur’ānic standpoint, this would be tantamount to *shirk*, although it is unclear if it is God, or one of the angels who responds to Zechariah (Q 3:41).<sup>687</sup> The introduction of angels in the Medinan versions of the stories in the Qur’ān thus serves as a corrective against any tendency to interpret the Meccan ones as theophanies, while at the same time affirming and underlining God as the sole source of divine creative power.

In Luke, Zechariah converses with the angel directly and we are told it was clear that Zechariah had seen a vision (ορτασιαν: 1:22).<sup>688</sup> In Q 3:39, the angels simply call out to him (*nādathu*), and there is no indication that he sees anything out of the ordinary. This cannot be the case in Q 19:2–15 either, as there are no angels present at all. In Q 3:42, and 45, Mary is also visited by a plurality of angels; in Q 19:17, however, *rūḥanā* “our [= God’s] spirit,” appears to her in the form of a man, whom God says he has sent (*arsalnā*), and who identifies himself as *rasūl rabbiki*, “a messenger of your lord” (Q 19:19). As in Q 3:39, where the angels call out to Zechariah, the angels speak (*qālat*), to Mary (Q 3:42, 45, 47; cf. Prot. Jas. 11:1), and there is no suggestion that her interaction with them is anything other than purely auditory. The *rūḥ* also

---

<sup>685</sup> An exception to this is in the *Protoevangelium of James*, 4:3, where two angels visit Anna, although this occurs after she has already been visited by one “angel of the Lord.”

<sup>686</sup> We cannot tell how many angels are present, only that there are more than two, as the grammatical dual would indicate.

<sup>687</sup> This phenomenon, whereby an angel appears, or speaks, to a human character, who then speaks to God (or vice versa), seemingly ignoring the angel, occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Hagar: Gen 16:7–13, 21:17–19; the sacrifice of Isaac: Gen 22:11–12; Moses and the burning bush: Exod 3:2–6; the call of Gideon: Judg 6:11–23.

<sup>688</sup> Cf. Prot. Jas. 4:1; Ps.-Mt. 2:3, 3:1–2, 5, 9:1, 11:1.

speaks to Mary in Q 19:19, and 21, but unlike the angels in Q 3:39, 42, and 45, she can clearly see him (Q 19:17), and there is no sense that he is calling out to her from heaven. Owing to the risk of committing *shirk*, the Qur’ān would be at pains to avoid any suggestion of a theophany, while at the same time wary of attributing any powers of intercession, or even, creation, to a being other than God. The presence of (multiple) angels in the Medinan retelling of this narrative, avoids this, rendering them more impersonal and impotent, as part of a collective, rather than as a single individual. At the same time, the fact that the main interaction takes place, not, as with Abraham and Lot, between the angels and the human protagonists, but between them and God, firmly assigns him the role of creative agent, and thus avoids any suggestion of *shirk*.

Unlike in Q 3:45, where the angels’ mission is clearly to pass on the good news to Mary, that she will bear a son, in Q 19:19, the *rūḥ* states that he has come to give (*w-h-b*), her a son, i.e., he is not there simply to inform her of what is about to happen. This runs the risk of Jesus’ creation being attributed to the *rūḥ* despite his explanation that he is a merely a “messenger of [Mary’s] Lord” (Q19:19).<sup>689</sup> The Medinan version avoids this by removing the *rūḥ* from the scene altogether. It stresses that God is the source of creative power and capable of creating a human being from nothing, simply by saying “be!” (Q 3:47). The act of creation is a miracle in itself, but this child will be doubly marked out as special through his unusual creation.<sup>690</sup> The description of the annunciation in Q 19:19 is, however, particularly interesting owing to its parallels with that of the Greek *Epistle of the Apostles* (composed before 147/148 CE). This survives largely in Ethiopic, Coptic (originally from the late fourth/early fifth-century CE), and Latin (fifth/sixth-century CE) translations. In it, Christ assumes the form of the Angel Gabriel and forms himself in the Virgin Mary (3–14).<sup>691</sup> Similarly, the Ethiopic text of the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* describes the Beloved One (as opposed to Isaiah)

---

<sup>689</sup> This risk does not seem to have deterred several medieval scholars from interpreting the *rūḥ* as the agent of Jesus’ conception/creation, see footnote 235.

<sup>690</sup> In the same way that Adam was also created without a mother or father, e.g., Ibn Kathīr, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>691</sup> Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 235–37. See also the less explicit description of Jesus as the agent of his own birth in Hist. Jos. Carp. 5:1.

transforming into an angel, who then descends on Mary's womb, where he becomes the infant Jesus (11:2–22, cf. 3:3–18). In the first-century *Sibylline Oracle*, 8.456–61, the Word also appears to Mary as Gabriel. Less explicitly, Mary's virgin companions in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* suggest intervention by an angel of God can be the only explanation for her pregnant state (10:1). Joseph rejects this claim, unless the form of an angel was a disguise, allowing Mary to be seduced (10:2). This clearly demonstrates the extent to which the boundaries between the figures of Jesus/Christ, the Angel Gabriel, and the (Holy) Spirit, as potential agents of Christ's conception, had already become somewhat blurred by the immediately pre-qur'ānic period. This may therefore be what is reflected in the qur'ānic description from the middle Meccan period, which the Medinan Qur'ān attempted to correct.<sup>692</sup>

In contrast to the angelic visitations to Abraham and Lot, in the Bible, and related extrabiblical retellings of the annunciations, the arrival of angelic beings prompts a negative emotional response: in the case of both Zechariah and Mary, this is fear (Luke 1:12, 29; cf. Prot. Jas. 11:2–4; Ps.-Mt. 2:3, 9:1). Although Mary seeks refuge with God in the Qur'ān (Q 19:18), this is because the *rūḥ* appears to her *basharān sawiyyān*, “in the likeness of a man,” of which she perhaps has just reason to be afraid, rather than because she sees an angel: she does not.<sup>693</sup> This potential fear, or wariness, could also be based on the presumption that the audience (and thus, in some way, Mary), are familiar with the narrative by this point, and therefore able to anticipate the negative consequences of the *rūḥ*'s visit: that Mary, who is alone, and thus without the protection offered by a husband or father, will give birth to a seemingly illegitimate child. In contrast, the only fear the qur'ānic Zechariah displays is of dying *sine prole* (Q 19:5), not when apparently conversing directly with God (Q 19:3–11).

---

<sup>692</sup> And could also explain early post-qur'ānic interpretations of the Spirit/man here as references to the spirit of Jesus (ibn Ka'b, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Shīrāzī); see also al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabrisī for a similar interpretation that is not attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

<sup>693</sup> Although al-Zamaksharī claims the *rūḥ*'s appearance in the form of a man was in order to prevent Mary being overcome by fear of him, Nasr.

Both the Qur'ān and the Bible are unanimous concerning the positive characteristics and attributes the promised children will possess: John will confirm the Word of God, be noble, chaste, a prophet, righteous (Q 3:39), endowed with wisdom even as a child (Q 9:12), pleasing to the Lord, and continue the legacy of the people of Jacob/Zechariah himself (Q 9:5–6). He turns out to be affectionate, or pious, pure, righteous, or devout, dutiful to his parents, and not at all tyrannical or disobedient (Q 19:13–14). This mirrors the angel's prophecy that John will constitute a joy and delight to his parents, and that his birth will prompt much rejoicing in Luke (1:14), perhaps owing to his greatness in the sight of the Lord (1:15), and being filled with the Holy Spirit before his birth (1:16).<sup>694</sup> The description of the qur'ānic Jesus consciously links back to that of John, like whom he will be pure (Q 19:19), a word from God, honoured in this world, and the next, among those near (God?), and the righteous (Q 3:45–46), taught the *kitāb*, wisdom, the Torah, and the gospels (Q 3:48). The qur'ānic description of Jesus is slightly less fantastic than the biblical one. This raises the question, whether this represents a deliberate attempt on the part of the Qur'ān to tone down the Angel Gabriel's predictions, and thus refute the biblical image of Jesus. According to Luke 1, Jesus will be great (v. 32), holy (v. 35), and called the Son of the Most High/God (vv. 32/36),<sup>695</sup> inherit the throne of David (v. 32), reigning over Jacob and his descendants forever, with a kingdom that will not end (v. 33). This is perhaps due to Luke's desire, or need to distinguish between John the Baptist, and Jesus, and to emphasise that the latter would be greater than the former.<sup>696</sup>

Despite being described in positive terms, in all versions of the story, Zechariah expresses his disbelief that God will send him and his wife a child (Q 3:40; Q 19:8; Luke 1:18). The reason for his doubt (that he is old, and his wife is barren), is what prompts him to request a son and heir from God in the first place (Q 19:4–5; Luke 1:18). This circularity underlines God's

---

<sup>694</sup> Cf. the (for their age) advanced abilities attributed to Mary (e.g., Prot. Jas. 6:1–2, 8:1–2; Ps.-Mt. 4:1, 6:1–3), and Jesus ((Arab.) Gos. Inf. 1, 48–52; Ps.-Mt. 13:2, 18:2–19:2, 20:2–22:1), in extrabiblical texts.

<sup>695</sup> This is in direct contrast to *al-masīḥ 'īsā ibn maryam*, “the Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary,” in Q 3:45, an identifying epithet that occurs 23 times in the Qur'ān: Q 2:87, 253; Q 3:45; Q 4:157, 171; Q 5:17 (x2), 46, 72, 75, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; Q 9:31; Q 19:34; Q 23:50; Q 33:7; Q 43:57; Q 57:27; Q 61:6, 14.

<sup>696</sup> Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of the Angels*, 148.

ability to perform the impossible owing to his unique creative power (Q 3:40; Q 19:9; cf. Luke 1:19, in which it is Gabriel's closeness to God that confirms that this will be possible). A similar pattern, whereby disbelief is followed by an affirmation citing the creative act, also occurs in the case of Mary (Q 3:47; Luke 1:34 → 37). Although the version in *sūrah* 19 ends without Mary responding to the news that she is to bear a son, her fear of the *rūḥ* closely mirrors her reaction to seeing the Angel (Gabriel) in Luke 1:29. Coupled with the call to *wa-idhkur fī al-kitāb maryam*, "relate [the story of] Mary [which is] in the *kitāb*," (Q 19:16), we can surmise that the Qur'ān expected its audience to be familiar with Mary's story to some extent. It follows that her emotional response to the angelic visitation, albeit from a version that begins slightly differently from that in Luke, would thus be well known. Although those who heard Q 3:42 might have been expected to remember Mary's story from Q 19:16–19, the use of *wa-idh* here points additionally to an extra-qur'ānic, "(extra)biblical" context or memory, as it must also do in the case of Zechariah (Q 19:2).<sup>697</sup> Both the make-up and knowledge of the Medinan qur'ānic community may have developed to the extent that a greater proportion of it was familiar with such material compared to the Meccan period, meaning this reference may have been more likely to be understood by the time *sūrah* 3 was revealed.

In the same way that Abraham is apparently not satisfied by the announcement of the birth of Isaac, and asks the messengers the reason for their mission (Q 15:57; Q 51:31), the affirmation offered seemingly fails to satisfy Zechariah, who demands an *āyah*, "sign," from his Lord as proof (Q 3:40–41; Q 19:10). The biblical Zechariah does not directly demand a sign, but asks *κατὰ τί*, "by what," i.e., how will he know, or be sure, that what the angel has promised will actually happen (Luke 1:18). In all instances, the sign is the same: temporary dumbness, for a period of three days (Q 3:41), three nights (Q 19:10), or until John's birth (Luke 1:20; cf. Prot. Jas. 10:5–6), forcing Zechariah to communicate by signs (Q 3:41; Q 19:11; Luke 1:22).<sup>698</sup> In the Bible, Zechariah's temporary dumbness is administered as a punishment (or perhaps, a sign but to *others*), and is coupled with an admonishment for failing to believe the angel, who

---

<sup>697</sup> Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 61.

<sup>698</sup> Or, according to al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭabrisī, through writing, Nasr, *The Study Quran*.

now reveals himself to be none other than the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1:20).<sup>699</sup> In the Qur'ān, Zechariah is enjoined to remember his Lord and glorify him morning and night (Q 3:41; cf. Q 19:11), which could be interpreted as a reprimand, or even penance for having doubted God's ability, and/or reliability. All versions of the stories thus reflect the pattern of doubt → affirmation → rebuke, that also occurs in the visitations to Abraham and Lot (Q 11:72–73; Q 51:29–30; Gen 18:10–15).

In the same way that Mary does not seek out either the angels, or God, neither does she request a sign. And yet she still receives one: the prediction that the child Jesus will speak from the cradle (Q 3:46), realised in Q 19:31–33. This miraculous attribute appears in a number of extrabiblical texts, which date from as early as the second century, and some of which were considered to be canonical in many traditions.<sup>700</sup> In the Qur'ān, Jesus' premature ability to speak reflects a reversal of the dumbness imposed on Zechariah. In Luke 1, the only possible 'sign' is that Elizabeth, who is old, and had not been able to conceive, is six months pregnant (v. 36). Again, this references God's creative power in the face of the impossible, even though it is not used to draw a parallel with the births of John and Jesus earlier in the chapter, as it is in the Qur'ān. Either way, in the Bible, this suffices to satisfy Mary, as her answer in verse 38 makes clear, and she is not rebuked to the same extent as Zechariah. In contrast, the qur'ānic Mary remains surprisingly mute on this point. Perhaps the presumed recollection of the "(extra)biblical" account(s) meant it was taken as read, that the audience would be aware of Mary's acceptance of God's will and her ensuing situation.

The differences between the Meccan and Medinan versions of the annunciations to Zechariah and Mary can be summarised as follows: explicit references to angels (of any

---

<sup>699</sup> In a potential echo of the righteous versus unrighteous, positive versus negative, portrayals of Abraham and Lot, Zechariah fails to accept the angel at his words, or recognise him as Gabriel. In contrast, although Mary finds the angel's news hard to believe, she does not doubt the veracity of the messenger, and immediately accepts God's will (Luke 1:38). Mary's righteousness is further underlined in several extrabiblical texts (e.g., Prot. Jas. 19:4–20:11; cf. Ps.-Mt. 13:3–5; (Lat.) Gos. Inf. 69–79), when she remains a virgin even after having given birth to Jesus. This also acts as the sign in this narrative, along with the withering of the midwife Salome's hand, because she doubted God, in a similar way to Zechariah, who doubted that God would send him a son (Luke 1:18).

