Ancient Jewish Ideas About the Origins of Angels

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Thank you very much for this opportunity to join you today for the Trends of Ancient Jewish and Christian Mysticism Seminar. As I am sure you already know, you have a wonderful colleague in Silviu, who is very quickly making a name for himself in the study of Second Temple Judaism. I have had several opportunities to spend time with him at conferences in recent years and appreciate him very much as an excellent scholar and friend. I have enjoyed his hospitality these last few days, and my first visit to Dayton has been enjoyable indeed.

I would like to begin with a few introductory comments about my presentation for today. Please know up-front that this is very much a work in progress toward an investigation of ideas in Second Temple Judaism—including early Christianity—about the origins of angels, and I value very much any suggestions or critiques you might have. Perhaps the most direct way of rephrasing my topic is this: where did ancient Jews think angels came from? Did they just assume the existence of angels as figures of the heavenly realm, much as they did the existence of God, or did they think of angels as created beings who at some time in the past were not in existence? We know that interest in angels increased significantly in the Second Temple Period—as did ideas about personified Wisdom as an envoy mediating God’s instruction and a figure active in creation. Both of these ideas have their roots in the Hebrew Bible, yet both develop significantly beyond the traditions in those texts in ways that put to rest any simple notions about uniform, tidy categories for what all Jews believed in the era. Rather, there is a broad recognition today that we must more appropriately speak of “Judaisms” in the plural, most but perhaps not all with shared commitments to covenant, the law, temple, etc., but with diversity
on many other matters. Despite the biblical commitment to “hear O Israel, the Lord our God is
one God,” some conceptions seem to stretch the idea of monotheism to the limits—as would
later Christian affirmations that Jesus and the Holy Spirit too are divine—and certainly thought
and practices considered heterodox to the biblical writers were abundantly present even in their
own days, as texts and archaeology repeatedly remind us.

Study of angels can be perplexing, even in the biblical texts—much less in *Jubilees*, the
Enochic texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and others. In the Hebrew Bible one finds an amazing
diversity of discussions of angels, something I will not pursue here lest this become an
encyclopedia article. Yet they remain somewhat mysterious, a world apart. Along with
historical reasons often proposed for the rise in interest in angels in the Second Temple period,
including contact with Persian and Babylonian thought, perhaps the fact that they are so
mysterious in the biblical tradition further lends itself to such speculations in this period that sees
the rise of apocalyptic, rewritten Scriptures, and fascination with similarly obscure characters
like Enoch. John Collins suggests that this represents the survival of elements of ancient Israelite
personal religion, ideas that reflect roots in ancient Canaanite thought (*The Apocalyptic Vision of
the Book of Daniel*, 1977, cited in Carol A. Newsom “Angels” *ABD*).

I became interested in this investigation of the origins of angels chiefly because of my
work on the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews. My dissertation, subsequently published as
the book Silviu mentioned in the introduction (‘*You Are a Priest Forever*: Second Temple
*Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [STDJ 74; Leiden:
Brill, 2008]), considered the possible antecedent traditions for the presentation of Jesus as priest
in Hebrews. As such, much attention focused on Hebrews 7 and the author’s use of the figure of
Melchizedek. By the time one reaches this chapter, the author of Hebrews has quoted Ps 110:4
on several occasions, with its bestowal of a heavenly priesthood like Melchizedek’s to Jesus. Finally in chapter 7 the author explains how this can be and what it means. The description of Melchizedek in Heb 7:3 is a crux for understanding how the author conceives of the figure, which in turn illuminates the connection he finds between Melchizedek’s priesthood and that of Jesus. The author writes (as translated in the NRSV): “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.”

