

Fast 20: Angels

- As mentioned in Study 10, the basis of belief rests on five principles, according to the Holy Quran and Hadith: God, His angels, His prophets, His books, and a life after death. Thus in Islam belief in angels is the second article of faith.
- The Arabic word for angels is *malā'ika* (singular, *malak*). Its meaning refers either to their power in executing their functions, or to their role as messengers.
- Angels are *immaterial* beings. They are not physical beings like human beings or made of matter.
- The Quran contradicts the common idea that angels can assume any *physical* shape they like and appear physically before people. When the opponents of the Holy Prophet Muhammad demanded to see an angel or to have an angel as a messenger, he was told in his revelation:

“Say (to them): If there had been in the earth angels walking about secure, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as messenger.” — 17:95

When angels were sent to help the Muslims during battle, they were not seen:

“Then Allah sent down His calm upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent **armies which you did not see...**” — 9:26

“Call to mind the favour of Allah to you when armies came against you, so We sent against them a strong wind and **forces that you did not see.**” — 33:9

- The angel Gabriel is spoken of as coming to the Holy Prophet with the Divine revelation, but it was with the spiritual senses that the Holy Prophet received the revelation. It was not with the physical eye that he saw Gabriel. Those who were sitting next to him when revelation came, while they knew that revelation was coming to him by the change which came over him, they neither saw the angel, nor heard the words of the revelation.

(There are a few stray incidents reported, from which it is thought that other people besides the Holy Prophet saw Gabriel. Either this was in a vision, and the few people present with the Holy Prophet shared his vision, or there has been some misunderstanding in relating the incident.)

- Angels obey the commands of Allah and are not capable of disobeying Him:

“They do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, but do as they are commanded.” — 66:6

As man is endowed with a will while the angel is not, man is superior to the angel. This superiority is also evident from the fact that angels were commanded to make submission to him (the Quran, 2:34).

- **What is the role of angels?** Angels put into effect and carry out the commands of God relating to the running of the physical world and the spiritual world.
- The Quran tells us that when God wished to create man, He communicated His wish to the angels (2:30, 15:28, 38:71). From this we see that the laws of nature find expression through angels. They are called “messengers” (22:75, 35:1) and “bearers of the throne” of God (40:7, 69:17). The “throne” stands for God’s control of the universe, and the angels, the bearers of that control, are the intermediaries through whom that control is exercised.
- Vastly more important is the role of the angels *in the spiritual world*, because it is primarily with the spiritual development of man that the Holy Quran is concerned. Their functions can be summarized as below:
 - Bringing revelation to the Holy Prophet (2:97) and to prophets before him (4:163).
 - Strengthening the hearts of the prophets (2:87) and the believers (58:22).
 - Comforting the believers (41:30), and bringing revelation to those who are not prophets, as in the case of Zacharias (3:39) and Mary (3:42, 45).
 - Helping the believers against their enemies (3:124–125, 8:12).
 - Praying for blessings on the Holy Prophet (33:56) and on the believers (33:43).
 - Asking forgiveness for all human beings, believers as well as non-believers (42:5).
 - Writing down the deeds of human beings (82:10, 12) and interceding for them on the Day of Judgment (53:26).

These functions are discussed further in the next Study.