<sup>700</sup> E.g., Ps.-Mt. 18:2–22:1; (Arab.) Gos. Inf. 1; *Hist. Vir.* 45.

number), are completely lacking from the Meccan accounts. Instead, they are replaced by God's *rūḥ*, "spirit," or *rasūl*, "messenger," in the case of Mary, and by God himself in the case of Zechariah, although this latter is only implied. As noted, the introduction of angels in the Medinan versions avoids any tendency to interpret this as a theophoric appearance. This ties in with what the qur'ānic data has shown to be a chronological increase in the importance (if not the individualities), of angels, specifically *malā'ika*, which reaches a high-point in the Medinan period (see Section 2.1). Despite this, both Zechariah and Mary play a more active role in the Meccan narratives in conversing with God/his *rūḥ*, than their Medinan counterparts, Mary barely speaking in the Medinan recension. This may be because in Medina, we appear to get an abridged version of each story, and yet, despite the brevity of Q 3:38–48, compared to Q 19:2–22, none of the key elements (Zechariah's prayer for a son; the fact that he was in the temple/sanctuary at the time; that the son should be called John; Zechariah's disbelief and request for a sign; his being rendered temporarily mute; Mary's chaste behaviour; that she will bear a son; her disbelief; God's ability to do what he wills), are omitted. We also get a lot of additional information about what both John and Jesus will be like in the Medinan versions (Q 3:39, 45, 46). In the case of Jesus, this is almost entirely missing from the middle Meccan version, although the extent to which Q 19:16–19 reflects Luke 1:28–37, perhaps meant it was unnecessary, as it was clear the audience would know to what the Qur'ān was referring. Although Q 19:12–15 provides significantly more information about John's character than Q 3:39, unlike the Medinan text, it is not a prophesy, and describes how John actually was, rather than how he would be. Again, we can surmise that the information contained in Q 19:2–11, was sufficient to allow the audience to recall further details, such as those which appear in Luke 1:5–25. If these were not elements the Medinan Qur'ān felt it needed to "correct," this may be why it does not focus or elaborate on them, and relies on collective recollection from the Meccan versions.

In the visitations to Abraham and Lot, the Qur'ān appears to be both familiar with (extra)biblical and rabbinic versions, and to consciously reject certain elements of them (e.g., the uncertainty surrounding the identity of the visitors; their ability to eat; their number; the identity of the recipient of the news of the birth of Isaac: Abraham or Sarah; the real reason

for the visit; Abraham's ability to intervene on behalf of the people of Lot; the agents of the destruction: God or the angels). In contrast, the biblical annunciations provide a blueprint for the qur'ānic versions, both structurally and in terms of the message they aim to convey: God's limitless ability and unfailing reliability to do what he says. Where the Qur'ān differs in its retelling of the annunciations, it is largely in order to avoid any accusation of a theophany/*shirk*. It does this by introducing multiple, unidentified, and unidentifiable angels into the narrative, in a similar way to its use of them in the visitations to Abraham and Lot, and yet by firmly assigning the role of agent to God. It also reflects specific angelomorphic beliefs, in its description of the annunciation and creation of Jesus, which have important repercussions for the Qur'ān's view of Jesus' nature and role in general, as well as its view of angels.



## 7 Named Angels in the Qur'ān

### 7.1 Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mikāl*

Given the importance with which the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is endowed in later Islamic exegesis, it is surprising that he barely features in the Qur'ān, being named just three times in two (Medinan) *sūrahs*: Q 2:97–98; Q 66:4. On the basis of biblical parallels, he can potentially be identified in two further Medinan references (Q 3:39, 45), and two middle Meccan ones (Q 19:17, 19). This section will primarily examine the figure of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* with respect to Q 2:97–98; Q 66:4, since his role in the annunciations to Zechariah and Mary has already been discussed (Section 6.2). The association of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* with the *rūḥ al-qudus* has already been examined in Section 5.1.1.

The first thing to be noted is that in none of the references in which Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is explicitly named, is he described as an angel. In fact, Q 2:98, and Q 66:4, distinguish between God's angels on the one hand, and Gabriel/*Jibrīl* (and, in Q 2:98, Michael/*Mikāl*), on the other.<sup>701</sup> Despite this, his biblical origin, and extensive postbiblical development, can leave no doubt that Gabriel/*Jibrīl* was known to be an angel, and therefore did not require an introduction. However, only in Q 19:17, 19, where Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is not actually named, and in no Medinan *sūrah*, is the root *r-s-l* applied to him.<sup>702</sup> His primary role in the Qur'ān appears therefore not to be as a messenger, as he is in the New Testament (Luke 1:19, 26), in either the biblical sense of *mal'āk*, or the qur'ānic sense of *rasūl*, for he brings no simple message from God in the sense of good news or a warning (cf. Q 2:97). Rather, he facilitates the transmission

---

<sup>701</sup> Although Nasr notes that “the structure of this verse does not mean that Gabriel and Michael are other than angels; for example, [Q] 55:68 mentions dates and pomegranates after mentioning fruit,” Nasr, *The Study Quran*. Indeed, al-Ṭabarī confirms that Gabriel and Michael are both angels, and included in the general reference to “angels,” despite also being mentioned specifically by name, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:470.

<sup>702</sup> As discussed, this identification is based on the striking similarities with Luke 1:26–38. Furthermore, in the Coptic tradition, it appears likely that messenger angels were automatically identified as Gabriel, if not otherwise named, Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*, 42, so such a presumption is neither novel, nor perhaps, unjustified.

of the teaching contained in the Qur'ān, by implication, to the qur'ānic Messenger.<sup>703</sup> In this, his role is more akin to that of the *angelus interpres*, which he plays in Daniel, than that of a messenger as in Luke. Gabriel's elevation would eventually enable him to displace Michael from his position as chief of all angels, in all but the Coptic tradition, which continued to venerate Michael to an equal or greater degree, and yet still automatically identified otherwise unnamed messenger angels as the Angel Gabriel.<sup>704</sup>

As noted, that angels were privy to secret knowledge which they passed on to humans is a central theme of many extrabiblical texts (and yet it is rare that Gabriel is the angel in question).<sup>705</sup> Sometimes, this knowledge was recorded in writing: in *Jubilees*, God entrusts Michael with communicating the Law to Moses, which was written at the time of creation (Jub. 1:27),<sup>706</sup> and the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* specifically describes itself as having been taught to Moses by Michael.<sup>707</sup> In Tobit, Raphael instructs Tobit and Tobias to write down (in a book)<sup>708</sup> everything that has happened (Tob. 12:20). Enoch not only makes his own notes on Uriel's teaching, Uriel also writes information down for Enoch as he goes along (1 En. 33:3–4),<sup>709</sup> and orders him to read what is written in the book of the tablets of heaven (1 En. 81:1–2).<sup>710</sup> In later apocalyptic texts, Gabriel would come to be the angel associated with writing.<sup>711</sup>

That an angel should potentially be tasked with mediating the contents of the Qur'ān to man, is not in itself surprising, since it is both clearly aware of the broader tradition of angelic pedagogy (see e.g., Section 7.2 below), and uncomfortable with the idea of direct

---

<sup>703</sup> As noted, the details of what is brought down (*n-z-l*), and to whom is vague, but the presence of Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is undisputed (see Section 5.1.1).

<sup>704</sup> See footnote 703.

<sup>705</sup> Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*, 310.

<sup>706</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Les anges et leur mission, d'après les pères de l'église*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Chevetogne, 1953), 14.

<sup>707</sup> A. Pinero, 'Angels and Demons in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve', *JSJ* 24, no. 2 (1993): 198.

<sup>708</sup> In some versions.

<sup>709</sup> Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*, 73.

<sup>710</sup> Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 175.

<sup>711</sup> Dörfel, *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur*, 65.

communication between man and the divine (e.g., Q 42:51). That Gabriel/*Jibrīl* should be the angel in question can perhaps be understood in light of Gabriel's role as an *angelus interpres*, a function with which he is already associated in Daniel.<sup>712</sup> Throughout the Second Temple period, Gabriel attains an increasingly high status, and eventually usurps Michael as the angel par excellence. Although Gabriel is not named in large parts of Daniel (7:16–27; 10:5–12.3), he is retrospectively identified as the angel who interpreted Daniel's dream, and it is therefore logical that he would be “looked upon as the spiritual being who had revealed prophecy to other prophets of God.”<sup>713</sup>

The Qur'ān provides even less information about the Angel Michael/*Mīkāḷ*, than it does about Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, with just the one brief reference in Q 2:98. One possible explanation for the lack of any information as to who or what Michael/*Mīkāḷ* is, is that, like Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, he was a well-known figure in the qur'ānic milieu, and as such, did not require further explanation.<sup>714</sup> Of course, the text's silence is far from conclusive in itself, but what we can tell, is that like Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, he was somehow separate from the other angels, but working with them to assist God in his ongoing battle with the Unbelievers. It may be that these two angels' status as archangels (see Section 1.7), is the reason why they are identified by their names alone, since ordinary angels do not usually have names. Those angels with names often develop significant enough personalities that they are frequently referred to solely by their personal names, even in (extra)biblical literature.<sup>715</sup> That Michael's/*Mīkāḷ*'s name should follow Gabriel's/*Jibrīl*'s, is also not surprising: although he was seen as the protector of Israel (Dan 10:13, 21, 12:1), in the Bible he clearly acts as Gabriel's assistant (Dan 10:13), even when the identification of the latter can only be inferred. In extrabiblical and New Testament texts,

---

<sup>712</sup> Dörfel, 256. Dan 7:16–18.23–27, 8:15–26, 9:21–27, 10:4; 2 En. 9:1.

<sup>713</sup> Charles A Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 133.

<sup>714</sup> The prominence of Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāḷ*, as the only named angels in the Qur'ān does not, however, mean that Jewish-Christian ideas about angels in general were necessarily the most pertinent in the qur'ānic milieu. As Burge rightly points out, we should remain wary of jumping to such conclusions, as earlier scholars tended to, Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 48–49.

<sup>715</sup> E.g., in the following texts, the first references to Gabriel and/or Michael do not qualify them beyond their personal names: 1 En. 9:1; T. Ab. [B] 1:1; Apoc. Eli. 5:5; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 2:1; Vis. Ezra 56; Ques. Ezra B:11.

he is eventually superseded by Gabriel who consistently appears as a messenger (e.g., Matt 1:18; Luke 1:19, 26), or an *angelus interpres* (e.g., 2 En. 9:1), while Michael takes on a largely eschatological role.<sup>716</sup> This eclipse is also marked in so-called Gnostic material,<sup>717</sup> which has been shown to have a particular relationship with the Qur'ān vis-à-vis the relation of the *rūḥ* to the angels (see e.g., Section 5.1.1). This could thus be a contributing factor in the qur'ānic silence regarding Michael/*Mīkāīl*, but the small number of references to both Michael/*Mīkāīl* and Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, makes this impossible to determine.

In Hebrew, the names of both angels relate to their roles: *gabrī'ēl* means the “man of God,” while *mīkā'ēl* means the “one who is like God,” angelic names generally serving as an index of function.<sup>718</sup> However, these meanings are lost in Arabic (and other languages), and the names are thus divorced from their original Hebrew meanings.<sup>719</sup> Although the late Second Temple and early Christian periods saw a trend towards the giving of personal names to angels, albeit ones that reflected that particular angel's function, in post-qur'ānic Islam there was an increase in the use of ‘function’ names: e.g., “the angel of X,”<sup>720</sup> the angel itself remaining nameless. As Burge has noted, the theophoric element (-*ēl*), which in Jewish angelology highlights the power and authority of God, was lost when translated, or transliterated into Arabic.<sup>721</sup> The result of this is that the angel in question was viewed in terms of its relationship to God, rather than simply as a reflection of his might and glory.<sup>722</sup> Although Burge's observations relate to the post-qur'ānic development of angelic names in Islam, the point still holds that Gabriel's/*Jibrīl*'s and Michael's/*Mīkāīl*'s names were evidently understood as

---

<sup>716</sup> E.g., 1 En. 54:6; Mart. Ascen. Isa. 3:16; Sib. Or. 2:215; Rev 12:9; Jude 1:9; 1QM.

<sup>717</sup> Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 169. Given that the opposite is true in Coptic Orthodoxy, this is somewhat surprising, unless one or the other, or both views were a reaction to the other. On Gabriel and Michael in the Coptic tradition, see Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*. On the term “Gnostic,” see footnote 509.

<sup>718</sup> Frank Zimmermann, *The Book of Tobit. An English Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Harper, 1958), 150.

<sup>719</sup> Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 51.

<sup>720</sup> Burge, 39.

<sup>721</sup> Burge, 39.

<sup>722</sup> Burge, 34.

personal, rather than function-based names, and incorporated into the Qur'ān as such. Whether this occurred before, or concurrent with the revelation of the Qur'ān, we cannot tell. Despite this, Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāīl* are unusual amongst angels in Islam in that they “largely retain their Jewish identities,” in terms of the roles and responsibilities they undertake,<sup>723</sup> which is not what Burge’s analysis of the application of (Jewish) non-functional names to angels would lead us to expect.<sup>724</sup> This conclusion also ignores the pre-Jewish, Israelite, context of these angels’ genesis, as well as their Christian reception history, which must have also contributed to the background from which they entered the qur’ānic milieu. This surprising result does, however highlight their importance, not just as God’s angels, but as figures with independent identities of their own within the wider (pre-/extra-)qur’ānic milieu. These identities were evidently the result of the development of the complex roles they played and responsibilities they held. The lack of detail regarding them in the Qur’ān, although it makes it difficult to draw conclusions about their personalities and functions, should not therefore necessarily be understood as indicative of their diminishing importance but rather, as confirmation of the high regard in which they were held. This is made undoubtedly clear, both by the fact that they are referred to by name, and not categorised along with other angels (*malā’ika*).

---

<sup>723</sup> Burge, 180.

<sup>724</sup> Burge, 180.

## 7.2 *Hārūt and Mārūt*

Q 2:102 refers to two angels: *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, to whom knowledge of magic was revealed. We know that they were angels, because the Qur’ān tells us this explicitly.<sup>725</sup> They then passed this knowledge on to men, with a warning that they had been sent as a temptation or trial, and exhorted people not to disbelieve (in God).<sup>726</sup> Since *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* are not mentioned in any biblical texts, it has generally been assumed that had must have had their origins elsewhere, with the most common consensus considering them to be Iranian,<sup>727</sup> while others have

---

<sup>725</sup> Although oddly, some Islamic scholars claimed that the two angels were in fact Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāil* (e.g., al-Rāzī, Nasr, *The Study Quran*). Al-Ṭabarī recounts the opinions of e.g., ibn ‘Abbās and al-Rabī’ b. Anas, with whom he ultimately disagrees, that *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were the names of two men to whom the angels taught sorcery. He also dismisses the reading of *malikaini*, “two kings,” Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur’ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:481. 482, 485.

<sup>726</sup> Post-qur’ānic legend portrays them in quite a different, negative light. Following their boast that they would never succumb to human passions and transgressions, after being allowed to descend to earth as a test, they do just that, John C. Reeves, ‘Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the “Tale of *Hārūt wa-Mārūt*”’, *JAOS* 135, no. 4 (2015): 817–42. Although this would appear to go against the qur’ānic rejection of angelic free will, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* are “endowed with human passions prior to their descent so they can make good on their boast,” (Reeves, 825). They are thus able to disobey God because they have temporarily become like humans, not because their angelic nature has been corrupted.

