

# Angels & Demon in Early Church Fathers

All quotes are taken from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887; repr. 10 vols. (Peabody Mass.; Hendrickson 1994). All quotes are cited in the following way; Name, Year, Volume, Paragraph.

## Angels

### I. Nature and position of the angels

Ps. 104:4,  
Heb. 2:7.  
2 Pet. 2:11,  
Rev. 2:1.

Having thus learned to call these beings "messengers" [i.e., angels] from their duties, we find that because they are divine, they are sometimes called "god" in the sacred Scriptures. But this is not said in the sense that we are commanded to honor and worship them in place of God— even though they minister to us and bear His blessings to us. For every prayer, supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving is to be sent up to the Supreme God through the High Priest— the living Word and God, who is above all the angels. Origen (c. 248), 4.544.

We recognize also a multitude of angels and ministers, whom God, the Maker and Framers of the world, distributed and appointed to their various posts by His Logos. Athenagoras (c. 115) 2.134.

The other angels were created by Him, and entrusted with the control of matter and the forms of matter. . . . Just as with men, they have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice. . . . Some men are diligent in the matters entrusted to them by you, and others are faithless. It is the same among the angels. They are free agents, being created that way by God, as you will observe. Some of them have continued in those things for which God had made them. They have remained over the things to which He had ordained them. Athenagoras (c. 175), 2.142.

Blessed are those who watch for Him. For They make themselves like the angels, whom we call "watchers." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195), 2.258.

The spiritual man prays in the company of the angels, . . . and he is never out of their holy keeping. Although he prays alone, he has the choir of the holy ones standing with him. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195), 2.545.

This also is a part of the teaching of the church that there are certain angels of God and certain good forces, which are His ministers for accomplishing the salvation of men. However, it is not clearly stated when the angels were created, of what nature they are, or how they exist. Origen (c. 225), 4.241.

We should not suppose that it is the result of accident that a particular responsibility is assigned to a particular angel. For example, to Raphael, has been assigned the work of curing and healing. To Gabriel, there is assigned the conduct of wars. To Michael, there is the duty of attending to the prayers and supplications of mortals. For we are not to imagine that they obtained these positions otherwise than by their own merits and by the zeal and excellent qualities that they individually displayed before this world was formed. As a result, afterwards, in the order of archangels, this or that position was assigned to each one. At the same time, others deserved to be enrolled in the order of angels and to act under this or that archangel. Origen (c. 225), 4.264, 265.

It is enough to know that the holy angels of God are favorably disposed to us and that they do all things on our behalf. So our disposition of mind towards God should imitate the example of these holy angels, as far as it is within the power of human nature to do so. Origen (c. 225), 4.544, 545.

Those angels who were made spirits by God—those who are a flame of fire and ministers of the Father of all—cannot have been excluded from also being evangelists. For that reason, an angel stood over the shepherd, and made a bright light to shine around them Origen (c. 228), 9.304.

## **II. The division of the nations**

Note: According to most English translations, God set the boundaries of the nations according to the "number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8). The Septuagint, however, states that he set the boundaries according to the "number of the angels of God." Based on that Scripture, together with passages from Ezekiel, Daniel, and other Scriptures, the early Christians believed that each nation is subject to the oversight of one of the angels.

Deut. 32:8 (in the LXX).  
Gen 11:1-9

"He set the boundaries of the nations after the number of the angels of God." However, the people who believe in God are not now under the power of angels, but under the Lord's [rule]. "For His people Jacob were made the portion of the Lord." Irenaeus (c. 180), 1.434.

Regiments of angels are distributed over the nations and cities. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195), 2.517.

By an ancient and divine order, the angels are distributed among the nations. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195), 2.524.

In the Holy Scriptures, we find that there are princes over individual nations. For example, in Daniel we read that there was a prince of the kingdom of Persia and another prince of the kingdom of Greece. By the nature of the passage, these princes are clearly shown not to be human beings. Rather, they are certain [spiritual] powers. Also, in the prophecies of Ezekiel, the prince of Tyre is unmistakably shown to be a type of spiritual power. Origen (c. 225), 4.335.

Moreover, other nations are called a part of the angels. This is because "when the Most High divided the nations and dispersed the sons of Adam, He fixed the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the angels of God." Origen (c. 225), 4.241.

