

ANGEL

CULTURAL INSIGHT

In the King James Version of the Old Testament, *angel* is the translation of the Hebrew word *malakh*. This word primarily means “messenger.” The Old Testament does not present a unified doctrine of angels, and many distinctive doctrines about angels found in modern revelation are not explicitly taught in the Old Testament. For example, the distinction between angels as resurrected beings and the spirits of just men and women made perfect is not found in the Old Testament (see Doctrine and Covenants 129).

Because the word *angel* largely means “messenger,” it is used symbolically in some places to illustrate God’s control over the natural world. In the King James Version, Psalm 104:4 reads, “[Jehovah] makes his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.” Since Psalm 104 is describing the extent of Jehovah’s control over the earth and the cosmos, a better translation would read, “[Jehovah] makes the winds his messengers; flaming his servants.” Psalm 104 is not really talking about angels in the way that we think of them.

Similarly, although *angel* has come to primarily refer to *heavenly* messengers, that is not its only usage in the Old Testament, where it can also refer to human beings who impart divine messages. For example, the prophet Malachi’s name means “my [the Lord’s] messenger,” and the Lord promises in the book of Malachi to send His “messenger” (Malachi 3:1). Sometimes the type of messenger referred to in the scriptures is ambiguous, such as with the two individuals sent to Lot at the destruction of Sodom, who are referred to as both angels and men (Genesis 19:1, 12).

Related verses

Genesis 19:1

Psalm 104:4

Credits

Author: Avram R. Shannon

General Editor: Taylor Halverson

Associate Editor: Morgan Tanner

Senior Editor: Sarah Whitney Johnson

Assistant Editor: Verlanne Johnson

ScripturePlus Design: Jasmin Gimenez Rapple