<sup>727</sup> These are *Haurvatat/Harvotat* and *Ameretet/Amurtat*, who appear in the Avesta, yet a closer parallel to the roles of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* is found in 2 Enoch (Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1926), 146–48; Reeves, ‘Parascriptural Dimensions’, 818). However, de Menasce views the legend of these two angels as having entered the Arabic/qur’ānic milieu in “une manière relativement indépendante des récits hénochiens sur la chute des anges,” in part because the Qur’ān ignores, or is not interested in the meanings behind their Semitic names (P.J. de Menasce, “Une légende indo-iranienne dans l’angélogie judéo-musulmane: À propos de *Hārūt et Mārūt*,” *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der schweizerischen Asien-gesellschaft* 1, no. 1–2 (1947): 17). Ambros and Procházka also posit a Middle Persian origin for these names, Ambros and Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, 306, while Eichler explains both names as being based on the Hebrew root *r-’-h*, Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, 39.

identified a midrashic origin.<sup>728</sup> This verse has, however, not yet been the subject of detailed study, and few attempts have been made to analyse the background to it, or to identify the two angels.<sup>729</sup>

The first problem we encounter in attempting to examine these two named angels, is that there is not a lot of material with which to work. There is also no real introduction to the brief mention in verse 102, which comes at the end of a long section detailing how some of the Israelites were disobedient, and disbelieving, breaking their covenant with God, who time and time again, gave them yet another chance (vv. 40–101). The *sūrah* continues with an attack on disbelievers (both People of the Book and the *mushrikūn*, verses 103–109), and examples of what Believers should do; establish prayer, give *zakāt*, “charity,” submit themselves to God and do good (vv. 110–112), and a corresponding condemnation of those, who do not do such things, such as some Jews and Christians (vv. 211–214). Verse 102, thus initially appears out of

---

<sup>728</sup> Most notably John Reeves, who discusses the fact that “Western scholars who have studied the “Tale of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*” and grappled with its literary analogues have most frequently pointed to the Jewish and Christian parascriptural materials that envelop the enigmatic figure of Enoch and in particular to a curious medieval Jewish aggadic narrative known as the “Midrash of *Shemḥazai* and ‘*Azael*,’” (Reeves, ‘Parascriptural Dimensions’, 827–28). Reeves continues by noting that “[c]areful comparison of the developed narratives of the “Tale of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*” and the “Midrash of *Shemḥazai* and ‘*Azael*” amid the larger literary corpora within which they are embedded, suggests that the Muslim *Hārūt wa-Mārūt* complex both chronologically and literarily precedes the articulated versions of the Jewish “Midrash of *Shemḥazai* and ‘*Azael*”” (Reeves, 829). Moshe Idel convincingly disagrees (Moshe Idel, ‘*Hārūt and Mārūt*: Jewish Sources for the Interpretation of the Two Angels in Islam’, in *L’ésotérisme shi’ite, ses racines et ses prolongements / Shi’i Esotericism: Its Roots and Developments*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 127–37). However, because the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the midrash only date from the eleventh century, and “visibly mimic the homiletic structuring of some of the most literarily polished,” post-quranic Islamic versions (Reeves, 830), Reeves concludes that “Even though the integral story transmitted by the versions of the Jewish “Midrash” appears to be post-Islamic, a number of its individual motifs and sub-themes—many of the “building-blocks,” that serve as the constituent elements of the larger narrative—predate the Quran” (Reeves, 830).

<sup>729</sup> Patricia Crone, ‘The Book of Watchers in the Qur’an’, in *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Hagai Ben-Shammai et al., (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2013), 16–51.

place in the immediate context of the *sūrah*, as well as overly long in comparison with the *sūrah*'s mean verse length.

The first figures who appear on the scene, are the *shayāṭīn* and Solomon. As discussed in Section 5.1.2, *shayāṭīn* usually only appear collectively in relation to generic evil, in the middle and later Meccan periods. The reference to a group of *shayāṭīn* in Q 2:102 thus stands out, not only for its grammatical usage, but also because of the figure with whom they are connected: Solomon. Analysis of the narrative structure of verse 102, however, immediately highlights the presence of several inverted parallels:

1. Devils *versus* angels
2. Belief *versus* disbelief
3. Teaching *versus* learning
4. Knowledge *versus* ignorance

These are shown more clearly in Diagram 7.1:

#### *Diagram 7.1 Narrative Outline of Q 2:102*

**The devils recite against/at the time of<sup>730</sup> Solomon's power**

They were *Unbelievers*; not Solomon

**They *taught* people magic**

**which also *descended* to the angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* at Babylon**

**The two angels didn't *teach* this without first saying: "we are a trial, so do not *disbelieve*"**

**But [men] *learnt* from them [two] what causes separation between a man and his wife**

[men] could not harm anyone with it [the knowledge of magic] without God's permission

**[men] *learnt* what harmed them, not what benefitted them**

They *knew* that whoever bought it [magic] would have no share in the hereafter

If they had only *known* that that for which they sold their souls was evil

---

<sup>730</sup> A temporal reading also being favoured by al-Ṭabarī, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:480.



Solomon's great wisdom is mentioned in both the Hebrew scriptures,<sup>731</sup> and the gospels (Matt 12:42). This led to the development of a subsequently widespread tradition in late antiquity, that this knowledge encompassed some sort of esoterical, magical knowledge.<sup>732</sup> This was purported to have enabled Solomon to control the demons, who he then set to work building the temple.<sup>733</sup> The image of Solomon as an exorcist, with power over demons, could therefore have been familiar to some members of the qur'ānic *Urgemeinde*.<sup>734</sup> In fact, there are four other references in the Qur'ān to Solomon in this context: Q 21:82; Q 27:24, and Q 38:37, which are all from the middle Meccan period, and Q 34:12–13, which is from the latest Meccan period. A comparison of these references with Q 2:102, reveals clear parallels and connections between them, suggesting both that the Qur'ān presumes some knowledge, on the part of its audience, of the longer accounts in *sūrahs* 21, 27, 38, and 34, and that this is necessary to understand Q 2:102 fully.

The tradition that knowledge of metallurgy was handed down to humans by demons/fallen angels, appears in the Enochic literature, where it is generally the watcher, 'Azāzā'ēl/Aζαήλ, who is cited as having been responsible for this.<sup>735</sup> The type of knowledge transmitted was said to have encompassed magical practices, such as divination, sorcery and astrology, medicine, including pharmacology, cosmetology, alchemy and dyeing, and so-called "cultural arts," like metallurgy, which could be used to make both weapons and jewellery.<sup>736</sup>

<sup>731</sup> E.g., 1 Kgs 3:5–15, 4:29, 10:1–13, 23, 24, 11:1–8; 2 Chr 1:5–12, 9:22, 23; Eccl 1:16; 2:9.

<sup>732</sup> Dennis C. Duling, 'The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's "Antiquitates Judaicae" 8.42–49', *HTR* 78, no. 1/2 (1985): 17.

<sup>733</sup> E.g., T. Sol., T. Truth, Jacques van der Vliet, 'Solomon in Egyptian Gnosticism', in *The Figure of Solomon*, 205–6; Søren Giversen, 'Solomon und die Dämonen', in *Essays on the Nag Hamadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 16. Cf. *Jos. Ant.* 8:45.

<sup>734</sup> Although al-Ṭabarī was adamant that Solomon was not a sorcerer, highlighting the negative view of magical power in the early Islamic period, even when in the hands of a positive, divinely ordained figure, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:480–81.

<sup>735</sup> E.g., 1 En. 8:1–4; 69:1–14 credits *Gādar'ēl*, although Hanson notes that the skills listed as having been taught by the former are not explicitly negative, it is the unsanctioned teaching of them that was, Paul D. Hanson, 'Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11', *JBL* 96, no. 2 (1977): 230.

<sup>736</sup> Cf. 1 En. 7:1–6, 8:1–4, 67: 4–7, 69:1–14; cf. 3 En. 5:7–8.

This explains why 1 Enoch 8 pairs the “civilised” art of metalwork with sorcery and divination, and *Prometheus Bound* treats divination, pharmacology, and metallurgy as one category of skills, reflecting the widespread mistrust of all kinds of chemical skills in Greco-Roman culture.<sup>737</sup> It appears that the authors of Enoch shared this suspicion. We can thus equate the magic *sent down* (*n-z-l*) to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* at Babylon with knowledge of metallurgy because iron is also described as having being *sent down* (*n-z-l*) in the Qur’ān (Q 57:25). Although at first glance, this image is an odd one, an examination of the other things that are *sent (down)* in the sense of *n-z-l*, strongly suggested it simply indicates a heavenly origin (see Section 3.1.1), which makes sense in the context of the knowledge transmitted by the watchers in 1 Enoch 6–16. In contrast to the Enochic literature, however, the Qur’ān appears to consider the development of metalworking as a positive one for mankind.<sup>738</sup>

*Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were recipients of (magical) knowledge that had a heavenly origin, which, even if it did not include metalwork was comparable to it, in its illicit, prohibitive nature. This establishes a connection between this type of knowledge and that of the Enochic tradition. The motif of illicit angelic instruction is central to *The Book of the Watchers*, which understands it as an explanation for the origin of evil and sin.<sup>739</sup> Later Enochic literature, *The Book of Dreams*, *The Epistle of Enoch*, *The Similitudes of Enoch*, and other pre-rabbinic texts influenced by it, generally ignored the motif and turned their attention to the watchers’ sexual sins, of which there is no mention in Q 2:102.<sup>740</sup> This was part of a broader shift towards an Adamic explanation for the origins of evil i.e., as a consequence of events concerning Adam, Eve and the serpent in the garden, in the Second Temple period.<sup>741</sup> Having been largely preserved by Christians, the Enochic tradition may then have been “re-discovered” by Jews several centuries

---

<sup>737</sup> Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 40.

<sup>738</sup> Cf. 1 En. 19:1–3.

<sup>739</sup> Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 6.

<sup>740</sup> This is also the case in 3 En. 5:7–8.

<sup>741</sup> Andrei A. Orlov, ‘The Watchers of Satanael’, in *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany: SUNY, 2011), 85–106; Reed, *Fallen Angels*. Orlov, ‘The Watchers of Satanael’, 87; e.g., 2 Bar. 56:9–16; 4 Ezra 3:6–7, 4:21–22, 25–26, 5:30, 7:11, 46[116]–48[118], Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 110–13, 115, 116.

after it was excluded from the Jewish canon during the rabbinic period.<sup>742</sup> One example of this is the, admittedly post-qur'ānic, eighth-century *Midrash Avkir*, although this reflects the version in Jubilees (4:22), more than that in Enoch, since the watchers are only seduced by the daughters of men after descending to earth. In contrast to Jubilees, however, their reason for descending was to prove God wrong in his assessment that they too would behave as men on earth, of whom they were so critical. Their seduction led to them revealing God's secret name to a girl, Istehar, who was able to use this knowledge to ascend to heaven.<sup>743</sup> This is of course the opposite of what *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* do in the Qur'ān, where they issue a warning against the knowledge they are forced to transmit, and are neither seduced nor attempt to seduce anyone.<sup>744</sup> It is telling that the Qur'ān, which clearly attributes the origin of evil to *al-Shayṭān* leading Adam and Eve astray in the garden, reflects this negative view of angelic instruction, while ignoring their sexual sin. In Q 2:102, it is the magic that is *sent down* to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* that is illicit, not the act of passing it on, over which they do not appear to have any control, and would clearly rather not do, hence their issuing of a warning before doing so. This is confirmed by the other references to *siḥr*, "magic," in the Qur'ān, in which it is generally either what the Unbelievers claim God's signs to be,<sup>745</sup> or an accusation levelled at Moses, Aaron, and/or the Children of Israel,<sup>746</sup> Jesus (Q 61:6), or Pharaoh's sorcerers (Q 10:81; Q 20:73). Unlike in the Enochic tradition, where the knowledge obtained from the descending angels results in

---

<sup>742</sup> Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 13.

<sup>743</sup> Marmorstein, 'Fallen Angels'. This sequence of events can also be found in Indian, Indo-Iranian, Manichean, and post-qur'ānic Islamic exegesis on this verse. It is, however, impossible to say whether the midrash, or the post-Islamic tradition is older than the other, Roberto Tottoli, '*Hārūt and Mārūt*', in *El*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Brill Online, 2017).

<sup>744</sup> Although they do in post-Islamic tradition, e.g., according to Ibn 'Abbas and al-Suddī, as recounted by al-Ṭabarī, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:484–85. Ambros and Procházka also curiously refer to these angels as "seducing people in Babylon," even though this aspect is absent from the qur'ānic account, Ambros and Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, 306.

<sup>745</sup> Q 5:110; Q 6:7; Q 10:76; Q 11:7; Q 21:3; Q 27:13; Q 28:48; Q 34:43; Q 37:15; Q 43:30; Q 46:7; Q 52:15; Q 54:2; Q 74:24.

<sup>746</sup> Q 10:77; Q 20:57, 63, 66, 71; Q 26:35, 49; Q 28:36.

mankind wreaking havoc on earth, in the Qur'ān, despite the illicit nature of the magic sent down to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, men are not able to “harm anyone with it, without God’s permission.” It would appear that the negative effects of the magic are limited to separating a man from his wife, and the loss of a share in the hereafter, hardly the chaos that results in the Enochic tradition. In the Qur'ān, it is God who outwits man because even magical knowledge is of no benefit to man, since God’s knowledge is greater, and even magic cannot buy a share in the hereafter.

Unlike all other angels with personal names mentioned in the Qur'ān, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* are both named and referred to as *malā'ika*. On the basis of the application of personal names to other angels in the Qur'ān (i.e., Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāil*), both of whom are known to be angels and yet never referred to as such, three possible conclusions can be drawn from this. First, unlike Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāil*, the Qur'ān’s audience was not familiar with *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* or, if they were, with the fact that they were angels. Their foreign-sounding, grammatically diptote names is one fact in support of this, and yet, it is the magic that the Qur'ān explains through its association with Solomon, and the *shayāṭin/jinn*, not the identities of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*. The second possibility is that they were not angels in the sense of winged, heavenly creatures, but simply messengers. However, by the Medinan period, the generic term for messengers, *rusul*, is never applied to angels, even when they are acting as messengers (see Section 2.2.2). If *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were simply human messengers, they ought therefore to be described as *rasūlān*, not *malākān*. While not impossible, it would also be unusual for magic to be sent down to human messengers. Finally, the potential for confusion, or ambiguity, as to whether or not *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were angels, as opposed to demons or deities, which they clearly are in some Indo-Iranian versions of the story, meant the Qur'ān needed, or wanted to make their nature as angels clear to its listeners. The names *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* appear in Zoroastrian-Persian, Sogdian, and Armenian traditions, where they were originally some kind of deities. Upon descending to earth, they either try to seduce, or are seduced by a beautiful woman or princess, who then tricks them into revealing their medicinal or secret knowledge to her. This basic sequence of events can also be found in Indian, Indo-Iranian, Enochic, rabbinic, and Manichean traditions, where the two figures are generally called variations on the later

Hebrew monikers of *‘Āṣā’šēl* and *Šmyḥṣh*. The common themes of angelic descent, the seduction of divine beings by mortal women (or vice versa), and/or illicit angelic instruction, run through all these traditions, most famously and extensively, in the broader Enochic tradition, which includes the book of Jubilees. Given how well-known Enochic literature was in late antiquity, it is unsurprising to find what appears to be a reference to it here in the Qur’ān. Patricia Crone has explained the odd reference to the Jews’ worship of *‘Uzayr* in Q 9:30 as a corruption of *‘Āṣā’šēl*.<sup>747</sup> This explanation is unconvincing because although *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* bear foreign names post-qur’ānic exegetes somehow immediately recognised as Iranian, they did not connect *‘Uzayr* with *‘Āṣā’šēl*. For this reason, some scholars have concluded that the Indo-Iranian legend entered the qur’ānic milieu independently from the Enochic tradition, and is thus the reason why the Qur’ān does not refer to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* by their Semitic names.<sup>748</sup> The absence of a sexual element is one argument against this view, since the seduction motif is the other common thread in the Indo-Iranian-Zoroastrian-Persian versions of the tale, besides the angels’ names. Present in 1 Enoch as one explanation for the origin of sin, the sexual sin of the descending angels subsequently became the only or main reason, and the motif of illicit angelic instruction is thus not present in subsequent Enochic and other works, which “tend to focus on the sexual transgressions of the watchers, while omitting reference to their corrupting teachings.”<sup>749</sup> It is thus curious, both that the memory of illicit angelic instruction surfaces in Q 2:102, and that it occurs without any reference to angelic sexual deviance.<sup>750</sup> One explanation could be the strict belief maintained in the Qur’ān that angels did not have human

---

<sup>747</sup> Crone, ‘The Book of Watchers in the Qur’an’, 22. Ambros and Procházka explain it as a resurrected Arabic diminutive form of Hebrew *‘āzrah*, Ambros and Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, 309.