Our prophet of God and His genuine servant Moses, in his song in the Book of Deuteronomy, makes a statement regarding the portioning out of the earth in the following terms: "When the Most High divided the nations, when He dispersed the sons of Adam, he set the boundaries of the people according to the number of the angels of God. And the Lord's portion was His people, Jacob." Origen (c. 248), 4.555.

All the people upon the earth are to be regarded as having originally used one divine language. As long as they lived harmoniously together, they were preserved in the use of this divine language. They remained without moving from the east, as long as they were imbued with the sentiments of the light.... [After the confusion of languages,] each one was handed over ... to angels of character more or less severe . . . until the peoples had paid the penalty for their brash deeds. The angels imprinted on each his native language. And they were conducted by those angels to the different parts of the earth according to their deserts. For example, some were taken to a region of burning heat. Others, to a country that chastises its inhabitants by its cold. Again, others, to a land exceedingly difficult to cultivate. . . . Those who preserved their original language continued . . . in possession of the east and of their eastern language. Take note that these people alone became the portion of the Lord. And His people were called Jacob and Israel..... Origen (c. 248), 4.556.

To every nation is sent an angel, as the Law says: "He determined them by the number of the angels of God," until the number of the saints should be filled up. They do not overstep their boundaries, because in the end they shall come with the Antichrist. Vutorinus (c. 280), 7.352; see also 5.500, 5.627.

### **III. Fallen Angles and their crimes**

Gen. 6:1-2; 2

Pet. 2:4-5;

Jude 6.

**Note:** Regarding the term "angel" for whatever reason the church fathers used the term as a general for different spiritual beings possibly because the only clear distinction they saw was between angels, demons and fallen angels.

Angels sinned and revolted from God. Justin Martyr (c. 160), 1.238.

But some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the oversight entrusted to them..., These angels fell into impure love of virgins and were subjugated by the flesh. . . . Those who are called giants were begotten from these lovers of virgins. Athenagoras (c. 175), 2.142.

Those angels who invented them (jewelry, etc.) are assigned under condemnation to the penalty of death. They are the same angels who rushed from heaven on the daughters of men.... If it is true, they laid bare the operations of metallurgy, divulged the natural properties of herbs, promulgated the powers of enchantments, and traced out every curiosity, even to the interpretation of the stars. Tertullian (c. 198), 4.14.15.

I lay down this one proposition: that those angels—the deserters from God, die lovers of women—were likewise the discoverers of this cunning art [of astrology]. And on that account, They were also condemned by God. ... For we know the mutual alliance of magic and astrology. Tertullian (c. 200), 3.65.

Apostate and refugee powers that have departed from God—because of the very wickedness of their mind and will, or from envy ... invented many errors and delusions of false doctrine in order to prevent any progress. Origen (c. 225), 4.336.

Such was the beauty of women that it turned the angels aside. As a result, being contaminated, they could not return to heaven. Being rebels from God, they uttered words against Him. Then the Highest uttered His judgment against them. And from their seed, giants are said to have been born. By them, arts were made known in the earth. They taught the dyeing of wool and everything that is done. When they died, men erected images to them. Commodianus (c. 240), 4.203.

All of these things [i.e., the making of jewelry] the sinning and apostate angels put forth by their arts, when, lowered to the contagions of earth, they forsook their heavenly vigor. They also taught women to paint the eyes with blackness drawn around them in a circle and to stain the cheeks with a deceitful red. Cyprian (c. 250), 5.434.

God, in His foresight, sent angels for the protection and improvement of the human race— lest the devil . . . should either corrupt or destroy men through his subtlety. Since He had given these angels a free will, He admonished them above all things not to defile themselves with contamination from the earth and thus lose the dignity of their heavenly nature. ... However, while the angels lived among men, that most deceitful ruler of the earth, by his very association, gradually enticed them to vices and polluted them through sexual relations with women. Thereafter, not being admitted into heaven because of the sins into which they had plunged themselves, they fell to the earth. Lactantius (c. 304-313), 7.64.

Although they are the destroyers of men, they wish to appear as men's guardians—so that they themselves will be worshipped and so that God will not be worshipped. Lactantius (c. 304-313), 7.64.

They strive to turn men away from the worship and knowledge of the true Majesty, so men will not be able to obtain immortality. That is because these angels lost [immortality] because of their wickedness. Lactantius (c. 304-313), 7.66.

Certain of the angels, refusing to submit themselves to the commandment of God, resisted His will. And one of them indeed fell like a flash of lightning upon the earth, while others, harassed by the dragon, sought pleasure in sexual relations with the daughters of men, and thus brought on themselves the deserved recompense of the punishment of eternal fire. Disputation of Archefous and Manes (c. 320), 6.205.

