

Cherubim and Seraphim

Our English word "angel" comes from the Greek word "angelos". The Hebrew word "Malakh" from the Old Testament and the Greek word "angelos" from the New Testament are the two words that are translated as "angel" in the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Both the Hebrew and the Greek originals mean "messenger".

Hence anyone in the role or function of a messenger can be termed an "angel".

- 1) Men can become angels for Satan (2 Nephi 6:20-21, Jacob 2:65)
- 2) David is described as an angel (1 Samuel 29:9, 2 Samuel 19:27)
- 3) Jesus Christ is an angel (Exodus 3:1-6, John 17:8)
- 4) A spiritual personage can be believed to be an angel (3 Nephi 5:9-11)

However there is a creation of beings perhaps more accurately referred to as the "heavenly host" that most are thinking of when they refer to "angels". They have many roles and functions of which being a messenger is only part. We know from scripture that there are "archangels" – which means "chief angel" and that certain angels seem to have different strengths; Michael is a warrior for God (Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7-9; Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1) and Gabriel is a true "angel" in that he appears to be a messenger (Daniel 8:15-17; 9:21-22; Luke 1:19; 1:26-33; Luke 2:9-14?).

Among these members of the heavenly host we read of Cherubim and Seraphim. Cherub is the singular form of the word and Cherubim is the plural, although some translators have added the plural "s" and written Cherubims.

Cherub is a unique word of unknown roots or meaning and is believed to be the name for a group of similar beings such as human, dog, cat etc. Its only use in the New Testament is in Hebrews 9:5 and it is not a Greek word like the rest of the text, but the original Hebrew word from the Old Testament scripture interjected into the text. The word is only translated as Cherub, Cherubim or Cherubims and is not used for any other word or meaning in scripture.

In the Garden of Eden, we are told that Cherubim guard the tree of life so that man might not partake of it (Genesis 3:22-24, Alma 9:34-39, Alma 19:82-83). In Alma 19:83 we are told that the Cherubim were not placed there merely as a barrier, but in a function to ensure that "he should not partake of the fruit".

In Exodus, the Lord gives specific instructions concerning the Ark of the Covenant, which includes images of Cherubim over the Ark, facing each other with their wings spread over the Ark. Certainly the Ark had great powers attributed to it. When Israel carried it properly into battle with them, they were victorious and when their enemies had control of it, great misfortune came upon them and yet they did not destroy the Ark. Also there were specific instructions about the care of the Ark that had consequences for failing to properly execute. Numbers 4:4-15 & 7:9 - it was to be carried by the sons of Kohath. Exodus 25:14-15 & Numbers 4:5-8 - prohibited from being carried on a cart. Numbers 4:15 - not to be touched by human hands.

We find in both Second Samuel 6:6-7 and First Chronicles 13:9-10 that when the Ark of the Covenant was being transported contrary to the will of God i.e., being carried on a cart pulled by oxen and it began to tip over that Uzzah lost his life when he touched it in an attempt to steady it.

The children of Israel were forbidden from having molten images and the images of these Cherubim over the Ark would have been very unique and special and would seem to be symbolic of actual Cherubim being given charge of the Ark of the Covenant as they were given charge of guarding the tree of life. Their wings stretched out over the Ark would indicate their protecting role even as Christ said He would have for Jerusalem (Luke 13:34).

The Ark of the Covenant was symbolic of the Lord being with Israel and scripture tells us that the Lord dwelt between the Cherubim (2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalms 80:1; Psalms 99:1; Numbers 7:89).

The Cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant were made according to the instructions of the Lord and it says that they were winged. It does not state the number of wings, but when Solomon built his temple, it had large Cherubim images and it would be most probable that they were copied from the Ark and it says that they had two wings: (First Kings 6:23-28 and First Kings 8:7)

Cherubim are also mentioned in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 8:1-4 we learn that Ezekiel is having a vision and what is recorded in the following chapters is that vision. We find the details of the Cherubim in Ezekiel 10:1-22. In verse 14 we are told that they each had four faces, that of a cherub, man, lion and eagle and in verse 21 it states that they had four wings.