While some scholars (notably Fred Horton in his very influential book *The Melchizedek Tradition*) have argued that by this the author only intends to say that Melchizedek lacks a Levitical priestly genealogy, this overlooks the two connections he draws between Melchizedek and Jesus in the following verses. Both indeed lack the Levitical pedigree, as is made clear in the playful account in Hebrews 7:4-10 explaining how Levi tithed to Melchizedek because he was in the loins of Abraham, and the explicit recognition that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah in 7:13-14. But the author also builds on the fantastic description of Melchizedek in verse 3 with the affirmation in verses 16-17 that Jesus is priest “through the power of an indestructible life,” followed immediately by yet another quotation of Ps 110:4, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” This clearly reflects the language of Heb 7:3, so Melchizedek and Jesus are similar in that they lack Levitical genealogies and have some sort of eternal nature. As such, I argue that Hebrews must understand Melchizedek as more than the mortal priest-king of Gen 14 but instead as a heavenly figure, most likely angelic. Melchizedek is no threat to Jesus’ priority, and after having been mentioned so frequently previously, he disappears from the book after this chapter.
Admittedly Melchizedek is only a mortal priest and king of Salem in Genesis, a Canaanite literarily assimilated as a priest of Israel’s God in both biblical and subsequent Jewish tradition. But angels certainly are not foreign to the patriarchal narratives, and at Qumran Melchizedek was perceived as such. In *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a very fragmentary text, he seems to be the leader of the angelic priesthood. In 4QVisions of Amram, also very fragmentary, he appears to be identified with the warrior angel Michael, standing opposite Belial, the evil one. Portions of only three columns of 11QMelchizedek have survived, but in the most substantive second column he brings God’s eschatological judgment and deliverance in the final period of jubilee, and he makes atonement for those of his lot. Interestingly, biblical passages speaking of God in their Hebrew Bible contexts are recast to describe Melchizedek, a phenomenon that occurs for Jesus in Hebrews 1:5-14. Those of you familiar with scholarly debates about these Qumran texts know that not all scholars would agree with these assessments, as numerous challenges have been raised especially about the identity of the figure mlky tsdq in 11QMelchizedek, and some have less confidence in the textual reconstructions of the other two documents. That said, my comments about all three of those Qumran texts reflect the broad scholarly consensus and need not detain us here.

Gareth Cockerill has objected to my interpretation of Hebrews 7:3, responding that Melchizedek cannot be understood by the author of Hebrews as angelic because angels are created beings, a point he finds stressed in Heb 1:5-14. Somehow Cockerill instead reads the language of Heb 7:3 as describing God, despite its explicit comparison of Melchizedek and Jesus. Perhaps this arises from a misreading of Jerome Neyrey’s article “‘Without Beginning of Days Nor End of Life’ (Hebrews 7:3): Topos for a True Deity” (*CBQ* 53 [1991]: 439-55). There Neyrey argued that the language of the verse—emphasizing that a figure “is (1) ungenerated, (2)
unchreated in the past and imperishable in the future, and (3) eternal or immortal” (540)—reflects Greco-Roman descriptions of true gods as opposed to mortals. This language ultimately is descriptive of Jesus, affirming his real, ontologically divine identity, since Melchizedek is said to resemble the Son of God in this way. (The language here is unusual, as normally Hebrews says Jesus is like Melchizedek.) Admittedly Neyrey does not clearly explain how he understands Melchizedek in light of this, preferring instead to see the language immediately pushed forward to Jesus. But it seems that his point, that Hebrews is describing Jesus as truly divine, has been misunderstood by Cockerill as an assertion that Hebrews is describing God the Father.

As for the discussion of angels in Heb 1 cited by Cockerill, the author obviously finds them inferior—but not necessarily in a negative way—to the Son. (I say “not necessarily” because some find here the groundwork for a subtle polemic against angels in the following chapter, where Ps 8’s “what is man that you are mindful of him?” passage is quoted and unpacked. Some Jewish texts that cite this psalm do so to explain angelic enmity or jealousy toward Moses, for example, but that is extraneous for the present consideration.) Hebrews’ comparison of the Son and angels begins with the elegant opening period of 1:1-4, where the Son is enthroned and has a superior name to theirs. Indeed this book is marked by use of synkrisis in the form of a double encomium, comparing what is good (the prophets, angels, the law, Moses, the Levitical priesthood, the covenant, the tabernacle, etc.) to what is even better in Christ. The following verses, 1:5-14, reiterate the Son’s superiority by quoting several passages of Scripture in order to describe Jesus and the angels. Interestingly, the texts now used for Jesus described either God or the Davidic king in their original contexts. John Meier [“Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb 1,5-14,” Biblica 66 (1985): 504-33] has argued that the
arrangement of the quotations in 1:5-14 mirrors the themes of the assertions made about the Son in 1:1-4, and I largely agree.