## **Demons**

### **I. Origin of demons**

Gen. 6:4.

The angels transgressed this appointment and were captivated by love of women. And they begat children, who are those who are called demons. Justin Martyr (c. 160), 1.190.

These angels, then, who have fallen from heaven, and haunt the air and the earth, and are no longer able to rise to heavenly things, and the souls of the giants, who are the demons who wander about the world, perform similar actions. Athenagoras (c. 175), 2.142.

The angels transgressed this appointment and were captivated by love of women. And they begat children, who are those who are called demons. Justin Martyr (c. 160), 1.190.

Furthermore, we are instructed by our sacred books how from certain angels, who fell of their own free will, there sprang a more wicked demon brood, condemned of God along with the authors of their race.... Their great business is the ruin of mankind. So, from the start, spiritual wickedness sought our destruction. Accordingly, they inflict upon our bodies dis-eases and other grievous calamities. And by violent assaults, they hurry the soul into sudden and extraordinary excesses. . . . By an influence equally obscure, demons and angels breathe into the soul, and rouse up its corruptions with furious passions and vile excesses. Tertullian (c. 197), 3.36.

From the seed [of the fallen angels and women], giants are said to have been born. By them, arts were made known in the earth. They taught the dyeing of wool and everything that is done. When they died, men erected images to them. Yet, because they were of an evil seed, the

Almighty did not approve of their being brought back from death when they had died. For that reason, they wander and they now subvert many bodies. And it is these whom you [pagans] presently worship and pray to as gods. Comnodianus (c. 240), 4.203.

It is true of all demons that they were not originally demons. Rather, they became so in departing from the true way. Accordingly, the name "demon" is given to those beings who have fallen away from God. Origen (c. 248), 4.638.

Among angels, some are angels of God, and others are angels of the devil. But among demons, there is no such distinction. For they are all said to be wicked. Origen (c. 248), 4.648, 649.

In my opinion, it is certain wicked demons (so to speak, of the race of Titans or giants) who have been guilty of impiety towards the true God and towards the angels in heaven. They have fallen from it, and they haunt the denser parts of bodies. Origen (c. 248), 4.538.

However, those who were born from [the relations of angels with women]—because they were neither angels nor men, but had a mixed nature—were not admitted into Hades [when they died]. Similarly, their fathers had not been admitted into heaven, either. Thus there came to be two kinds of demons: one of heaven, the other of the earth. The latter are the wicked spirits, who are the authors of all the evils that are done. This same devil is their prince. . . . However, grammarians say that the reason they are called demons . . . is because they are skilled and acquainted with matters. For the grammarians think they are gods. In truth, the demons are acquainted with some future events, but not with all. For He has not permitted them to know entirely the counsel of God . . . . Lactantius (c. 304-313), 7.64; extended discussion: 4.328-4.334

## **II. Nature and Activity of Demons**

Matt. 4:24.

Acts 16:16.

The term "demons" is always applied to those wicked powers, who are freed from the encumbrance of a grosser body. They lead men astray and fill them with distractions. They drag them down from God and from heavenly thoughts to things here below. Origen (c. 248), 4.545.

As I was saying, these contaminated and abandoned spirits wander over the whole earth. They console their own ruin by destroying others. Therefore, they fill every place with snares, deceits, frauds, and errors. For they cling to individuals and even occupy whole houses, from door to door.... And since spirits are without physical substance and cannot be held, they slink into the bodies of men. Secretly working in their inward parts, they corrupt the health of these persons, bring on diseases, terrify their souls with dreams, and harass their minds with frenzies. They do this so that by these evils, they may cause men to come to them for aid. Lactantius (c. 304-313), 7.64; extended discussion: 4.328-4.334

In my opinion, it is certain wicked demons .... they haunt the denser parts of bodies. They also frequent unclean places on the earth. Since they are without bodies of earthly material, they possess some power of foretelling future events. So they engage in works of this kind, desiring to lead the human race away from the true God. They also secretly enter the bodies of the more predatory, savage. and wicked of animals and stir them up to do whatever they choose, whenever they choose. They can turn the fancies of these animals to make flights and movements of various kinds. in order to entrap men by such power of divination. Origen (c. 248), 4.538.

None of the demons possess flesh. Their structure is spiritual, like that of fire or air. And only by those whom the Spirit of God dwells in and fortifies are the bodies of the demons easily seen, not at all by others. Tatian (c. 160), 2.71.