We are told in verses 15, 20 and 22 that these are the same creatures that he saw at the river Chebar. We find the description of that experience in Ezekiel 1:1-28. Although not called Cherubim in the first chapter of Ezekiel, both verses 1 and 3 tell us that this occurred by the river Chebar and the description is very similar. In verse Ezekiel 1:10 we are also told that they each had four faces, but they are a little differed, that of a man, lion, ox and eagle. Verse 4 says that they each had four wings although verse 23 almost sounds as if six wings are seen: one set stretched outward with two additional wings on each side with which they covered themselves.

We find that the creatures described in Revelation 4:6-9 to be very similar. The word "beasts" found in this scripture actually means "living creature", consistent with what we read in Ezekiel. Here there are four present, each with a different face: that of a lion, calf, man and eagle and have six wings.

This leaves us with two possibilities:

1) Cherubim are very differed in appearance, having very distinctive features from one another, or:

2) What is described in Exodus is their actual appearance and what is described in both Ezekiel and Revelation is not their actual physical appearance but a symbolic representation of their authority, power and abilities as portrayed in a vision.

In either case, we do find it very consistent in their roles. They are the direct attendants of God and guard that which is entrusted in their care, i.e.; the tree of life, the Ark of the Covenant and the throne of God etc.

Seraphim are only mentioned in Isaiah 6:1-7 and Second Nephi 9:1-7 (pages 123-124), which is a quote of Isaiah 6:1-7.

Unlike the word Cherubim, which is a unique word; Seraphim is a descriptive word meaning "fiery, burning or glowing". It is Strong's #8314 which is the same word that we find translated as "fiery" in Numbers 21:6-9, Deuteronomy 8:15, Isaiah 14:29 and Isaiah 30:6.

Seraphim are described in Isaiah 6:2 as having six wings, much like the creatures described in Revelation 4:6-9. In Isaiah 6:3, they cry "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts" much like the cry of the creatures in Revelation 4:8.

In Isaiah one of the Seraphim took a coal from the alter to purge Isaiah's lips, much like Cherubim in Ezekiel 10:2 that scattered coals over the city.

The word Seraphim means "fiery, burning or glowing", which matches the description of the Cherubim in Ezekiel 1:13-14.

This leaves us with two possibilities:

1) Cherubim and Seraphim are very similar in appearance and function or:

2) Seraphim is not the name of a group of celestial beings, but rather a descriptive word of their appearance and what is being described are actually Cherubim. The differences between Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation are not contradictions, but rather they are symbolic portrayals of Cherubim's powers, roles and abilities and hence in each instance emphasize their role in the circumstance portrayed.

While we may not fully understand this while in this, Cherubim and Seraphim are so similar in appearance and roles that it would be impossible to differentiate between them and most likely they are in fact the same group of the heavenly host, but quite different from others.

Characteristics and/or qualities of Cherubim/Seraphim:

1) Four

Four beasts - Revelation 4:6

Four living creatures - Ezekiel 1:5

Four faces - Ezekiel 1:6; 1:10; 10:14; 10:21 Revelation 4:7

Four wings - Ezekiel 1:6; 10:21

- 2) Throne of God
 - Around the throne - Revelation 4:6
 - Above the throne - Isaiah 6:2
 - under the throne - Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1; 10:19-20

- 3) Eyes
 - Full of eyes before and behind - Revelation 4:6
 - Wings are full of eyes - Revelation 4:8
 - Rings are full of eyes - Ezekiel 1:18
 - Body, backs, hands, wings, and wheels are full of eyes - Ezekiel 10:12

- 4) Faces
 - Each of 4 beasts has a different face: lion, calf, man, eagle - Rev 4:7
 - Each had four faces - Ezekiel 1:6; 10:21
 - Each has four faces: man, lion, ox, eagle - Ezekiel 1:10
 - Each has four faces: cherub, man, lion, eagle - Ezekiel 10:14

- 5) Wings
 - Four wings - Ezekiel 1:6; 10:21
 - Four wings: two stretched out and two covered their bodies - Eze 1:11
 - Six wings - Isaiah 6:2; Revelation 4:8
 - Six wings: two for flight, two cover face, two cover feet - Isaiah 6:2
 - Six wings: two straight and four cover bodies - Ezekiel 1:23
 - Wings lowered when the Lord spoke - Ezekiel 1:25

- 6) Rest not, day or night - Revelation 4:8

- 7) Proclaim: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord..." - Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8

