THE ANGEL OF THE PRESENCE IN THE BOOK OF JUBILEES

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I. Introduction

The Book of Jubilees offers a picture of the world in which angels are very active in nature and in history. To a certain extent, the writer was simply following his biblical base in attributing significant roles to angels in the earliest times of sacred history, but he goes far beyond that base to elaborate a larger cast of characters and a more defined sense of their work. Among that cast of characters is a creature called the “angel of the presence” who mediates between the deity and humanity and carries out some remarkable functions as he does so.

A Summary of Angelic Roles

In the Book of Jubilees there are both good and evil angels, with each of the two types arranged according to their own hierarchies. In a recent analysis of Jubilees’ angelology, D. Dimant finds that the author operated with an original division of reality into three areas: the heavens, the earth, and the deep. Heaven is the place where God and his spirits dwell, the earth is the sphere of human life, and the deep (or the lower stretches of the earth) is the location where the demons and the angels who sinned are punished. The angels, nevertheless, are active on the earth when God sends them on missions, while the demons also labor on a split level in that nine-tenths of them...
are bound beneath the earth but one-tenth are allowed to do the bidding of the prince of the Mastema on the earth. Mankind alone is confined to a single level, the earth, which lies between the other two spheres of influence.

The angels themselves are ordered in hierarchical fashion and have been since their creation. Three levels or ranks may be distinguished: the angels of the presence and the holy ones; the angels appointed over meteorological phenomena; and the angels appointed over the powers and other created entities (2:2). From the names of the first two groups—the angels of the presence and the holy angels—one learns how closely related they are to God and why they are rightly styled the “two great kinds” (2:18). Most of the author’s references to angels are to these two elite classes. In several respects they are imagined in anthropomorphic terms: they speak with people, one of them teaches Abram to speak Hebrew (12:27), and they alone are created circumcised (15:27-28).

In her summary, Dimant divides the actions of the angels of the presence, the supreme angel class, into two parts: their works in heaven and their works on earth. In heaven these exalted angels are credited with performing a number of functions:

1. They praise and bless God for his first works of creation (2:3).
2. They officiate as priests above, just as Levi’s sons are priests in the earthly sanctuary (30:8; cf. 49:7).
3. They serve during the six days of creation, apparently in a liturgical sense, and also on missions for God; in addition, they celebrate Sabbath with God.
4. The angels are conversation partners with God, and at times he allows them to participate in his plans and purposes. In some cases they accompany him when he descends to earth (as at the tower of Babel and in the scene of Jacob’s ladder).
5. In heaven the angels keep the basic laws. They were the first to receive the Sabbath command and they observe the seventh day with God. They also celebrated the Festival of Weeks in heaven (6:18) until Noah’s time. So, by obeying the commands regarding circumcision, Sabbath, and the Festival of Weeks, these angels keep the laws that signify the covenant between Israel and God.

As for their activities on earth, Jubilees says of the angels of the presence that

1. They see all that is done on the earth and report it to God (4:6).
2. They descend to the earth and make contact with people in three ways: teaching, carrying out certain activities, and by giving instructions or explanations.

These angels have dealings with the demons because they are pictured as the ones responsible for imprisoning the sinful angels and the demons (10:11). They also counteract the power of the demons who