From dwelling in the air, and their nearness to the stars, and their familiarity with the clouds, the demons have means of knowing the preparatory processes going on in these upper regions. By this means, they can give promise of the rains that they already feel. No doubt, they are very kind, too, in regard to the healing of diseases! For, first of all, they make you ill. Then, to get a miracle out of it, . . . they withdraw their hurtful influence. Supposedly, then, they have wrought a cure! Tertullian (c. 197) 3.37.

There are some insincere and vagrant spirits who have been degraded from their heavenly vigor by earthly stains and lusts. Now that these spirits ... are ruined themselves, they never cease to ruin others. Being depraved themselves, they infuse into others the error of their depravity. . . . The poets know that these spirits are demons. The philosophers speak of them, too. Mark Minucius Felix (c. 200), 4.189

### **III. Central Methods of deception by demons and fallen angels**

1 Cor. 10:20.

Rev. 9:20.

Not knowing that these spirits were demons, they called them "gods," and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for himself. Justin Martyr (c. 160), 1.164

As is shown by the Magi, the philosophers, and Plato, these impure spirits (the demons) lurk under the statues and images that are consecrated to them. In the meantime, they are breathed into the [pagan] prophets. They dwell in the shrines, and they sometimes animate the fibers of the entrails. They control the flights of birds, direct the lots, and are the cause of oracles involved in many falsehoods. Mark Minucius Felix (c. 200), 4.190.

The poets and mythologists did not know that it was the [wicked] angels, and those demons who had been begotten by them, who did the various things to men, women, cities, and nations that the poets and mythologists wrote about. So they ascribed them to God Himself and to those who were considered to be His very offspring. ... For they called them by whatever name each of the angels had given to himself and to his children. Justin Martyr (c. 160), 1.190.

Secretly creeping into human bodies with subtlety (as being spirits), they simulate diseases, alarm the minds, and wrench about the limbs. They do this so that they may constrain men to worship them. ... By remitting what they had bound, they seem to have cured it. Mark Minucius Felix (c. 200), 4190.

It is the practice of some men to capture persons and then to restore them to their friends for a ransom. Similarly, those who are considered to be gods invade the bodies of certain persons. They then produce a sense of their presence by dreams. Then, when they have taken their fill of the things of this world, these "gods" command them to come forth into public. In the sight of all, they then fly away from the sick, destroying the disease which they had produced. They thereby restore men to their former state. Tatian (c. 160), 2.73.

#### **Summery:**

False Healing for the purpose of leading humanity away from God.

False revelation revealing themselves to be something they are not.

#### **IV. Christian authority and practice of exorcisms**

[When exorcised by Christians,] these beings admit that they are not gods. And they confess to you that there is no God, except one — the God whom we worship. Tertullian (c. 197), 3.38.

we not only reject those wicked spirits, we overcome them. We daily hold them up to contempt. We exorcise them from their victims, as multitudes can testify. Tertullian (c. 212), 3.106.

Even at the present time, the demons and other unseen powers show that they either fear the name of Jesus as that of a Being of superior power, or else they reverentially accept Him as their lawful ruler. For if the commendation had not been given Him by God, the demons would not have withdrawn from those whom they had attacked. For they withdrew in obedience at the mere mention of His name.

Origen (c. 248), 4.419.

We do not deny that there are many demons upon earth. However, we maintain that they exist and exercise power among the wicked, as a punishment for their wickedness. But they have no power over those who "have put on the whole armor of God," who have received strength to "withstand the wiles of the devil" [Eph. 6:11]. Origen (c. 248), 4.652.



A Christian — I mean a true Christian, who has submitted to God and His Word— will suffer nothing from demons. For he is mightier than demons. The Christian will suffer nothing, for "the angel of the Lord will encamp around them who fear Him and will deliver them" [Ps. 34:7]. Origen (c. 248), 4.653.

In fact, [the demons] do injure some — but only those by whom they are feared. For the powerful and lofty hand of God does not protect such ones, for they have not been initiated in the sacrament of truth. However, the demons fear the righteous, the worshippers of God. When adjured by the name of God, they depart from the bodies.... They cannot speak falsely either to God (by whom they are adjured) or to the righteous, by whose voice they are tormented. Therefore, oftentimes they have uttered the greatest howls. They cry out that they are beaten and are on fire. ... So whom can they injure, other than those whom they have in their own power? Lactantius (c. 304-313), 1.65.