<sup>748</sup> de Menasce, ‘À propos de *Hārūt et Mārūt*’, 17.

<sup>749</sup> E.g., Deut. Rab. 11:10; the motif does not feature in 2 Enoch at all (but reappears in 3 En. 5:9), Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 102, cf. 73–74, 81, 86, 101, 119–20, 122. In contrast, Jubilees 4:22 portrays the angelic instruction as (originally), positive, and divinely ordained, and does refer to the watchers’ sexual sin, as does the *Testament of Reuben* (5:6), and the brief references in 4Q180 = 4QAgasCreat A–B, 1, 7, Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels*, 219, 212. New Testament interpretations of Genesis 6 understand the angels’ sin as generically evil, but Jude (1:6–7), links it explicitly to the sexual immorality of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Sullivan, 221.

<sup>750</sup> Crone, ‘The Book of Watchers in the Qur’an’, 3–4.

attributes (e.g., they do not eat (Q 25:7), or have a specific gender). Interaction between angels and humans of the kind that occurs in the Enochic tradition must have involved some transformation of the Watchers' natures, something with which the Qur'ān appears to show deep discomfort.<sup>751</sup> Although the Watchers in Enoch are also guilty of transgressing the boundaries between the heavenly and the earthly, the spiritual and the physical spheres, the Qur'ān appears to apply such "rules" more strictly—if it does not even permit angels to appear to eat, as in the Jewish and Christian exegetical tradition, how much less likely is it to allow them to marry and sire offspring?

Despite the absence of this motif, of all the characters in Q 2:102, it is the *jinn/shayāṭīn* who are most akin to the watchers, being bound, and associated with knowledge of metallurgy. If *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were in fact 'Āṣā'ṣēl and Šmyḥṣh, or any of the watchers, it would neither be necessary, nor make sense to explain the type of magic sent down to them as "like that sent down to the *jinn/shayāṭīn* [aka watchers]." This would be about as logical as saying "what was sent down to the watchers was like that sent down to the watchers." In contrast to the watchers, in the Qur'ān, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* do not really act like "fallen" angels: they do not descend to earth of their own free will, their heads are not turned by human women, and they try to avert the negative effects of man obtaining access to magical knowledge. Even without the sexual aspect, if the transmission of magical knowledge was against God's wishes, we would expect *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* to be summarily punished, which is what we find in post-qur'ānic exegesis.<sup>752</sup> In contrast, in the Qur'ān, it appears that *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* are executing God's will, against which they have no control, besides issuing a warning. It is therefore the magic itself, not the act of transmitting it, that is dangerous or sinful.<sup>753</sup> This, and the warning not to disbelieve, links back to the rejection by Unbelievers, or Israelites, of God's revelations in earlier parts of the *sūrah*. It further suggests revelation was rejected by some, who accepted or

---

<sup>751</sup> Note the identification of *Iblīs* as a *jinn*, necessary to allow him to have free will and "fall," as discussed in Section 5.1.4 and the qur'ānic horror of female angels, examined in Section 5.1.6.

<sup>752</sup> Tottoli, 'Hārūt and Mārūt'.

<sup>753</sup> Although al-Ṭabarī argued that there was no sin in knowing about sorcery, only in practising it, Al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Al-Ṭabarī*, 1:483.

preferred magic because there was a (perceived) affinity between the two. We might ask why God would allow, or force *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* to disseminate such knowledge, if there was the potential it could lead to confusion. The answer would appear to lie in *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*'s warning: it was a trial, intended to weed Unbelievers out from Believers. It made clear that, despite any similarities on the surface, magic could never be mistaken for "true" magic, i.e., revelation, because it could not be used without God's permission, not even to save oneself from the fire.

The reference to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* in Q 2:102, thus highlights the way in which the Qur'ān reworks motifs from earlier material, not out of ignorance, or confusion, but to make a new point. The use of material with which it knows its audience will be familiar, makes it more likely its message will be understood, and the skill with which it recasts it, suggests (some of) its audience was similarly well versed in many of the traditions and texts to which it refers.

## 8 Conclusion

This thesis has examined the qur'ānic presentation of angels with a view to establishing both how they were perceived within the qur'ānic milieu, and how this related to pre-Islamic Arabian and late antique Jewish and Christian ideas about them more generally. The results of this analysis have shown that, although the Qur'ān stresses the importance of belief in angels relatively infrequently, angels play key roles in the Qur'ān, and are present throughout the qur'ānic corpus. The origins of angelic beings, and how they came to be a creedal requirement may be shrouded in mystery, but there was no mystery as far as the Qur'ān was concerned, which “speaks to its Arab contemporaries as if they knew exactly what it was [talking] about.”<sup>754</sup> Despite the meaning of the common Semitic root *l'-k*, of “to send,” implying that *malā'ika* would first and foremost be messengers, this is not what we have found in the Qur'ān. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'ān always clearly conceives of angels as heavenly beings, even when referred to by terms other than *malā'ika*. This is a significant finding, not only for understanding the qur'ānic view of angels, but also the late antique Jewish and Christian view(s) of them, which formed the background against which the Qur'ān was revealed. It further sheds light on the relationship between the Qur'ān, and the Jewish and Christian traditions with which it interacted more broadly. This interaction was not passive on the part of the Qur'ān, rather, the text consciously accepted and rejected different elements, and used the traditions themselves to assert and refute certain views.

Although angels may (and did), act as messengers, as far as the Qur'ān was concerned, this was not their *raison d'être*. This betrays an understanding of an angel that only developed following the distinction made in Latin between *angelus/angeli* (for heavenly messengers), and *nuntius/nuntii* (for human ones). This would eventually feed back into Greek and Hebrew, even though the terms ἀγγελοι and *mal'ākīm* originally indicated both, or either, kinds of messengers. A *malak* must, therefore, have been conceived of as a fixed, otherworldly creature, not only in the Qur'ān, but prior to it, as otherwise it could not have counted on its

---

<sup>754</sup> Fehmi Jadaane, ‘La place des anges dans la théologie cosmique musulmane’, *SlS* 41 (1975): 30, translation is my own.



audience understanding what it intended by the use of this term, if a messenger-function could no longer be automatically inferred from the terms *malak/malā'ika*.

The analysis of the noun(s) *malak/malā'ika*, (Section 2.1), revealed a clear chronological development in the use of these terms, throughout the different portions of the Qur'ān. Although the number of *sūrahs* which use these terms remains fairly constant throughout the different periods of the Qur'ān's transmission, there is a significant threefold increase between the first and middle Meccan periods, and then a further increase of nearly a quarter, between then and the Medinan period, in the number of references they contain. With few exceptions, references to *malā'ika* in Medinan *sūrahs* are definite and plural. With limited exceptions—Q 12:31 (late Meccan); Q 53:26;<sup>755</sup> Q 69:17; Q 89:22 (early Meccan)—Meccan references to *malā'ika* are characterised by a hostile standpoint, rebuke the audience for failing to believe in *malā'ika*, or document the Unbelievers' insistence on an angelic, as opposed to a mortal, messenger. Such demands, and the appearance of *malā'ika* in human form, appear to occur only pre-*Badr*, following which, a “dramatic change in the Qur'ānic portrayal of both the nature and the roles of the angels clearly occurs.”<sup>756</sup> This indicates that there was a significant development in qur'ānic theology between the Meccan and Medinan periods, and the inclusion of angels would be beneficial to a more in-depth evaluation of this change more generally.

The analysis of other terms used to refer to angels (Section 2.2), further revealed a significant threefold increase in the occurrence of terms other than *malak/malā'ika* between the early and middle Meccan periods. This is mirrored by a similar, nearly fourfold increase in the number of references to angels in general over the same timeframe. The proportion of all references to angels declines slightly in the late Meccan period, following which it remains fairly consistent into the Medinan period. In the late Meccan period, the use of terms other than *malak/malā'ika* decreases by about 20 percent compared to the middle Meccan period. This is not paralleled by a commensurate increase in references to *malak/malā'ika*, in these periods, which remain fairly stable at around a third in each of them. The range of terms used to refer to

---

<sup>755</sup> According to Nöldeke, this is potentially an undated insertion to an early Meccan *sūrah*, Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 81.

<sup>756</sup> Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings', 746–47.

angels decreases throughout the Qur'ān, culminating with a preference for the term(s) *malak/malā'ika* in the Medinan period. This suggests not only the complete crystallisation of the concept of an angel by this time, but a desire, or need to distinguish conclusively between angels and other beings, who might perform the same, or similar roles—namely (human) messengers, *rusul*, and humans in general, who, for example, could logically be termed *bashar*, or *ḍayf*, as angels had previously been (see Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.6).

Terms other than *malak/malā'ika* have sometimes been shown to be limited to certain periods or roles, e.g., *rūḥ* (see Section 2.2.5), and *bashar* (see Section 2.2.6), only appear in the second Meccan period, and the only term besides *malak/malā'ika* to appear in Medinan material is *jund* (see Section 2.2.4). Again, this points to a further tightening of the definition of an angel by the Medinan period. The overwhelming majority of references in the later Meccan period that do not use the term(s) *malak/malā'ika*, use the term *rasūl/rusul*, (see Section 2.2.2 and Table 2.5, above), which then suddenly disappears in the Medinan period. In general, angelic *rusul* only appear as a collective, usually in the second and third Meccan periods. They are not to be compared to human *rusul* in the things that they bring or do. In the Meccan period, the term *malak* does not appear to have automatically implied that the angel in question had the ability (or authority), to act as a messenger, with the term *rasūl/rusul* being used to clarify this. Again, this provides useful evidence for the qur'ānic understanding of the nature, role, and remit of human *rusul*, and the concept of revelation. Post-qur'ānic tradition promulgated the belief that the Qur'ān was mediated to the prophet Muhammad by an angel, namely the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, although this is not explicitly clear from the Qur'ān (e.g., Q 2:97). Unlike human *rusul*, however, angels, even when termed *rusul*, do not bring revelation, or written scripture.<sup>757</sup> This is despite the fact that both have a clear heavenly origin, as the application of the verbal root *n-z-l* indicates (see Section 3.1.1).<sup>758</sup>

The analysis of verbal roots such as *n-z-l* (see Section 3), which are applied to angels, further underlined the perception of them as creatures with a heavenly origin, bound to serve God and execute his will. It appears that only *malā'ika* worship (God: *s-j-d*, *s-b-ḥ*, and *'-b-d*, see

---

<sup>757</sup> On this see Section 2.2.2.

<sup>758</sup> See Section 3.1.1.

Section 3.1.4), and bear witness (*sh-h-d*), to his truth, not angels referred to by other terms. Humans also “see” (*r-’-y*), *malā’ika* more frequently than angels referred to by other terms, even though, or perhaps, because, they often appear on earth as humans. Mainly in the middle and later Meccan periods, *malā’ika* are frequently described as being “sent down” (*n-z-l*), by implication, from heaven. In the middle Meccan period, they are often described as “worshipping” (*s-j-d*), God; in the later Meccan and Medinan periods, they “take” men’s souls at their deaths (form V of the root *w-f-y*), to either heaven or hell. Angelic *rusul* are also “sent,” but not necessarily from heaven, as the more frequent application of the root *r-s-l*, rather than *n-z-l*, demonstrates (see Section 3.1.2). *Malā’ika* are never “sent” (*r-s-l*), and this root is never applied to angels described by any term in Medinan material, while *n-z-l* is never applied to human *rusul*. That *malā’ika* are more likely to be “sent down” (*n-z-l*), than angels referred to by other terms, and are never “sent” (*r-s-l*), has the effect of underlining the heavenly origin of the former. This clearly becomes more important by the Medinan period, when, as noted, even angels referred to by other terms are no longer described as being just “sent” (*r-s-l*). This is due to what appears to be an increasing need to distinguish between the heavenly and earthly spheres by the Medinan period, and its consequences for qur’ānic theology more generally. The analysis of verbal roots also sought to show the extent to which angels differ from both humans, and the rest of creation. Even when angels and humans do the same actions (e.g., talking and worshipping), they do them in slightly different ways, which has the effect of limiting any potential independence angels might gain from them. This prevents angels developing any kind of individual personalities, which would potentially allow them to pose a threat to God’s oneness, as this could lead to *shirk*, or idolatry.

Although none of the roles identified as being performed by angels are unique to the Qur’ān, closer examination has revealed aspects of them, which are particular to the text. For example, the qur’ānic heavenly host (see Section 4.1.1), lacks the distinctive military connotations of the *sabā hašāmayim*/στρατιαὶ τῶν οὐρανῶν/δυνάμεως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ/στρατιᾶς

οὐρανίου of the MT/LXX/NT,<sup>759</sup> and has no link with the worship of beings other than God.<sup>760</sup> Angelic soldiers in the Qur’ān (see Section 4.1.4), are noticeable for supporting Believers in the here and now, rather than in a future eschatological context.<sup>761</sup> This has the potential to tell us something about the qur’ānic concept of heaven, the relationship of its inhabitants to God, and how it relates to men and the earthly sphere. Analysis of the roles performed by angels in the Qur’ān further revealed their limited authority. This stands in stark contrast to extrabiblical (but not always biblical), angels. This already limited authority has been shown to decrease further throughout the Qur’ān, with angels “becoming little more than symbols and extensions of divine power.”<sup>762</sup> This is despite the fact that they appear to become more important over the same timeframe. This is most clearly shown by the fact that the Qur’ān is at pains to stress that angels only act on God’s command, and in the roles they play in eschatological events. In contrast to extrabiblical angels, qur’ānic angels do not pass judgment on men, and do not defeat Satan (see Sections 4.1.8 and 4.1.11). Angelic teachers, key figures in many (extra)biblical texts, appear only once in the Qur’ān, and even then, in a negative context (Q 2:102; see Sections 4.1.10 and 7.2). This appears to be connected to the Qur’ān’s increasing concern to define and delimit the heavenly and earthly spheres, and the things that belong in them, as well as developing concepts of the divine. Although angels move between the heavenly and earthly spheres, they only do so with God’s permission (Q 70:4; Q 97:1). The Qur’ān also appears to be uncomfortable with the idea of metamorphosis. This is suggested by the fact that, even when angels do appear on earth, as men, they do not actually take on human characteristics, such as needing, or even being able to eat (see e.g., Section 6.1 above).

