Gods, Mortals, Angels

Angels: Their Place in Biblical Worlds

Week 1 of 3

Angels: Putting Together some Pieces

* Angels in the Bible: No comprehensive account in the text itself
* Working in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek
* Bible, Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Popular Imagination

Linguistic Roots

* Ugaritic lakah: To send (no analogue in Biblical Hebrew)
* Hebrew mal'akah: Business, message, work (4th commantment--no malakah on the shabbath)
* Hebrew mal'ak: Someone who does a job or delivers a messenger (not to be confused with malak, a verb meaning to reign as a king (melek) reigns)
* In the Old Testament, people and the LORD can have mel'akim--context must determine whether one is a human mal'ak or a superhuman mal'ak
  + Jacob sends mel'akim to Esau (Genesis 32:3)
  + YHWH sends a mal'ak to Hagar (Genesis 16:9)

Genesis 22: What an angel does

* 22:1—God speaks directly to Abraham, not through an angel
* 22:11—the angel of YHWH calls to Abraham from heaven
* 22:15-17—the angel of YHWH calls to Abraham a second time and speaks for YHWH

Numbers 22: The Assassin-Angel

* 22:22—God sends an angel to stand against Balaam in the road
* 22:23—the donkey can see the angel, but the Balaam the seer cannot
* 22:31-35—Balaam sees the angel and converses with the angel about God’s wrath

5 th century: St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius

* Angels among the heavenly lights on the fourth day of creation (City of God)
* Celestial Hierarchy: Three threefold Orders of Celestial Intelligences:
  + Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones
  + Dominions, Virtues, Powers
  + Principalities, Archangels, Angels
  + All Celestial Intelligences are angels, but not every angel is a seraph

Hebrews 1: The New Testament’s Warning to Keep Angels in their Place

* 1:4—A human being, with a human body, is superior to the angels
* 1:5-1:13—Proof texts from the Old Testament demonstrating that angels take their place below the human being whom God has elevated
* 1:14—Establishment of angels as fundamentally servants