Most relevant for the present discussion are the citations in 1:6-9. The author quotes the Septuagint of Deut 32:43: “And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” Obviously the function is again to demonstrate the priority of the Son over the angels, though the timing the author has in mind for this statement is debatable—if we may even assume such precision was of his concern. In other words, when does this occur: At Jesus’ incarnation or else the parousia, reading “world” as the physical, earthly world? Or, at his exaltation upon the completion of his sacrificial mission, reading “world” as the “world” or “age” to come? The latter is more likely given the exaltation context of Heb 1:1-4 (Craig Koester, Hebrews [Anchor Bible]; Meier), but such things need not necessarily be the focus today because either presupposes the existence of angels who then will worship the Son. Furthermore, one might question how systematically we should expect the author to be speaking here as opposed to seeking the optimal rhetorical effect.

Next come quotations in juxtaposition, one about angels and the other the Son, both originally about God’s authority but recast to speak of Jesus. In verse 7, quoting Ps 104 (LXX 103):4, one reads, “Of the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire.’” Craig Koester (193-94) prefers the translation “he makes his angels spirits,” which is certainly possible in the Greek, because angels are called “ministering spirits” later in v. 14 in his concluding comments to the catena of quotations. The relevant part of the next quotation of Ps 45 (LXX 44):6-7 says, “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom.’” According to Meier’s correlation of the affirmations of Heb 1:1-4 and the quotations of 1:5-14, one would expect here citations affirming
the Son’s creative activity and eternal existence. The second quotation, concerning the throne, fits well, though the statement about angels may be more tenuous—is the implied contrast between the angels and the Son one of ontology, or one of mutability? We will return to this question later, after further consideration of Ps 104 below.

Before moving on, it seems appropriate to mention very briefly two other New Testament texts sometimes cited as proof that angels are created beings. One is very broad, the statement about the Logos in John 1:3 that “all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” Potentially more significant is Colossians 1:15-17, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” This description of Jesus—like that of the prologue of John and Hebrews 1—is significantly influenced by language used in Second Temple period Jewish texts for personified wisdom, and cases can be made for all three of these NT books as products of the late first century CE (allowing time for the presumably deuto-Pauline Colossians to have been utilized by the author of Ephesians). Whereas John 1 strongly alludes to Genesis 1 and one might reasonably assume that its phrase “all things” consciously reflects the cosmological order of that passage, Colossians is more explicit. Its language, echoing Greco-Roman philosophical descriptions of deities, explicitly mentions “thrones or dominions or rulers or powers.” While some find a negative cast here, similar language can be used of angels in 2 Enoch 20:1; T Levi 3:8 (P. T. O’Brien, Colossians, Philemon [WBC] 46); and T Abr 13:10 (R. M. Wilson, Colossians and Philemon [ICC] 139-41). Much may hinge on interpretation of Col 2:18, alternately understood as condemning worship directed toward angels or experiencing heavenly
visions involving angelic worship, as was commonly described in apocalyptic Jewish texts; or else on 2:8’s mention of “the elemental spirits of the universe” if that be given a middle Platonic reading associating angels with a particular realm (Ken Schenck, *A Brief Guide to Philo* 80-81). Again, we need not tarry at this point, except to note the possibility that a New Testament writer thinks of angels as created but others are not clear.