Analysis of what, on the surface, may not appear to be particularly important, or obvious aspects of angels, underlined how angels are actually closely linked to key themes in the Qur’ān, such as *tawhīd*, *shirk*, sources of authority, or power, the definition of good and

---

<sup>759</sup> E.g., Dan 8:10; Neh 9:6; Luke 2:13.

<sup>760</sup> E.g., Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16, 21:3, 5, 23:4, 5; 2 Chr 33:3, 5; Zeph 1:5; Jer 8:2, 19:13, although the Greek term is not employed in the LXX translation of Deut 17:3, or 2 Kgs 17:16, 21:3; Acts 7:42.

<sup>761</sup> E.g., Q 3:124–125; Q 8:12; Q 36:28; Q 89:12.

<sup>762</sup> Welch, ‘Allah and Other Supernatural Beings’, 750.

evil, and the demarcation between the heavenly and earthly spheres. Examination of the relationship between angels and the *rūḥ* (see Section 5.1.1), highlighted the need for further research to address this relationship more fully. The post-qur'ānic exegetical interpretation of the *rūḥ* in the Qur'ān as the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, should not automatically form the background against which such references are read. There is also a need for angelomorphic, Christological ideas to be examined in relation to the Qur'ān's understanding of the natures of Jesus, angels, and the *rūḥ*. The general lack of modern research on *al-Shayṭān*, (*al-*)*shayāṭīn* (see Section 5.1.2), and *jinn* (see Section 5.1.3), have also been shown to be areas that could benefit from further examination, both in terms of understanding how such beings were conceived of themselves, as well as the qur'ānic understanding of good and bad, and the origin(s) of evil.<sup>763</sup>

Analysis of angels in narratives underlined the, now widely recognised, homiletic quality of the qur'ānic text, and the way in which it uses such stories “as a medium by which to express a religious message.”<sup>764</sup> At no point does the presence of angels in narratives threaten God's power and transcendence. On the contrary, it bolsters it, and provides a means of validating the divine origin of the messages, around which the narratives are centred, while at the same time avoiding the interpretation of theophanies in the narratives. In the case of the angelic visitors to Abraham and Lot (see Section 6.1), although the qur'ānic narratives remain faithful to the chronological structure of the stories as they appear in Genesis, they do not include all the details of the stories that appear there. In many cases, the details of the stories stem from rabbinic tradition, with the Qur'ān often agreeing with this rather than the biblical text.<sup>765</sup> The extent to which the Qur'ān expects its audience to be familiar with the basic narratives of such stories is very clear, and suggests the qur'ānic *Urgemeinde* was more sophisticated and diverse, than has perhaps been previously thought to be the case. The presumption of familiarity with pre-qur'ānic material further highlights both the Qur'ān's knowledge of (extra)biblical and rabbinic versions of, and comments on these stories, and its rejection of parts of them. In the case of the Meccan and Medinan versions of the annunciations to Zechariah and Mary (see

---

<sup>763</sup> The work of Whitney Bodman remains a notable exception.

<sup>764</sup> Reynolds, 'The Case of Sarah's Laughter', 585–86.

<sup>765</sup> Zellentin, '*Sūrat yā sīn*, Lot's People, and the Rabbis', 144.

Section 6.2), it is striking that angels make no appearance in the Meccan versions. Rather, it is God's *rūḥ*, or *rasūl*, in the case of Mary, and God himself in the case of Zechariah, that perform the necessary roles. Welch has identified this, and the fact that the angels present in the visitations to Abraham and Lot, are never called *malā'ika* in the Meccan versions of these, always appearing as men, as pointing to "a consistent change or development in the Qur'anic portrayal of angels," between the Meccan, and post-*Badr* versions of the stories, which has been borne out by this investigation.<sup>766</sup>

Medinan versions of these narratives present abridged versions of each story, and yet, not only do they not exclude any of the key elements, they actually provide a lot of additional information. At the same time, they rely on the audience's ability to recall details from the Meccan versions, some of which it attempts to correct. In contrast to the angelic visitations to Abraham and Lot, the qur'ānic accounts of the annunciations follow the structure of the biblical versions more closely, and appear to be designed to convey the same, or a similar message. Divergence from the biblical models appears to be mainly due to the need to avoid anything like a theophoric interpretation of the encounter between the human protagonists and the angels or *shirk*. This is achieved by the introduction of unidentified, and unidentifiable, angels into the narrative, and the clear attribution of the role of (creative) agent to God.

Analysis of the figures of the Angels Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mikāl* (see Section 7.1), suggests they were known to be angels, despite not being explicitly described as such, and, in fact, referred to separately from *malā'ika*.<sup>767</sup> Given that Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, is one of only two named angels in the Bible, and that extrabiblical texts developed extensive traditions surrounding him, it is not surprising that these two angels, in particular, feature in the Qur'ān. What is surprising is that they feature so fleetingly. The importance of named angels appears to be a late(r) qur'ānic development, since they are only named in Medinan material. And yet the Meccan description of the annunciation to Mary in Q 19:17–19 (see Section 6.2), is proof that the figure of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl*, must have been known earlier than this, if only for his involvement in this pivotal event. It may be that the role of the *rūḥ* was considered more important at this

---

<sup>766</sup> Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings', 748.

<sup>767</sup> Although note footnote 702.

point in time, or it is a reflection of Gnostic beliefs about the incarnation of Jesus, concerning the merging of the figures of the Angel Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, and Christ.<sup>768</sup> This is most vividly depicted in the *Epistle of the Apostles*, the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, and the *Sibylline Oracles*. If this is due to such angelomorphic beliefs, we might also have expected the Angel Michael/*Mīkāḷ* to feature here, since he is clearly identified as the Spirit/Christ in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. However, angel, or angelomorphic Christological ideas, which could have provided both a basis for the denial of Christ's divinity, and an explanation for his qualities and attributes, were found to be curiously absent from the Qur'ān.

Despite his renown, it was found that the Angel Gabriel's/*Jibrīl*'s primary role in the Qur'ān appears not to be that of a messenger, but rather, to facilitate the transmission of the teaching contained in the Qur'ān, by implication, to the qur'ānic Messenger.<sup>769</sup> As to whether Gabriel/*Jibrīl* should be understood as the *rūḥ*, a negative conclusion was reached, at least, in the context of revelation. Although the Qur'ān is unequivocal in declaring the revelatory role of the *rūḥ*, (Q 16:102; Q 26:192–4), Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is on no occasion equated with the *rūḥ*, and the evidence of his revelatory role is vague (Q 2:97). Strong grounds for viewing Gabriel/*Jibrīl* as the *rūḥ* (or vice versa), in the context of the incarnation (Q 19:17–19), were firmly established, as discussed (see Sections 2.2.5, 5.1.1, 6.2, and 7.1). The Meccan dating of these references suggests that the fusion of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* with the *rūḥ*, was known in this period, but that Gabriel/*Jibrīl* was considered of secondary importance to the figure of the *rūḥ* at this stage. Subsequent to this, as the concept of both named angels and angelic intermediaries developed, the view of the *rūḥ* as an independent being declined. The Angel Gabriel's/*Jibrīl*'s personality expanded and the *rūḥ* thus became a mere tool, through which God strengthened (namely) Adam and Jesus. This would account for the later tendency to associate the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* (God's number one messenger), with revelation, since the being originally responsible, the *rūḥ* (Q 16:102; Q 26:192–4), had been de-personified by the Medinan period.

---

<sup>768</sup> See footnote 509.

<sup>769</sup> As noted, the details of what is brought down (*n-z-l*), and to whom is vague, but the presence of the Angel Gabriel/*Jibrīl* is undisputed (see Section 5.1.1).

The use of personal names with no further qualification suggests that the Angels Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāl* were seen as independent figures in their own right, not just because of their potential involvement in Jesus' conception, and further raises the question as to why the Qur'ān does not have more to say on them. It is almost as if the few references to them that do exist are merely the tip of the iceberg, of what must have been well-developed, and established beliefs, regarding these two angels in particular. The even more limited information the Qur'ān provides about the Angel Michael/*Mīkāl* (Q 2:98), led to the conclusion that the qur'ānic *Urgemeinde* were also familiar with this figure, and that he was also viewed apart from other *malā'ika*, maybe even as an archangel along with Gabriel/*Jibrīl*. The fact that the meanings behind Gabriel and Michael's Hebrew names are lost in translation into Arabic leaves them adrift from their original Jewish context.<sup>770</sup> It was concluded, that in the Qur'ān, the Angels Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and Michael/*Mīkāl* were therefore understood as individual personalities, and held in high esteem, despite the sparse references to and information it provides about them.

Although the analysis of the angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, and the narrative in which they appear (see Section 7.2), did not answer all the questions raised by this episode, it did establish the importance of the link between *sūrah* 2 and the Enochic tradition in the context of the fallen angels/*shayāṭīn/jinn*. In contrast to the watchers/'*Azāza'ēl*/'*Aζαήλ*, who transmit knowledge to humans of their own volition, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* appear not to have had any free will, or if they did, it was extremely limited, since they were obviously not keen to pass on the magic sent down to them, but could only issue a feeble warning. The analysis of this narrative sought to show how the Qur'ān recasts the motif of illicit angelic instruction, with the knowledge (i.e., the magic), rather than the angels, descending and being transmitted, on, rather than against God's wishes. The entire background to this narrative, and these characters requires further examination in order to conclusively understand these two angels.

This thesis has not only shed light on angels in the Qur'ān themselves, but shown the interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated elements in the text (e.g., angels and *shayāṭīn*, and angels and *jinn*). The benefits of looking at the big picture, both within the broader late antique

---

<sup>770</sup> Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 51.



milieu, and within the qur'ānic text itself, have been conclusively demonstrated. Furthermore, the differences between the four qur'ānic periods have been shown to be key to understanding angels and their roles in the Qur'ān. In particular, a distinct split between the Meccan and Medinan material that deals with them was identified, further underlining the merits of reading the Qur'ān within a chronological framework. Moving forwards, it has also identified several topics for further research. Examples of these are:

1. A survey of all early Latin Christian references to Isaiah 18:2, 33:7; Ezekiel 30:9; Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7, 3:1, and 1 Esdras 1:48–49 (Lat. 3 Esdras 1:50–51), Matthew 11:10, and Mark 1:2, to ascertain at what point *angeli* came to be understood as exclusively non-human beings by early Latin Christian translators/exegetes, if at all, which could have fed into the qur'ānic understanding of such creatures, as mentioned in Section 2.1.
2. The concept of angelic free will, which is pertinent to understanding the figures of *Iblīs*, *Hārūt*, and *Mārūt* (see Sections 5.1.4 and 7.2), and which was not investigated as a separate topic owing to the limits of time and space.
3. An over-arching study of the qur'ānic concepts of heaven and earth, the distinction between these areas and items stemming from them, which the discussion of the verbal roots *n-z-l* and *r-s-l* in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 suggested becomes of increasing importance throughout the period of the Qur'ān's revelation.
4. Analysis of the extent and method of divine involvement in earthly battles and its ramifications for the degree of divine transcendence (see Section 4.1.4).
5. Connected to this, in light of the fact that qur'ānic angels appear to have much more limited authority, and less agency in directing events at the end of time than their Jewish and Christian counterparts, a larger study of qur'ānic eschatology (see Section 4.1.8).
6. An examination of angelomorphic beliefs and how they relate to the Qur'ān's understanding of Jesus' creation, nature, and role, as touched upon in Sections 2.2.5 and 6.2.

7. The relationship between angels, particularly Gabriel/*Jibrīl* and the *rūḥ* see Sections 2.2.5, 5.1.1, 6.2, and 7.1)
8. A full analysis of *sūrahs* 11, 15 and 51, in order to ascertain the origin of the motif of the fear Abraham (and Lot) experience upon encountering their angelic visitors (see Sections 2.2.2 and 6.1).
9. Although the analysis of angels in narratives (see Section 6) excluded those versions which do not feature angels, it has become clear that a comparison of these with those examined would be beneficial to developing an understanding of the latter.

The above list of desiderata includes both topics that relate directly to qur'ānic angels and those feed into a broader understanding of qur'ānic theology, and of the text itself.

## 9 Bibliography

- al-Azmeh, Aziz. 'Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings'. In *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels: Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, and Hans-Peter Pökel, 135–52. Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2019.
- Alexander, Philip S. 'The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch'. *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977): 156–80.
- Alexander, T. Desmond. 'Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness'. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 2 (1985): 289–91.
- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. *The Holy Qur'an*. Birmingham: IPCI Islamic Vision, 1999.
- Ambros, Arne A., and Stephan Procházka, eds. *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004.
- Andersen, F.I. '2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction'. In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H Charlesworth, 1:91–213. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.
- Arbach, Mounir, and Mohammed Maraqtan. 'Notes on the Root L'K "to Send" and the Term Ml'k "Messenger" in the Ancient South Arabian Inscriptions'. *Semitica et Classica* 11 (2018): 251–56.
- Arndt, William F., F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, trans. "Ἀγγελος". In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 7–8. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Arthur, Rosemary A. *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth-Century Syria*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.
- Assis, Elie. 'The Reproach of the Priests (Malachi 1:6–2:9) within Malachi's Conception of Covenant'. In *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles*, edited by Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers, 271–90. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.