- 8) Coals
 - Remove live coals from the altar to purge Isaiah's lips - Isaiah 6:6-7
 - Scatter coals of fire over the city - Ezekiel 10:2

- 9) Similar to man
 - Likeness of man - Ezekiel 1:5
 - Hands of a man - Ezekiel 1:8; 10:8

- 10) Continually straight, do not turn - Ezekiel 1:9; 1:11-12; 1:17; 10:22

- 11) Go where the spirit leads - Ezekiel 1:12; 1:20

- 12) Have a bright appearance - Ezekiel 1:13-14

- 13) Wheels

Wheels are upon the earth by the living creatures - Ezekiel 1:15
Wheel in a wheel - Ezekiel 1:16; 10:10
Wheels leave the earth with the creatures - Ezekiel 1:19&21; 10:16-17&19
Wheels under the Cherubim - Ezekiel 10:2
Wheels by each Cherub - Ezekiel 10:9

It would appear that whatever their appearance are, that Cherubim/Seraphim are guardians and watch over and protect that which God has entrusted to their care. It is also important to realize that Satan was a Cherub. In Ezekiel 28:1-19, Ezekiel compares the sins of the king of Tyre with the sins of Satan and says that Satan was "the anointed cherub" that was lifted up and corrupted by his "beauty" and "brightness". Isaiah makes a similar comparison between the king of Babylon and Satan in Isaiah 14:3-23. Here we learn of Satan's name before his fall: Lucifer, which means "Day Star or light bearer" and therefore it should come as no surprise that he can appear as "an angel of light". After his fall, Lucifer became known as Satan "adversary" or the devil "slanderer."

A dream received by Priest Glenn Orsted
December 16, 2000

In the early hours of December 16, 2000 I experienced a dream that I believe to be the answer to prayer. I had spent many hours studying the scriptures concerning God's wondrous kingdom and its heavenly host for this study. During the course of this study I had listened to many thoughts and ideas presented during the class. As we studied this section about Cherubim and Seraphim, as a class we had concluded that what was being described as Cherubim and Seraphim were really the same beings and/or creatures and that what is described in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation, was not an actual description of their real appearance, but rather visions with symbolic representations of their powers, authorities and abilities.

With this understanding I desired to know the meanings of all these faces, wings, eyes and wheels. There are certainly many thoughts and ideas about what they represent and numerous commentaries to explain them, but often differing from one another. Having prayed frequently for an understanding as to which interpretation(s) were correct, I slept during the early morning hours of December 16, 2000 and saw the following dream:

I saw what I can only describe as a sphere, but it was not solid. It had portions moving in different directions opposite of one another all at the same time. As I watched, it transformed into a wheel spinning inside rings at 90 degrees to one another, much like a gyroscope. As I continued to watch, it changed first into a spinning wheel, then into gears spinning with interlocking teeth and finally to a set of pulleys with ropes and/or chords moving through them.

As I saw these pulleys in motion, the scene changed to a spectacular view of the universe with all its stars and galaxies and then changed to our solar system with its sun, planets and moons all in continual perfect motion. I then saw our planet earth, perfectly suspended in space, moving around the sun as the moon circled our little planet. I next saw the abundant life on earth in perfect harmony, sustaining each other and each portion

was created by what appeared to be billions upon billions of atoms, looking much like a microscopic solar system.

There was suddenly a bright and brilliant flash of white and I saw a hand outstretched holding the sphere that I had originally seen, still in motion. I could only see the hand and the forearm that held the sphere, but not the person behind. A brilliant being approached the outstretched hand holding the sphere. He had the appearance of a man in that he had a face, arms, hands and legs, but seemed to emit light and glow and had six wings from the back all outstretched, easily three to four times the width of the body and the upper wings raised high above the head and the lower extended down to the feet.

As I watched this being, he approached the hand outstretched with the sphere, but then turned and departed, leaving the sphere behind. As I continued to watch another being similar to the first approached the sphere. This one also had the appearance of a man and radiated light, but only had two wings that were outstretched to the sides and was clothed in a long robe.