**Angels and Creation in the Hebrew Bible**

If one is to consider the development of Jewish thought about the origins of angels, naturally the place to begin is with the creation accounts in the Hebrew Bible. Though the accounts of Genesis 1-3 most naturally spring to mind, one must not overlook the several other creation texts in prophetic and wisdom literature. I wish to comment on these texts in terms of what they might say about the origins of angels. Here I follow the list of creation texts identified by Richard J. Clifford in his book *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (CBQMS 26; 1994). It is instructive to note that the word “angels” is absent from the subject index, so that gives us a hint as to how rarely they are mentioned in these traditions. In addition to the Genesis texts, Clifford considers passages from Psalms, Second Isaiah, Proverbs, and Job. There is nothing relevant to the origin of angels in Isaiah 40-55, so we may set that aside from the start.

**Genesis 1:1-2:3**

For many this is the classic biblical creation text, even if its place at the very beginning of the canon, much less its own book, does not mean that it is the oldest. We have already noted above its influence on the gospel of John. This text was rewritten in an important way by the
author of the book of *Jubilees* in the Second Temple period, as we will consider later. Its contours likely are familiar to everyone in this room, with six days of creation by fiat—three days spent creating habitats, if you will, followed by three days filling them with appropriate things—before a day of rest that later will be understood as modeling God’s command for sabbath. The word angel does not appear here, and God’s utterances are performative; God speaks, and things happen without the activity of subordinates. God is pleased with creation and pronounces it good.

This orderly account with its haunting serenity is interrupted somewhat jarringly on the sixth day in Gen 1:26 at the creation of humanity. Earlier in verse 2 either a breath or spirit of God had blown or hovered over the unharnessed waters, but now God suddenly speaks in the first-person plural: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” Form critics note that this account of the creation of humanity originally was independent of the rest of this unit, and the mechanics of creation do seem to differ here (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* 143). Interpreters have long debated this plural language, some dismissing it as a plural of majesty, others anachronistically finding a hint of the Christian Trinity.

Still others have found here a description of God addressing a divine council or a heavenly court, composed either of inferior gods or angels. Neither has yet appeared in the story, so internal cues offer little help. Their origins are not explained, so presumably they predate creation. Westermann, following Joüon, argues for a plural of deliberation, noting ancient Near Eastern parallels for a corporate decision before creating humanity. Yet he denies that the priestly editor could have sanctioned anything less than monotheism, and he asserts that angels are nowhere to be found in P traditions (144-45). Nevertheless he concludes, “The idea of a heavenly court may well be in the background; however it is not necessary for the explanation
and P could not have intended it to be so. The plural of deliberation in the cohortative is an attested and sufficient explanation” (145).

Others are more assertive about a court setting for such language, and Gordon Wenham notes that this has long been the standard Jewish position and one embraced by many critical scholars (Genesis 1-15 [WBC] 27). Here Mark Smith’s work is very helpful. Smith argues that ancient Israel inherited from Canaanite tradition a four-level heavenly pantheon. That model attested in Ugaritic texts had El and his wife (Athirat) at the top, divine children including Baal on the second level, specialized gods such as the craftsman Kothar on the third level, and divine workers such as messengers (angels), gatekeepers, and servants on the fourth. In the words of Smith, “The four levels of the pantheon correspond to different tiers of the divine household. The top two levels of the pantheon are occupied by the divine parents and their children, while the bottom two tiers of the pantheon consist of deities working in the divine household” (Memoirs of God 102). The important thing to note is that in the Canaanite conception, all these levels are occupied by divine beings. Elsewhere he considers what gods are in the Ancient Near East and opines that at the most basic level of definition, “to be divine is not to be human” (Origins of Biblical Monotheism 6). He notes various biblical texts in which YHWH appears in El’s court, such as Ps 82, where El officiates and YHWH stands to speak; or Deut 32:8-9, where YHWH as “divine son” of Elyon is assigned as god for Jacob’s family in the LXX and DSS manuscripts, but the MT has scrubbed this instead to speak of “sons of Israel” rather than divine sons, and by doing so assimilated YHWH and Elyon [Smith Origins 48-49], something similar to the assimilation of Abraham’s god with Melchizedek’s El Elyon in Gen 14. He also points out biblical texts where YHWH may be described with imagery familiar from Baal texts, such as various texts describing God’s arrival with thunder. As such, Smith argues that Israel took over
this basic Canaanite pantheon model, with El (and Asherah) on the top level, then a second level with Baal and Yahweh among several gods, a third level more difficult to define, and a fourth level with angels. Eventually El and YHWH are assimilated as Israel moves toward monotheism. The angels, occupying the fourth level, continue the functions held by lesser gods in Canaanite thought. By the time Gen 1 is written, the presentation has been fully domesticated to present God as without any legitimate challenger, as the forceful sea, sun, moon, planets, etc., have all been assigned their places in God’s creative order [Origins 170-71]. A court context remains for God, but clearly he is its sole leader.

