295922 - Are the angels of different ranks, and is it true that there is a hierarchy among the angels?

the question

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Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The angels are honoured slaves of Allah, who have the characteristics that Allah has mentioned in His Book, where He, may He be Exalted, says:

{All praise be to Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels messengers with wings, two or three or four. He adds to creation whatever He wills. Verily, Allah has power over all things} [Fatir 35:1]

{The heavens are almost rent asunder [because of the might and majesty of the One Who is] above them, and the angels glorify and praise their Lord, and pray for forgiveness for those who are on earth. Verily, it is Allah Who is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful} [Ash-Shura 42:5].

Secondly:

The differences in rank among the angels is something that is established and proven. It is indicated by the authentic religious texts.

What that means is that some of the angels are superior to others and closer to the Lord of the Worlds than others. However, all of them are close to Him; they are pure and free of any defects or shortcomings, and they cannot go against the command of the Lord of the Worlds. Allah, may He

be Exalted, says:

{Never would the Messiah disdain to be a servant of Allah , nor would the angels near [to Him]. And whoever disdains His worship and is arrogant - He will gather them to Himself all together} [An-Nisa’ 4:172].

Ar-Razi said: The words {nor would the angels near [to Him]} indicate that the angels are of different ranks and they vary in their virtues. The most prominent among them include Jibril, Mika’il, Israfil, `Azra’il and the bearers of the Throne.

End quote from *At-Tafsir*, 11/119.

Ibn Kathir said, after mentioning the different categories of angels: Some of them are the karubiyun (cherubim) who surround the Throne. They are the noblest of the angels alongside the bearers of the Throne, and they are the angels who are near to Allah, as He, may He be exalted, says:

{Never would the Messiah disdain to be a servant of Allah , nor would the angels near [to Him]. And whoever disdains His worship and is arrogant - He will gather them to Himself all together} [An-Nisa’ 4:172].

End quote from *Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah*, 1/49.

The best of those who are close to Allah are the three most prominent angels, whom the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) would mention in the supplication with which he began his prayer when he prayed qiyam at night. He would say: “O Allah, Lord of Jibril, Mika’il and Israfil, Originator of the heavens and the earth…” Narrated by Muslim, 770.

Ibn al-Qayyim said regarding this hadith: He mentioned these three angels because they are specialized in carrying out important tasks and Allah chose them to be close to Him. How many angels there are in the heavens besides them, yet he only mentioned these three.

Jibril is the one who brought down the revelation, by which hearts and souls are brought back to

life; Mika’il is in charge of the rain, by which the land, animals and plants are brought back to life; and Israfil carries the Trumpet, which, when he blows into it, by Allah’s leave the dead will be brought back to life and brought forth from their graves.

End quote from *Zad al-Ma`ad*, 1/36.

Allah has singled out Jibril and Mika’il for mention in His Book, where he mentions them by name after mentioning the angels as an honour to them, as He says:

{Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and His messengers and Gabriel and Michael - then indeed, Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers} [Al-Baqarah 2:98].

The best of the angels and foremost among them is Jibril (peace be upon him). Allah, may He be glorified and Exalted, says regarding him:

{Say: Whoever is an enemy to Jibreel – for he brings down the [revelation] to your heart by Allah’s leave, a confirmation of what came before it, and guidance and glad tidings for the believers –} [Al-Baqarah 2:97].

Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, honoured him by mentioning him by name and by condemning his enemies among the Jews and others, and He mentioned proof of his virtue and honour, which is his noble role of conveying revelation to the messengers from Allah. Thus he is the intermediary between Allah and His Messenger.

Allah has called him by several names in His Book and has described him in honourable terms, as He, may He be glorified, says:

{Say: The Pure Spirit has brought it [the Qur’an] down from your Lord in truth, to make steadfast [in faith] those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for the Muslims}

[an-Nahl 16:102]. Here Allah called him the Pure Spirit.

{ The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down}[Ash-Shu`ara’ 26:193]. Here Allah called him the Trustworthy Spirit.

{this is the speech of a noble messenger

who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne––

he is obeyed there and worthy of trust} [At-Takwir 81:19-21].