- Bamberger, Bernard J. 'Angels and Angelology: Bible'. In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2. USA: Macmillan, 2007.
- Bannister, Andrew G. 'Iblis and Adam: A Comparative Application of Computerized and "Manual" Methods of Formulaic Analysis to the Seven Retellings'. In *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an*, 195–211. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014.
- Barbel, Joseph. *Christos Angelos, die Anschauung von Christus als Bote und Engel in der gelehrten und volkstümlichen Literatur des christlichen Altertums: zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ursprungs und der Fortdauer des Arianismus*. Bonn: Hanstein, 1964.
- Barker, Margaret. *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God*. London: SPCK, 1992.
- Bell, Richard. *The Qur'ān: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937.
- Berlejung, Angelika. 'Angels and Angel-like Beings: Ancient Near East'. In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. De Gruyter Online: De Gruyter, 2012.
- Bietenhard, Hans. *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1951.
- Bird, Michael F. *1 Esdras: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Vaticanus*. Septuagint Commentary Series. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- Bishai, Wilson, B. 'A Possible Coptic Source for a Qur'ānic Text'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 1 (1971): 125–28.
- Blachère, Régis. *Le coran*. Islam d'hier et d'aujourd'hui. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947.
- Bodman, Whitney S. 'Stalking Iblīs: In Search of an Islamic Theodicy'. In *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach; Proceedings of the International Symposium in Beirut, June 25<sup>th</sup>–June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Birgit Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar, 247–70. Beirut Texts and Studies, 64. Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999.
- . *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qur'ān*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

- Bolt, Peter G. 'Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead'. In *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm*, edited by A. N. S. Lane, 75–102. Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Baker Book House, 1996.
- Bousset, W. *Die Religion des Judentums im spathellenistischen Zeitalter*. Tübingen: n.p., 1926.
- Bousset, Wilhelm. *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895.
- Bowersock, Glenn W. 'Les anges païens de l'antiquité tardive'. *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 24 (2013): 91–104.
- Bowker, J.W. 'Intercession in the Qur'an and the Jewish Tradition'. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 11, no. 1 (1966): 69–82.
- Brock, Sebastian P. "'Come, Compassionate Mother . . . , Come Holy Spirit": A Forgotten Aspect of Early Christian Imagery'. In *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*, by Sebastian P. Brock, 249–57. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Bucur, Bogdan B. 'The Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism'. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23, no. 2 (2015): 245–72.
- Burge, Stephen R. *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- . 'The Angels in *sūrat al-malā'ika*: Exegeses of Q. 35:1'. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2008): 50–70.
- Buster, Aubrey E. 'Hosts, Host of Heaven'. In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception [Online]*, edited by C. Furey, J. LeMon, B. Matz, T. Chr. Römer, J. Schröter, B. Walfish, and E. Ziolkowski. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010.
- Carrell, Peter R. *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Chipman, Leigh N. B. 'Adam and the Angels: An Examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources'. *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 49, no. 4 (2002): 429–55.
- Collins, John J. 'Gabriel,' in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 338–339. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

- ‘Prophecy, Apocalypse and Eschatology: Reflections on the Proposals of Lester Grabbe’.
- In *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and Their Relationships*, edited by Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, 44–53. London: T&T Clark, 2003.
- Cooke, G.A. *Ezekiel*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Corbin, Hènri. *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*. Paris: de l’Herne, 1981.
- Cowper, Benjamin Harris. ‘The History of Joseph the Carpenter’. In *The Apocryphal Gospels and Other Documents Relating to the History of Christ*, 99–127. London: Williams & Norgate, 1867.
- Crone, Patricia. ‘Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qur’ānic Pagans’. In *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, edited by Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas, 315–36. 146. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.
- . ‘Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One)’ *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 2 (2015): 225–53.
- . ‘The Book of Watchers in the Qur’an’. In *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean World*, edited by Haggai Ben-Shammai, Shaul Shaked, Sarah Stroumsa, and Shlomo Pines, 16–51. *Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean World*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2013.
- . ‘The Quranic *mushrikūn* and the Resurrection (Part I)’ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75, no. 3 (2012): 445–72.
- . ‘The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities’. *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 57, no. 2 (2010): 151–200.
- Culianu, Ioan, P. ‘The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism’. In *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, edited by R. van den Broek, M. J. Vermaseren, and Gilles Quispel, 78–91. Leiden: Brill, 1981.

- Daniélou, Jean. *A History of Early Christian Doctrine. The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicea, Volume 1: The Theology of Jewish Christianity*. Edited and translated by John A. Baker. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964.
- . *Les anges et leur mission, d'après les pères de l'église*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Paris: Chevetogne, 1953.
- Davidson, Maxwell J. *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1–36, 72–108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1992.
- Delcor, M. 'Le mythe de la chute des anges et de l'origine des géants comme explication du mal dans le monde dans l'apocalyptique juive'. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 190, no. 1 (1976): 3–53.
- Dold, Alban. *Konstanzer altlateinische Propheten- und Evangelienbruchstücke mit Glossen: nebst zugehörigen Prophetentexten aus Zürich und St. Gallen*. Texte und Arbeiten 7–9. Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1923.
- Dörfel, Donata. *Engel in der apokalyptischen Literatur und ihre theologische Relevanz: am Beispiel von Ezechiel, Sacharja, Daniel und Erstem Henoch*. Aachen: Shaker, 1998.
- Duling, Dennis C. 'The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's "Antiquitates Judaicae" 8.42–49'. *The Harvard Theological Review* 78, no. 1/2 (1985): 1–25.
- Eichler, Paul. *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*. n.p., 1928.
- Eickmann, Walther. *Die Angelologie und Dämonologie des Korans im Vergleich zu der Engel- und Geisterlehre der Heiligen Schrift*. Leipzig: Eger, 1908.
- Fletcher-Louis, Crispin H. T. *Luke–Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997.
- Fossum, Jarl E. *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985.
- García Martínez, Florentino. 'Sodom and Gomorrah in the Targumim'. In *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, edited by Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 83–96. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Gieschen, Charles A. *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

- . 'The Angel of the Prophetic Spirit: Interpreting the Revelatory Experiences of the Shepherd of Hermas in Light of Mandate XI'. *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers*, 33 (1994): 790–803.
- Gleason, Randall C. 'Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2'. *New Testament Studies* 49, no. 1 (2003): 90–107.
- Goodman, David. 'Do Angels Eat?' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37, no. 2 (1986): 160–75.
- . 'Traditions concerning Angels in the Rabbinic and Inter-testamental Exegesis of the Book of Genesis'. Oxford, 1985.
- Görg, Manfred. 'Angels: II Old Testament.' In *Religion Past and Present—Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, edited by Hans Dieter Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel, 1: A–Bhu. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Griffith, Sidney Harrison. *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Grypeou, Emmanouela, and Helen Spurling. 'Abraham's Angels: Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 18–19'. In *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, edited by Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, 181–203. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Gutman, Joshua. 'Angels and Angelology: Apocrypha'. In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2:153–55. USA: Macmillan, 2007.
- Hallaschka, Martin. *Haggai und Sacharja 1–8: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010.
- Hannah, Darrell D. *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.
- Hanson, Paul D. 'Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11'. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (1977): 195–233.
- Hawting, Gerald, R. 'Has God Sent a Mortal as a Messenger? Messengers and Angels in the Qur'an.' In *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 372–89. New York: Routledge, 2012.



- Heijne, Camilla Hélena von. 'Angels'. In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, edited by Samuel E. Balentine. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Heiser, Michael S. 'Angels and Angel-like Beings: IV New Testament'. In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception [Online]*, edited by Constance M. Furey et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010.
- . 'Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God.' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 52–74.
- Henninger, Josef. 'Beliefs in Spirits among the Pre-Islamic Arabs'. In *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, edited by Emilie Savage-Smith, 1–54. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.
- Henton, J.W. van. 'Angel II.' In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 50–53. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- . 'Archangel'. In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 80–81. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Hermann, Klaus. 'Angels: IX Judaism'. In *Religion Past and Present—Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, edited by Hans Dieter Betz et al, 1: A–Bhu. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Himmelfarb, Martha. *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*. New York, 1993.
- Hirth, Volkmar. *Gottes Boten im Alten Testament: die alttestamentliche Malak-Vorstellung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Malak-Jahwe-Problems*. 1978 Ed. Frankfurt: Lang, 1975.
- Horowitz, Josef. *Koranische Untersuchungen*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1926.
- Hull, John M. *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*. London: SCM, 1974.
- Idel, Moshe. 'Hārūt and Mārūt: Jewish Sources for the Interpretation of the Two Angels in Islam'. In *L'ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements / Shi'i Esotericism: Its Roots and Developments*, edited by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi et al, 127–37. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016.
- Jacobs, Mignon R. *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2017.
- Jadaane, Fehmi. 'La place des anges dans la théologie cosmique musulmane.' *Studia Islamica* 41 (1975): 23–61.

- ibn al-Kalbi, Hishām. *Book of Idols Being a Translation from the Arabic of the Kitāb al-Aṣnām by Hishām Ibn-al-Kalbi*. Translated by Nabih Amin Faris. Vol. 14. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Kassim, Husain. 'Nothing Can Be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels: Angels and Angelology in Islam and Islamic Literature'. In *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings—Origins, Development and Reception*, edited by Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, and Karin Schöpflin, 645–62. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007.
- King, Karen L. 'Introduction'. In *What Is Gnosticism?*, 1–4. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Klauck, Hans-Josef. *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*. Translated by Brian McNeil. London: T&T Clark, 2003.
- Knibb, Michael Anthony. 'Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A New Translation and Introduction'. In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, 2:143–76. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.
- Knight, Jonathan. *The Ascension of Isaiah*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- Kohut, Alexander. *Ueber die jüdische Angelologie und Daemonologie in ihrer Abhängigkeit vom Parsismus*. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866.
- Kościelniak, Krzysztof. 'Les éléments apocryphes dans la demonologie coranique'. In *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam: Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of L'union européenne des arabisants et islamisants*, edited by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Andrzej Pikulski, 41–49. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2006.
- Krone, Susanne. *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt*. Frankfurt: Lang, 1992.
- Kugel, James L. *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Kuhn, Harold. 'The Angelology of the Non-canonical Jewish Apocalypses'. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948): 217.

- Lane, Edward William. 'سجد'. In *An Arabic English Lexicon Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources (Digitized Text Version)*. Vol. 4. Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968, [1872, 2015].
- Lavik, Marta Høyland. *A People Tall and Smooth-Skinned: The Rhetoric of Isaiah 18*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Leemhuis, Fred. 'Lūṭ and His People in the Koran and Its Early Commentaries'. In *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, edited by Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 97–113. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Lesses, Rebecca. 'Speaking with Angels: Jewish and Greco-Egyptian Revelatory Adjurations'. *The Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (1996): 41–60.
- Letellier, Robert Ignatius. *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19*. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- Levison, John. 'The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism.' *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers* 34 (1995): 464–93.
- Ling, Trevor. *The Significance of Satan: New Testament Demonology and Its Contemporary Relevance*. London: SPCK, 1961.
- Loader, J. A. *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions*. Kampen: Kok, 1990.
- Loynes, Simon P. *Revelation in the Qur'an: A Semantic Study of the Roots n-z-l and w-ḥ-y*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.
- Macdonald, D.B. 'The Development of the Idea of the Spirit in Islam.' *Acta Orientalia* 9 (1931): 307–51.
- Macdonald, D.B., and W. Madelung. 'Malā'ika'. In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, edited by P. Pearman et al. Brill Online, 2015.
- Macdonald, William Graham. 'Christology and the Angel of the Lord'. In *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by His Former Students*, edited by Merrill Chapin Tenney and Gerald F. Hawthorne, 324–35. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975.

- Mach, Michael. *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992.
- Marmorstein, Arthur. 'Angels and Angelology: Fallen Angels'. In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2. USA: Macmillan, 2007.
- Marshall, David. *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*. Richmond: Curzon, 1999.
- Martínez, José. 'Muhammad y el monacato sirio'. *Gerión* 30 (2012): 293–342.
- Mazuz, Haggai. 'Polemical Treatment of the Story of the Annunciation of Isaac's Birth in Islamic Sources'. *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 17, no. 2 (2014): 252–62.
- Meier, S.A. 'Angel I.' In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 45–50. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- . 'Angel of Yahweh'. In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 53–59. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Meier, Sam. 'Angels and Angel-Like Beings: II Hebrew Bible/Old Testament'. In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception [Online]*, edited by Constance M. Furey et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010.
- de Menasce, P.J. 'Une légende indo-iranienne dans l'angélogie judéo-musulmane: à propos de *Hārūt et Mārūt*'. *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der schweizerischen Asien-gesellschaft* 1, no. 1–2 (1947): 10–17.
- Miller, William T. *Mysterious Encounters at Mamre and Jabbok*. Chico, CA Scholars Press, 1984.
- Muehlberger, Ellen. *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*. New York: OUP, 2013.
- Müller, Caspar Detlef Gustav. *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959.
- Mustansir, Mir. 'Polytheism and Atheism'. In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. Washington DC: Brill Online, n.d.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, ed. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: HarperOne, 2015.

- Neuwirth, Angelika. 'The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism'. In *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, edited by Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx, and Angelika Neuwirth, 499–532. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Niehr, H. 'Host of Heaven'. In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 428–30. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Nöldeke, Theodor. *Geschichte des Qorans*. Gottingen: Dieterich, 1860.
- . *Geschichte Des Qorans*. Edited by Friedrich Schwally. Vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1961 [1909–1938].
- Nünlist, Tobias. *Dämonenglaube im Islam*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.
- Orlov, Andrei A. 'The Watchers of Satanael'. In *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology*, 85–106. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2011.
- Osborn, Eric Francis. *Clement of Alexandria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- O'Shaughnessy, Thomas. *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. Rome: Pontifical Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1953.
- Paret, Rudi. 'Signification coranique de *ḥalīfa* et d'autres dérivés de la racine *ḥalafa*'. *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970): 211–17.
- Parker, S.B. 'Sons of (the) God(s)'. In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 794–800. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Parry, Donald W., and Andrew C. Skinner. '4Q37'. In *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library Biblical Texts*, edited by Donald W. Parry and Andrew C. Skinner. Brill Online, 2018.
- Pedersen, J. '*Djabrā'il*'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2012.
- Petterson, Anthony R. 'The Identity of "The Messenger of the Covenant" in Malachi 3:1—Lexical and Rhetorical Analyses'. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 29, no. 3 (October 2019): 277–93.

- Phillips, E. 'Incredulity, Faith, and Textual Purposes: Post-biblical Responses to the Laughter of Abraham and Sarah'. In *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, edited by Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, 22–33. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
- Pinero, A. 'Angels and Demons in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve'. *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 24, no. 2 (1993): 191–214.
- Pregill, Michael E., and Zohar Hadromi-Allouche. 'Devil: IV Islam'. In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, edited by Dale C. Allison Jr. et al. Vol. 8. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.
- Rangar, Cline. *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Reed, Annette Yoshiko. *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Reeves, John C. 'Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the "Tale of Hārūt wa-Mārūt"'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 4 (2015): 817–42.
- Reynolds, Gabriel Said. 'Angels'. In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, edited by Kate Fleet et al. Brill Online, 2009.
- . 'Case Study 2: *al-shayṭān al-rajīm*'. In *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 54–64. London: Routledge, 2010.
- . 'Introduction: Qur'ānic Studies and Its Controversies'. In *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 1–28. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- . 'Le problème de la chronologie du coran'. *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 58, no. 6 (2011): 477–502.
- . 'Reading the Qur'ān as Homily: The Case of Sarah's Laughter'. In *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, 585–91. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- . 'The Crisis of Qur'ānic Studies'. In *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 3–36. London: Routledge, 2010.
- . *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*. London: Routledge, 2010.