**Genesis 2-11**

Clifford notes that Christian tradition normally has focused largely on chapters 2-3 of this passage as the creation and subsequent fall account, but he argues for considering all of Gen 2-11 as a creation account, in part because this passage on the formation of the nations parallels the subsequent chapters 12-50 and the formation of Israel; includes a post-flood recapitulation of Gen 1; and has a pattern of creation, offense, flood, and re-creation resembling that of numerous ancient extra-biblical creation accounts (144-45). One finds interwoven here numerous traditions normally ascribed to J and P, and the vivid, personal creation account of J in chapter 2 lacks any reference to angels. Cherubim are said in Gen 3:24 to guard against the return of Adam and Eve to Eden, though their relationship to angels is not explicit. Genesis 6:1-4, with its account of the illicit behavior of the “sons of God” and “daughters of men,” certainly is read in Second Temple Jewish traditions of the Watchers as concerning angels. But even if that reading is assumed for Genesis, the account is of their transgression, not their origins. Finally, in the
Babel account of Gen 11 one finds language similar to the “us” phenomenon of Genesis 1 addressed above.

**Wisdom Literature**

When one considers creation accounts in wisdom literature, perhaps pride of place goes to that of Proverbs 8, which addresses the role of personified Wisdom. Angels are not mentioned here, so this passage will not be a focus for today’s discussion, but I should comment very briefly that 8:22 may be read to say that Wisdom was created by God before the rest of creation, though the proper understanding of the verse is debated. Philo of Alexandria speaks frequently about Wisdom, sometimes assimilating Wisdom with the Logos and sometimes distinguishing them. Similarly, Philo can sometimes describe the Logos as an archangel, and he can describe the Logos as a created being.

More relevant for this investigation is the book of Job. One finds here members of a heavenly court who present themselves before God. They are called “sons of God” but not defined more specifically, and nothing is said of their origins. The antagonist is *ha-satan*, the Accuser, perhaps similar to the figure in Zechariah 3 and 1 Chronicles 21 [Conrad, “Satan,” *NIDB*] but not the Satan or even a fallen angel of later traditions. He is the *diabolos* in the LXX, but in that literature the term can refer to either a celestial or human being [Hamilton “Satan” *ABD* 5:986]. Some have suggested that the figure in Job is modeled on the Persian secret service, whose spies Herodotus described as traveling the empire undercover in order to report malfeasance to the king (Marvin Pope, *Job* [Anchor Bible] 10 1965 edition). Samuel Balentine (“Job,” *NIDB*) finds several features that confirm that the author was familiar with the Genesis
creation traditions, so presumably the heavenly court arrangement reflects in some sense that of Genesis 1.

Probably everyone here knows what happens in the book. A narrative framework presents the wealthy Job, devastated by the loss of children and possessions in a test to affirm his faithfulness to God, and what he has lost is restored in a sense by the end. Between lies a lengthy poetic core in which Job proclaims his righteousness, his friends repeatedly claim that surely some sin has prompted his suffering, and eventually God responds to Job’s accusations of unfair treatment. There God taunts Job with a rehearsal of creation to make the point that Job does not understand all things. In 38:4-7, one finds mention of the “sons of God”:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings [lit. “sons of God”] shouted for joy?

Here these figures are not said to have participated in creation but do cheer it, implying their existence preceded it. With such poetic language, though, it is unwise to try to be too precise about such things.