That is, the Qur'an was brought down by Jibril, and Allah, may He be Glorified, ascribes to Jibril a number of noble characteristics, all of which are indicative of his superiority over all the other angels. He is a noble messenger, one who possesses great strength, is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne, is obeyed in the heavens by the angels, and is worthy of trust and entrusted with the revelation and messages of Allah.

The Prophet (pbuh) said: "When Allah loves a person, He calls Jibril and says: I love So and so, so love him. So Jibril loves him, then he calls out in heaven: Allah loves So and so, so love him. So the inhabitants of heaven love him…"

This hadith clearly highlights the virtue of Jibril and that he not only conveys the words of Allah to the Messengers, but he also conveys His words to the angels.

The best of the angels also include those who were present at Badr, as it is narrated in the hadith that Jibril asked the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): How do you regard the people of Badr among yourselves? The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said, "[We regard them] as being among the best of the Muslims," or similar words. Jibril said: And that is how we regard the angels who were present at Badr. Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3992.

See: *Mabahith al-Mufadalah fil-`Aqidah* by Muhammad ibn `Abd ar-Rahman ash-Shuzayfi, 350; *Al-Mawsu`ah al-`Aqdiyyah*, 3/310.

Thirdly:

There are leaders among some categories of the angels of whom Allah has told us, such as the keepers of Hell – we seek refuge with Allah from it – who are called az-zabaniyah; they have nineteen leaders, foremost among whom is Malik (peace be upon him).

Allah, may He be exalted, says:

{And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups until, when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say, “Did there not come to you messengers from yourselves, reciting to you the verses of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?”} [Az-Zumar 39:71]

{Those who are in the fire will say to the keepers of hell: Call upon your Lord to alleviate the punishment for us for one day.

They will say: Did your Messengers not come to you with clear signs? They will say: Yes. They will say: Then call upon Him yourselves! The supplication of those who disbelieve is all in vain} [Ghafir 40:49-50]

{Then let him call his associates

We will call the angels of Hell} [Al-`Alaq 96:17-18]

{O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded} [At-Tahrim 66:6]

{and how could you know what hell is?

It leaves nothing and spares no one,

scorching the skin.

Appointed over it are nineteen [angels].

We have appointed none but angels as keepers of the fire, and We have only mentioned their number as a trial for those who disbelieve, so that those who were given the Book might attain certainty and those who believe might increase in faith…} [Al-Muddaththir 74:27-31]

{They will call out [to the keeper of hell]: O Mâlik, let your Lord put an end to us! He will say: Verily, you will remain [in the same plight forever]} [Az-Zukhruf 43:77].

And in *Sahih Muslim*, it says: “Hell will be brought on that Day with seventy thousand reins, each rein being held by seventy thousand angels pulling it.”

See: *Ma`arij al-Qubul bi Sharh Sullam al-Wusul ila ‘Ilm al-Usul* by Hafiz ibn Ahmad al-Hakami, 2/819.

Fourthly:

There is no basis in Islam for the idea of a hierarchy, whether among the angels or among the prophets and messengers. The angelic hierarchy is only mentioned in some Christian books, in their discussion about the honoured angels of God.

There is no basis for this idea, as far as we know, in Islam. The angels vary in status, and some of them are superior to others, as we have mentioned, but we do not know that there is any hierarchy that encompasses all of the angels, either in their tasks or in their virtues. We do not know of any textual evidence which says that the categories of angels have supervisors over them, then these supervisors report to a smaller number of supervisors, and so on until they all come under one supervisor or leader, whether that is Jibril or any other angel. We do not know of any basis for that in the religion of Allah, may He be Exalted. Rather all that we know is what we have mentioned above, that some of the angels are superior to others, but that is not indicative of the hierarchy mentioned and it does not mean that their tasks are connected to one another.

Suggesting that without any textual evidence or any authority from the Book of Allah or the Sunnah is like speaking about Allah without knowledge and suggesting something for which Allah sent down no authority.

For more information, see the answer to question no. 177709.

And Allah knows best.