- Riley, G.J. 'Demon'. In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, edited by K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 235–40. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Roberts, J. J. M. 'Isaiah 33: An Isaianic Elaboration of the Zion Tradition'. In *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, 15–25. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983.
- Robin, Christian J. 'Before Ḥimyar. Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms of South Arabia'. In *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, edited by Greg Fisher, 90–126. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- . 'Les "anges" (shams) et autres êtres surnaturels d'apparence humaine dans l'arabie antique'. In *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels: Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, and Hans-Peter Pökel, 69–134. Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2019.
- Robin, Christian J., and A. de Maigret. 'Le royaume sudarabique de Ma'īn: nouvelles données grâce aux fouilles italiennes de Barâqish (l'antique Yathill)'. *Comptes rendus des séances de l'académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 153, no. 1 (2009): 57–96.
- Robin, Christian J., and Alessia Priolella. 'Nouveaux arguments en faveur d'une identification de la cité de Gerrha avec le royaume de Hagar (arabie orientale)'. *Semitica et Classica* 6 (2013): 131–85.
- Rubin, Uri. 'Prophets and Prophethood'. In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Vol. 4. Leiden: Brill Online, 2004.
- Rubio, Concepción Gonzalo. *La angelología en la literatura rabínica y sefardí*. Barcelona: Ameller, 1977.
- van Ruiten, Jacques. 'Lot versus Abraham: The Interpretation of Genesis 18:1–19:38 in Jubilees 16:1–9'. In *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, edited by Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 29–46. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Sabatier, D. Petri, ed. *Biblorum sacrorum latinae versiones antiquae seu vetus otalica*. France: apud Franciscum Didot, 1751.

- Sacchi, Paolo. *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*. Translated by William J. Short. Vol. 20. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Sadeghi, Behnam, and Mohsen Goudarzi. 'San'a' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'an'. *Der Islam: Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East* 87, no. 1/2 (2012): 1–129.
- Schäfer, Peter. *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975.
- Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace, eds. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*. Vol. 14. 14 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.
- Schenzle, Ruben. 'If God Is King, Is Man His Vicegerent? Considering *ḫalīfah* in Regard to Ancient Kingship'. In *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur'ānic Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity*, edited by Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin I. Cicek, 132–48. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017.
- Schmid, Nora Katharina. 'Lot's Wife: Late Antique Paradigms of Sense and the Qur'ān'. In *Qur'anic Studies Today*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Anthony Sells, 52–81. London: Routledge; Taylor & Francis, 2016.
- Sinai, Nicolai. *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009.
- . *The Qur'an—A Historical-Critical Introduction*. The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
- . 'The Qur'ān as Process'. In *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, 407–39. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Skehan, Patrick W. 'A Fragment of the "Song of Moses" (Deut. 32) from Qumran'. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 136 (December 1954): 12–15.
- Smelik, Willem F. *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Snyman, S. D. 'Once Again: Investigating the Identity of the Three Figures Mentioned in Malachi 3:1'. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27, no. 3 (2006): 1031–44.



- Søren Giversen. 'Solomon und die Dämonen'. In *Essays on the Nag Hamadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig*, edited by Martin Krause. Leiden: Brill, 1972.
- Stone, Michael E. *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition Fifth through Seventeenth Centuries*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013.
- Stuckenbruck, Loren T. 'An Angelic Refusal of Worship: The Tradition and Its Function in the Apocalypse of John'. *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers* 33 (1994): 679–96.
- . *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995.
- . *The Myth of the Angels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.
- Sullivan, Kevin P. *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad B. Jarīr. *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad B. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī*. Edited by Wilfred Madelung and Alan Jones. Translated by J. Cooper. Vol. 1. 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Thunberg, I. 'Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Genesis 18'. In *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented to the Fourth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1963*, 7:560–70. Berlin: Akademie, 1966.
- Tigchelaar, Eibert J. C. 'Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea Scrolls'. In *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, edited by Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 47–62. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Tigchelaar, Eibert J. C. 'Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea Scrolls'. In *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations*, edited by Edward Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 48–61. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Tottoli, Roberto. 'Hārūt and Mārūt'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by Kate Fleet et al. Brill Online, 2017.
- Tromp, Johannes, and M. de (Marinus) Jonge. *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.
- Tuschling, R. M. M. *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in Their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

- Van Fleteren, Frederick. 'Angels'. In *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, 20–22. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- van der Vliet, Jacques. 'Solomon in Egyptian Gnosticism'. In *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, edited by Joseph Verheyden, 197–218. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Vos, Nienke. 'Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity: Introduction, Summary, Reflection'. In *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, edited by Nienke Vos and Willemien Otten, 1–36. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Webb, Giesela. 'Gabriel'. In *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006 [2001].
- Webb, Robert L. "'Apocalyptic": Observations on a Slippery Term'. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49, no. 2: Qumran and Apocalyptic: The "End of Days" in Ancient Judaism and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1990): 115–26.
- Welch, Alford T. 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 4 (1979): 729–41.
- Wintermute, O.S. 'Apocalypse of Zephaniah'. In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, 1:497–516. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.
- Wischmeyer, Oda. 'Angels: III New Testament'. In *Religion Past and Present—Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, edited by Hans Dieter Betz et al, 1: A–Bhu. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Witakowski, Witold, and Eva Balicka-Witakowska. 'Solomon in Ethiopian Tradition'. In *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect*, edited by Joseph Verheyden, 219–40. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Witztum, Joseph. 'Thrice upon a Time: Abraham's Guests and the Study of Intra-qur'anic Parallels'. In *The Qur'an's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins*, edited by Holger Zellentin, 277–302. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Yahalom, Joseph. 'Angels Do Not Understand Aramaic: On the Literary Use of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic in Late Antiquity'. *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47, no. 1 (1996): 33–44.
- Zahniser, A.H. Mathias. 'Messenger'. In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Vol. 3. Brill Online, 2003.

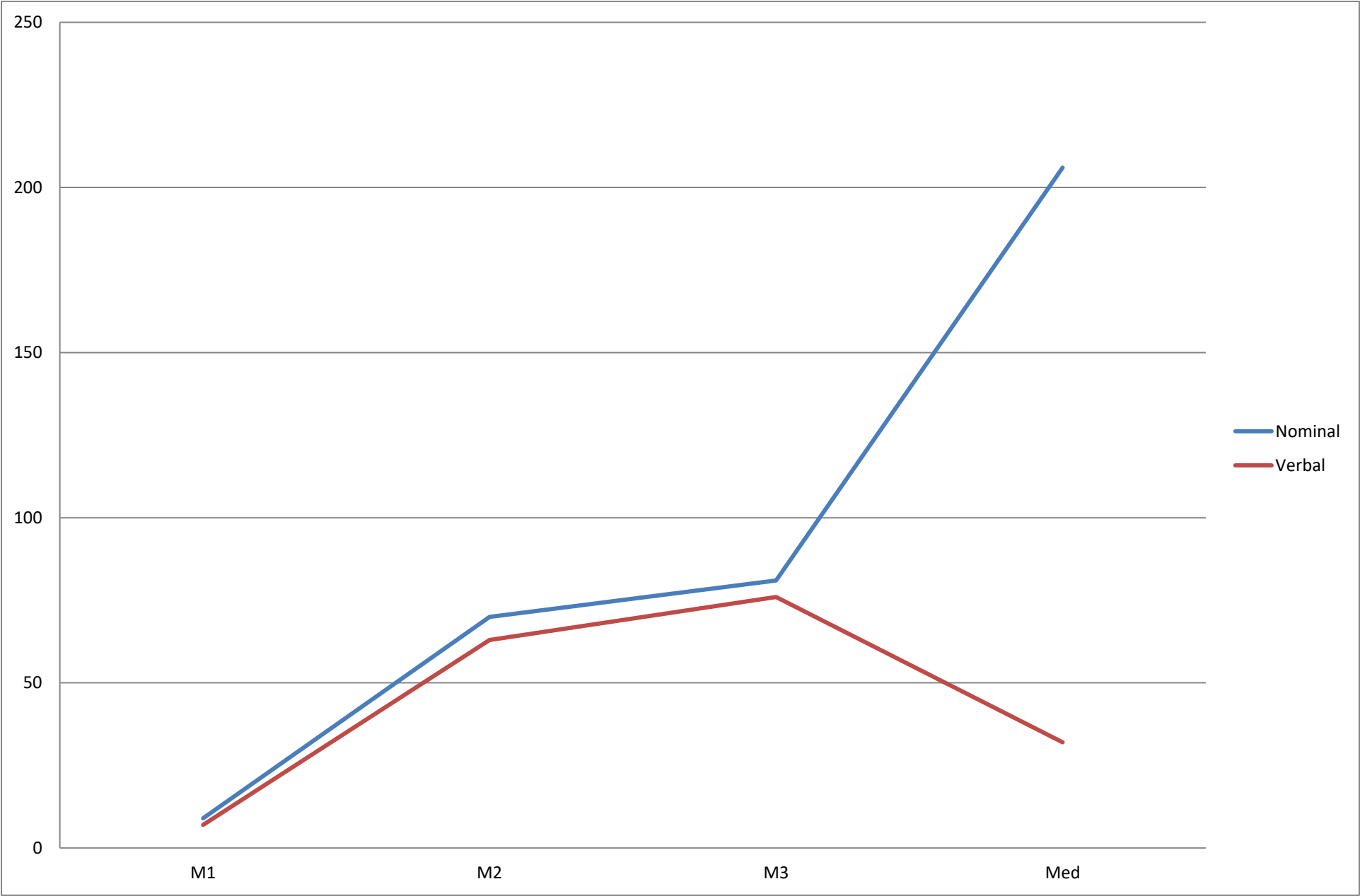
- Zellentin, Holger. 'The Synchronic and the Diachronic Qur'ān: *sūrat yā sīn*, Lot's People, and the Rabbis'. In *The Making of Religious Texts in Islam: The Fragment and the Whole*, edited by Asma Hilali and Stephen R. Burge, 111–74. Berlin: Gerlach, 2019.
- . 'Trialogical Anthropology: The Qur'an on Adam and *Iblis* in View of Christian and Rabbinic Discourse'. In *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur'ānic Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity*, edited by Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin I. Cicek, 59–129. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017.
- Zimmermann, Frank. *The Book of Tobit. An English Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958.
- Zwemer, Samuel. 'The Worship of Adam by Angels (with Reference to Hebrew 1:6)'. *Muslim World* 27, no. 2 (April 1937): 115–27.

## 10 Appendix

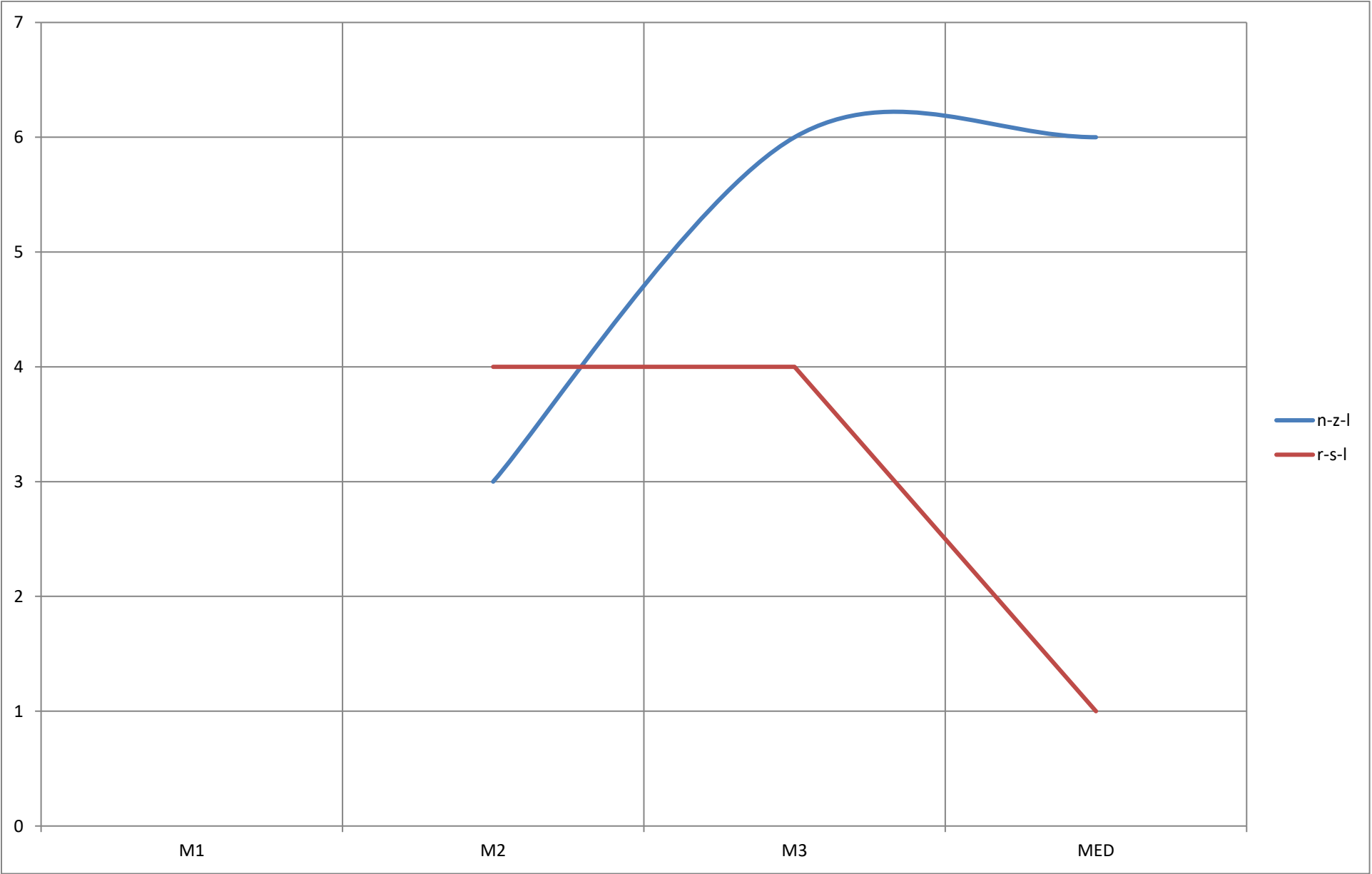
Table A2.26 References to Angels in the Qur'ān

PERIOD	NUMBER OF <i>SŪRAHS</i> WITH REFERENCES			% OF EACH PERIOD		% OF ALL <i>SŪRAHS</i> WITH REFERENCES			NUMBER OF VERSES WITH REFERENCES			% OF EACH PERIOD		% OF ALL REFERENCES		
	M-L-K	OTHER	TOTAL	M-L-K	OTHER	M-L-K	OTHER	TOTAL	M-L-K	OTHER	TOTAL	M-L-K	OTHER	M-L-K	OTHER	TOTAL
M1	7	3	10	70	30	12	5	17	8	3	11	73	27	7	2	9
M2	11	10	21	52	48	18	17	35	25	17	42	60	40	20	14	34
M3	11	8	19	58	42	18	13	32	24	13	37	65	35	20	11	30
MED	8	2	10	80	20	13	3	17	31	3	34	91	9	25	2	27
TOTAL	37	23	60	62	38	62	38	-	88	36	124	71	29	71	29	-