**Psalms**

Numerous psalms recount the glory of God’s creative activity, often as part of a broader rehearsal of salvation history. In such a vast corpus, however, mention of angels is relatively rare, whether in texts that recount the events of creation or otherwise. Lisowsky, for example, lists only eight occurrences of *mal’ak*, angel or messenger, in the entire collection book. For our purposes, only four psalms need be considered—Psalms 8, 33, 104, and 148—and this should be
done again with the reminder that numerous psalms rehearse or praise God’s creative acts without reference of any sort to angels.

The first of these four texts need be addressed only briefly. Humanity in Ps 8:6 is said to be created “a little lower than elohim,” which could denote either God, plural gods as in a court, or angels. While the Hebrew may mean that humans are a little less than divine or a little lower than God, the LXX rendering explicitly limits this to mean “angels.” Even if angels is deemed the preferred interpretation (as it must be when this is cited in Heb 2, via the LXX), it speaks only of the creation of humans and says nothing about creation of angels, i.e., it does not necessarily imply that they too are created.

In Ps 33:6-7 one reads, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.” The question here concerns the identity of the “host.” The Hebrew word tsaba’ may refer either to heavenly bodies or the heavenly entourage (or, for that matter, human armies, though that obviously is not reasonable here; HALOT 2:994-96). While in the next psalm we will consider, Ps 148, the “host” clearly is angelic, here the heavenly bodies better fit the context and parallelism. Kraus dates the psalm “relatively late” because of its acrostic form and finds echoes of Gen 1 (Psalms 1-59 375), further supporting the idea that the “host” here is not angelic.

Psalm 148 is a hymn of praise to God with a call for worship from the heavenly realm (vv. 1-6) and from earth (vv. 7-14; Clifford, Psalms 73-150 [AOTC] 311; also Weiser, Psalms [OTL] 748). Clifford dates it to the Second Temple period (311). Verses 1-6 read as follows:

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!
2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!
3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!
4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!
Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.
He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Like Ps 33, this hymn also seems to reflect awareness of Gen 1 or similar tradition, as is evident in the affirmation of creation by divine command and other things that echo that passage. For example, the opening call in the respective sections to “praise the LORD from the heavens” (v. 1) and “from the earth” (v. 7) reflects the Hebrew idiom of citing heaven and earth as representative of the entire universe (Clifford, Psalms 73-150 311-12). Clearly the angels are included in the heavenly realm, but one might question whether they denote the heavenly court of Gen 1 or else are associated with the elements explained as created in that account: sun, moon, stars, heavens, waters, etc., whose boundaries are fixed and established. It seems to go beyond the thought of this psalm—particularly if read in light of Gen 1:1-2:3—to apply the idea of boundaries to angels unless one finds here evidence of a development of thought that will indeed be present in Jubilee’s retelling of that creation story. For comparison, in Nehemiah 9:6 Joseph Blenkinsopp [Ezra-Nehemiah (OTL) 303] finds a similar reflection of the first Genesis creation account, especially the summary statement in 2:1, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude [lit. hosts].” In the first part of Nehemiah 9:6 one reads: “You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you.” Blenkinsopp does not comment on this last phrase, and admittedly later Jewish interpretation read the “host” in Gen 2:1 as angelic because the term may be used for angels elsewhere. But in Nehemiah, the word “hosts” seems to be used with two different meanings in this same context—God created the hosts, i.e. sun, moon, and stars, and for this was praised by the heavenly host, or angels.
This leaves Ps 104, which was addressed earlier in relation to its use in Hebrews. This is a lengthy psalm of 35 verses that draws on both Canaanite and Egyptian motifs to praise God for the creative work that allows for great bounty for all creatures. The first four verses are most important for our purposes:

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul.  
   O LORD my God, you are very great.  
   You are clothed with honor and majesty,  
   wrapped in light as with a garment.  
2 You stretch out the heavens like a tent,  
3 you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,  
   you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind,  
4 you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

The language reflects that of Ugaritic texts that praise Baal for his defeat of the sea and provision of fertility for the earth, themes subsequently addressed in this psalm (Clifford, Psalms 73-150, 148) and also present elsewhere in the book. The key part for us is that last line just quoted: “you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.” The word mal’ak appears in v. 4 and may be translated as either “angel” or “messenger.” Here the thrust is cosmic, stressing God’s control of the clouds, wind, and fire in God’s service. (Those influenced by 1970s soul music no doubt are disappointed that clouds were mentioned rather than earth!)