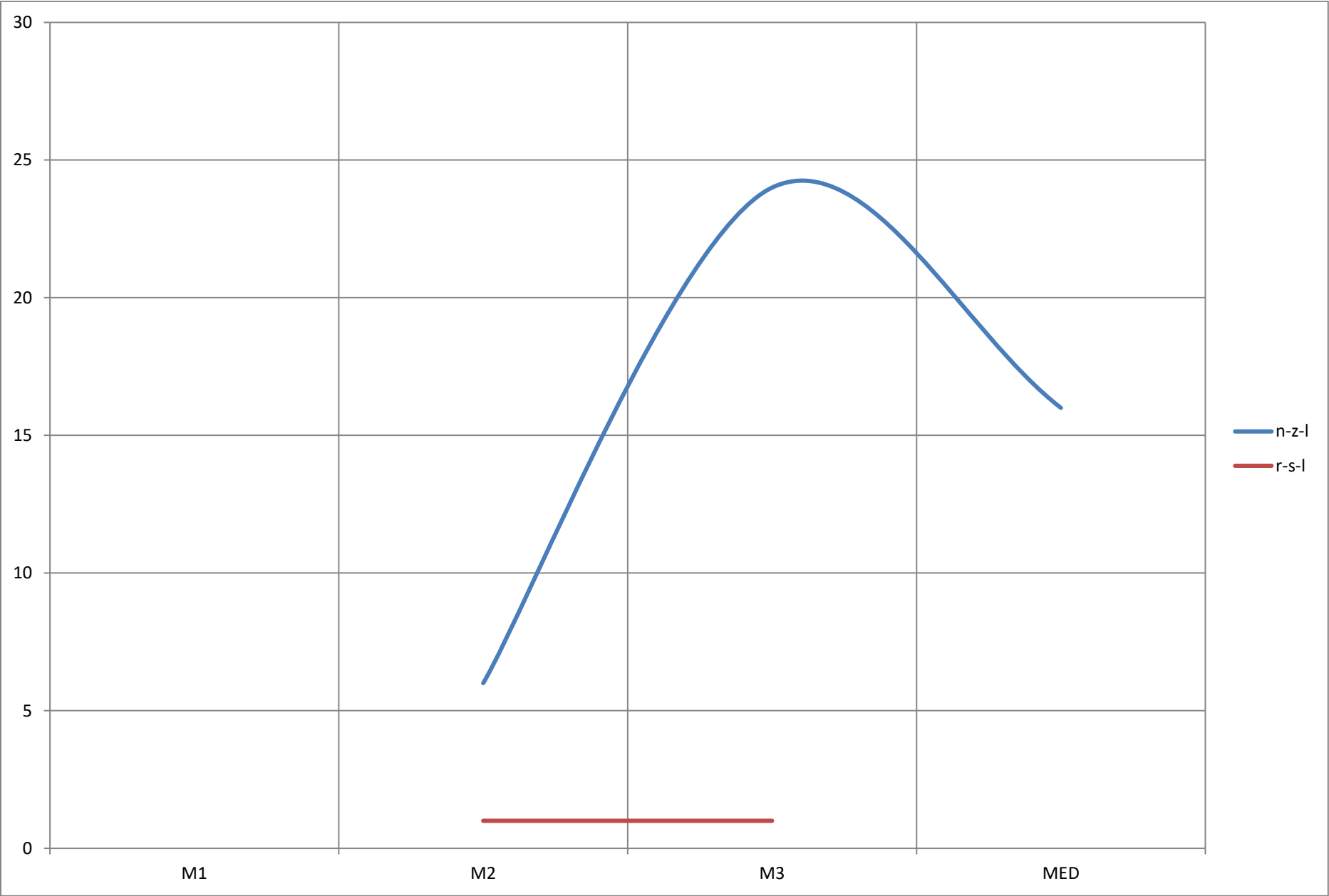
Graph A3.1: Nominal versus Verbal Occurrences of the Root *r-s-l*



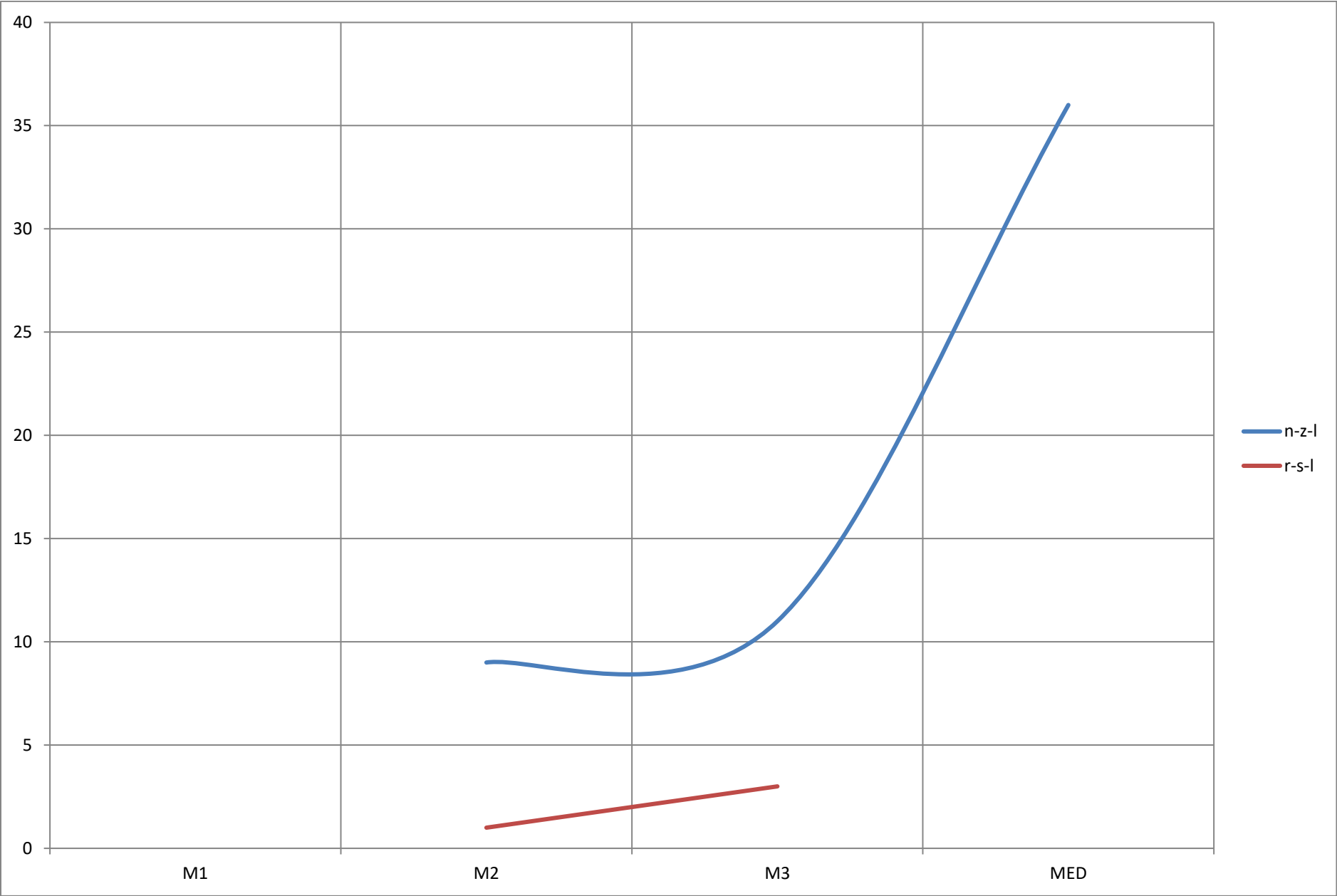
Graph A3.2: The Sending of *āyāt*, throughout the Qur’ānic Corpus



Graph A3.3: The Sending of *kutub*, throughout the Qur'ānic Corpus



Graph A3.4: The Sending of *tanzīl* throughout the Qur’ānic Corpus





**Table A5.1: *Iblīs*' Refusal to Bow to Adam in the Qur'ān**

Qur'ānic Accounts of <i>Iblīs</i> ' Refusal to Prostrate to Adam						
Q 2:34	Q 7:11–18	Q 15:28–43	Q 17:61	Q 18:50	Q 38:71–78	Q 20:116
		Behold! thy Lord said to the angels: <i>I am about to create man, from sounding clay from mud moulded into shape;</i>			Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: <i>I am about to create man from clay:</i>	
And behold, We said to the angels: <i>Bow down to Adam</i> and they bowed down. Not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty: He was of those who reject Faith.	It is We Who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels prostrate to Adam, and they prostrate; not so Iblis; He refused to be of those who prostrate.	<i>When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him.</i>	<i>Behold!</i> We said to the angels: <i>Bow down unto Adam</i> : They bowed down except Iblis:	Behold! We said to the angels, <i>Bow down to Adam</i> : They bowed down except Iblis. He was one of the Jinns, and he broke the Command of his Lord. Will ye then take him and his progeny as protectors rather than Me? And they are enemies to you! Evil would be the exchange for the wrongdoers!	<i>When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him.</i>	When We said to the angels, <i>Prostrate yourselves to Adam</i> , they prostrated themselves, but not Iblis: he refused.
		So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together:			So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together:	
		Not so Iblis: he refused to be among those who prostrated themselves.			Not so Iblis: he was haughty, and became one of those who reject Faith.	
	<i>What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee?</i>	<i>O Iblis! what is your reason for not being among those who prostrated themselves?</i>	He said, <i>Shall I bow down to one whom Thou didst create from clay?</i>  He said: <i>Seest Thou? this is the one whom Thou hast honoured above me!</i>		<i>O Iblis! What prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with my hands? Art thou haughty? Or art thou one of the high ones?</i>	
	He said: <i>I am better than he: Thou didst create me from fire, and him from clay.</i>	He said: <i>I am not one to prostrate myself to man, whom Thou didst create from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape.</i>			He said: <i>I am better than he: thou createdst me from fire, and him thou createdst from clay.</i>	

	<i>Get thee down from this: it is not for thee to be arrogant here: get out, for thou art of the meanest.</i>	<i>Then get thee out from here; for thou art rejected, accursed.</i>			<i>Then get thee out from here: for thou art rejected, accursed.</i>	
		<i>And the curse shall be on thee till the day of Judgment.</i>			<i>And My curse shall be on thee till the Day of Judgment.</i>	
	<i>He said: Give me respite till the day they are raised up.</i>	<i>He said: O my Lord! give me then respite till the Day the (dead) are raised."</i>	<i>If Thou wilt but respite me to the Day of Judgment, I will surely bring his descendants under my sway - all but a few!</i>		<i>He said: O my Lord! Give me then respite till the Day the (dead) are raised.</i>	
	<i>He said: Be thou among those who have respite.</i>	<i>He said: Respite is granted thee</i>			<i>He said: Respite then is granted thee-</i>	
		<i>Till the Day of the Time appointed.</i>			<i>Till the Day of the Time Appointed.</i>	
	<i>He said: Because thou hast thrown me out of the way, lo! I will lie in wait for them on thy straight way:</i>	<i>He said: O my Lord! because Thou hast put me in the wrong, I will make (wrong) fair-seeming to them on the earth, and I will put them all in the wrong,-</i>			<i>He said: Then, by Thy power, I will put them all in the wrong,-</i>	
	<i>Then will I assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left: Nor wilt thou find, in most of them, gratitude</i>					
		<i>Except Thy servants among them, sincere and purified</i>			<i>Except Thy Servants amongst them, sincere and purified</i>	

		He said: <i>This is indeed a way that leads straight to Me.</i>			He said: <i>Then it is just and fitting- and I say what is just and fitting-</i>	
	He said: <i>Get out from this, disgraced and expelled. If any of them follow thee,-</i>	<i>For over My servants no authority shalt thou have, except such as put themselves in the wrong and follow thee.</i>				
	<i>Hell will I fill with you all.</i>	<i>And verily, Hell is the promised abode for them all!</i>	He said: <i>Go thy way; if any of them follow thee, verily Hell will be the recompense of you (all)-an ample recompense.</i>		<i>That I will certainly fill Hell with thee and those that follow thee,- every one.</i>	
			<i>Lead to destruction those whom thou canst among them, with thy voice; make assaults on them with thy cavalry and thy infantry; mutually share with them wealth and children; and make promises to them. But Satan promises them nothing but deceit.</i> <i>As for My servants, no authority shalt thou have over them: Enough is thy Lord for a Disposer of affairs.</i>			

**Table A5.2 Structure of the Retellings of *Iblis*' Refusal to Prostrate in the Qur'ān**

Structure of the Retellings of <i>Iblis</i> ' Refusal to Prostrate in the Qur'ān						
Q 2:34	Q 7:11 – 18	Q 15:28 – 35	17:61 – 65	Q 18:50	Q 38:71 – 78	Q 20:116
		Intention: to create man			Intention: to create man	
Command: to bow down to Adam	Command: to bow down to Adam	Command: to bow down to Adam	Command: to bow down to Adam	Command: to bow down to Adam	Command: to bow down to Adam	Command: to bow down to Adam
Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>	Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>	Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>	Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>	Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>	Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>	Refusal by <i>Iblīs</i>
Reason: he was haughty/of those who reject Faith				Reason: he was one of the <i>jinn</i>	Reason: he was haughty/one of those who reject Faith	
	God questions <i>Iblīs</i>	God questions <i>Iblīs</i>			God questions <i>Iblīs</i>	
	<i>Iblīs</i> claims to be better than Adam because he was created from fire, while Adam was only made from clay.	because Adam was only created from clay/mud	because Adam was made from clay		God suggest <i>Iblīs</i> might be haughty or one of the high (and mighty) ones	
					<i>Iblīs</i> claims to be better than Adam because he was made from fire, while Adam was only made from clay	
	God orders <i>Iblīs</i> down/out (of heaven?); his arrogance will not be tolerated	God orders <i>Iblīs</i> out (of heaven?); he is rejected/accursed			God orders <i>Iblīs</i> out (of heaven?); he is rejected/accursed	
		Sentence limited to the Day of Judgment			Sentence limited to the Day of Judgment	
	Request for clemency: until the resurrection	Request for clemency: until the resurrection	Request for clemency: until the Day of Judgment		Request for clemency: until the resurrection	

	Clemency granted	Clemency granted			Clemency granted		
		Until the appointed time			Until the appointed time		
	<i>Iblis</i> vows to lead men astray	<i>Iblis</i> vows to lead men astray			<i>Iblīs</i> vows to lead most of Adam’s descendents astray		
		Only the sincere and purified will escape his clutches					Only the sincere and purified will escape his clutches
		God confirms only the way of the sincere leads to him					God feels justified-
	God orders Iblis out (of heaven); he is disgraced and expelled.	<i>Iblis</i> will only succeed with those who allow themselves to be led astray					
Those who follow him will go to Hell	Those (who follow him) will go to Hell	Those who follow him will go to Hell	Those who follow him will go to Hell, along with Iblis				
			<i>Iblīs</i> will not succeed in leading God’s servants astray				