The NRSV translators, like those of the JPS and NAB, do not find here a reference to angels. James Kugel notes, however, that later interpreters will instead assume this is a reference to angels (Traditions of the Bible 49). Similarly, the other noun in the phrase, ruach, could be translated as wind or spirit, but the former best fits the context. If spirit, however, this might explain why some authors of Dead Sea Scrolls equated the terms angel and spirit. The LXX renders the Hebrew mal’ak as angelos, though technically this too may be defined broadly as messenger or specifically as angel, and ruach becomes pneuma. But whereas the syntax of the key phrase is admittedly ambiguous in the Hebrew, whether winds are made messengers/angels
or the later are made the former, in the Greek the angels are made winds (Attridge, *Hebrews* [Hermeneia] 57 n 83).

Clearly this use of *angelos* attracted the author of Hebrews to this verse, though it fits somewhat awkwardly in his construction. If it is legitimate to expect it to describe creation, rather it describes *changing*, not creating, angels. Nevertheless, this is a touchstone passage for this investigation, and it provides an instructive opportunity to consider other streams of interpretation of this text in subsequent literature in addition to the aforementioned Hebrews 1.

**Use of 104:4 in Second Temple Period Texts**

We have now surveyed several texts with creation themes, and these include the several texts sometimes cited as evidence that angels are viewed as created beings in the Hebrew Bible. I have argued above that none of these texts explicitly states that idea. Instead, it seems that ancient Israelites inherited the idea of angels as heavenly, divine beings from their Canaanite neighbors.

That said, it also is important to remember that ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters tended not to read texts in the same ways as modern historical-critical scholars. So, while these Hebrew Bible passages may mean one thing to modern scholars, they could mean multiple other things to ancient interpreters. As an example, numerous texts from the Second Temple period cite Ps 104:4, and brief consideration of their varieties of use of this verse is appropriate. Time does not permit careful consideration of contexts and dates for the texts about to be mentioned, and I am sure that Silviu can tell you all you might wish to know about each of them. Rather, the point now is to illustrate the diversity of approaches.
It is very clear that some writers in the Second Temple period read Ps 104:4 as describing the creation of angels. This is evident because angels are described as made of fire and often are associated with winds.

Perhaps *Jubilees* 2:2 is most explicit. In the context of recounting the 6-day creation model of Genesis 1, angels of various sorts are created on the first day, including angels of the presence, meteorologically-related angels, and “the angels of the spirit of fire, and the angels of the spirit of the winds” [*OTP* 2:55]. The statement about fire is not present in all manuscripts, but the related comment about winds still points to Ps 104:4. In terms of creation chronology, one might compare Sirach 16:26-30, which discusses God’s creation of his “created ones” before filling the earth (Kugel, *Traditions* 49).

Consider also a passage from a prayer of Baruch in *2 Baruch*. Speaking of God, he describes him as one “who rules with indignation the countless holy beings, who are flame and fire, whom you created from the beginning, those who stand around your throne” [*OTP* 1:628].

Again, the idea seems present in *2 Enoch* 29:3 [*OTP* 1:148, see esp. notes b, f], but dated to the second day [Kugel, *Traditions* 48]. One manuscript tradition reads:

J: “And from the rock I cut off a great fire, and from the fire I created the ranks of the bodiless armies—ten myriad angels—and their weapons are fiery and their clothes are burning flames. And I gave orders that each should stand in his own rank.” [Satanail and his angels subsequently booted from heavens for aspiring power like God’s] 

... and the other similarly:

A: “From the rock I cut off a great fire, and from the fire I crated all the armies of the bodiless ones, and all the armies of the stars and cherubim and seraphim and ophanim, and all these from the fire I cut out.”

Some other texts that need not be mentioned here related angels and fire in ways that likely point to similar thinking. On the other hand, some writers used Ps 104:4 quite differently, such as in 4 Ezra 8:21-22, which like Hebrews finds the idea of God’s power over angels but not
a statement about their creation. In a prayer of Ezra begging God’s mercy on creation, he
describes hosts of angels trembling before God as figures “at whose command they are changed
to wind and fire” [Syr; Latin “they whose service takes the form of wind and fire”] [OTP 1:542]

Data from the Dead Sea Scrolls must be nuanced significantly. One text, the Rule of the
Community, may reflect Ps 104 when the author writes in 1QS 3:15-17 that God created two
spirits, the Prince of Light (later called the “angel of his truth”) and the Angel of Darkness. The
possible reflection of Ps 104 concerns the synonymous use of angel and spirit. Collins cautions
about downplaying the roles of these figures because of their creation, however, writing that:
“The powers of these spirits or angels are clearly limited by the creator, but they are supernatural
powers nonetheless” (Collins, “Powers in Heaven,” in Collins & Kugler, Religion in the Dead
Sea Scrolls, 17).

Another passage, from the Hymn to the Creator in the scroll 11QPsalmsa (11Q5),
presents angels marveling at God’s creation, in a way reminiscent of the passage from Job
addressed earlier. The relevant line (bold) reads:

Col. XXVI (Hymn to the Creator) [from Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library]
  9. Great and holy is the Lord, a Holy of Holies for generation after generation. At His fore
  10. marches majesty, at His rear, the tumult of many waters. Lovingkindness and truth
      surround His face, truth,
  11. justice and righteousness uphold His throne. Darkness He divides from light, preparing the
      dawn with the knowledge of
  12. His heart. When all His angels saw, they rejoiced in song—for He had shown them
      what they knew not:
  13. decking out the mountains with food, vacat fine sustenance for all who live. Blessed be He
      who
  14. by His might created the earth, who by His wisdom established the world. By His
      understanding He stretched forth the heavens and brought out
  15. [the wind] from [His] trea[sure stores.] He created [lightning for the rain] in and [from] the
      end of [the earth] made vapour[s] to rise.

Drawing assumptions from Dead Sea Scrolls materials is difficult for numerous reasons,
including their fragmentary preservation. While I agree with the majority opinion that the scrolls
were the library of the Qumran sect, still their contents include texts that were not necessarily sectarian and which came from outside the community. The sect faced numerous historical situations that likely influenced changes in their own thought, as is frequently argued to explain the variety of messianic expectations in their documents. As such, caution is necessary about defining the Qumran view on angels. Again, Collins reminds us well that at Qumran—as in the Hebrew Bible itself—terms normally used for divinity may also be applied to angels. Melchizedek, the priestly angel and warrior like Michael elsewhere in the Qumran corpus, is *elohim* in 11QMelchizedek, for example, and scholarly efforts to say his name is applied to God in this document have fallen short. In a quotation from Ps 82:1 he becomes the *elohim* figure who stands in the assembly of El, and later in the text one seems to find the statement “your God (*elohim*) is Melchizedek” (I speak cautiously on the latter because of the damage to the manuscript). As Collins notes, “Elohim is a lesser deity, an angel, if you prefer. But the striking thing about the passage is that the term Elohim, which is usually understood to refer to the Most High in the biblical psalm [Ps 82], now refers to a lesser heavenly being” (“Powers in Heaven,” 19).

Certainly other texts could be cited, but those considered already serve to illustrate the situation and in a way bring us full circle, both to Hebrews and the questions raised earlier about the nature of Melchizedek in that book, and to Mark Smith’s statement that “to be divine is not to be human.” In what sense are angels divine? Can Greco-Roman divinity language be applied to angels even if many—but not all—of Second Temple Jewish interpreters came to the conclusion that angels were created from fire, and even if the language is applied imprecisely in regard to the creation issue? I thank you in advance for your comments and suggestions.