This being had the face of a man and held out his hands before him cupped together. The hand holding the sphere placed it in the cupped hands of this being. As he held the sphere in his hands, his face changed to that of a lion. He then turned and began to move away from the outstretched hand. As he did so, his face turned to that of an ox, and that which I had presumed to be a long robed opened to become four additional wings and with the six open wings he flew over the earth and continued to until his face changed to that of an eagle and then he flew from the earth back to the outstretched hand, folded all six wings and covered himself, bowed before the outstretched hand and returned the sphere to the outstretched hand at which time I immediately awoke.

Although I heard no words spoken during the dream, I felt that I knew what I was witnessing. I believe that the sphere was representative of more than just creation, but also of all the laws of nature and physics that keep our universe working. There are certainly forces at work that we do not understand, but they are consistent so that we can plan and use them. An example is that all material is made up of atoms with moving parts that do not touch one another. If you think about it, there is no reason for anything to be solid, because everything is composed of non-connecting parts, but they attract to one another at constant force that we can calculate and use such as the strength of wood, versus steel or concrete for construction. Likewise, man has never built a perpetual motion machine, but we live in a perpetual motion universe. Our planet, the moon, the sun and the stars are in continual motion in a constant path. No one really understands how the earth continues to spin on its axis at a constant rate or circles the sun on a constant path nor the moon or other planets, but they do and at a constant, predictable rate that can be planned and studied.

I believe that is what the sphere represented and is the counterpart of the wheels seen by Ezekiel. I believe that the first creature which turned away, was Satan. Ezekiel 28:14 tells us that Satan was a Cherub and I believe that the image with his wings outstretched was symbolic of Satan's arrogance and pride that would not allow him to take the responsibility offered to him. As the next one approached, he had one set of wings open, but not lifted up above. Rather they were extended to the side, while he covered himself with the others. I believe this is representative of his humility and readiness to serve and is the counterpart of Ezekiel 1:11&23&25; Isaiah 6:2.

When he first approached the outstretched hand, he had the face and appearance of a man and probably is closest to his true appearance. After all man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and it would seem that something created between God and man, both of which have a similar image and to which man will eventually become like (Matthew 22:30 & Luke 20:36); would have a similar appearance; i.e., that of a man.

When this being was given the sphere, I believe that it was symbolic of him being given the responsibility for the care and maintenance of the universe with all its unknown workings that we are so dependent on (Genesis 2:1). This would be consistent with appearance of the number four in both Ezekiel and Revelation with the number of creatures and the number of faces. Through the scriptures four has been recognized as the number representative of creation; i.e., the four corners, the four winds etc.

The sphere would then be the counterpart of Ezekiel's wheels and be consistent with the wheels being under the Cherubim (Ezekiel 10:2) and the wheels being upon the earth (Ezekiel 1:15) and the spirit of the creatures being in the wheels (Ezekiel 1:20-21 & 10:17). It has long been thought by many that the wheels represented the working of God. Although not inaccurate, it includes even more, namely the maintenance of God's creation and all the unknown forces that allow it to continue.

Ezekiel 1:19&21; 10:16-17&19 describes the wheels periodically being removed from the earth and in fact there have been times where the laws of nature and physics have been suspended for a time for God's purposes, i.e.; the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21) and Joshua's day (Joshua 10:12-14).

When this personage received the sphere, his face turned to that of a lion. The scriptures use the lion as a symbol of power and authority and I believe the change represented the authority given to the creature to maintain creation. When he turned to go about the work, his face turned to that of an ox, a creature known for its strength and endurance with a heavy load, symbolizing, the creature's ability to perform the labor.

If this is what was entrusted to the being, it would then be understandable why they could not rest day or not (Revelation 4:8) and must always go straight and turn not (Ezekiel 1:9,12,17; 10:11,22) or else our universe would disintegrate, without any constant laws to maintain it. They must not turn (change) or rest (cease to maintain).

Being entrusted with this great care, it would follow that they must need be full of eyes (Ezekiel 1:18; 10:12; Revelation 4:6,8) so that can be all seeing. Not all knowing as with God who knows all the future (Matthew 24:36 & Mark 13:32), but all seeing i.e.: aware of all that occurs in this physical world that has been entrusted in their care.

Finally the face turned to that of an eagle, a majestic bird that can soar above this world and sail on open wings seemingly without effort. Though they are watching over and maintaining our world, they are not bound by it, further symbolized by their wings. They do not need a savior but can return before the throne of God, never having been separated (Ezekiel 1:12,20). I believe the end of the dream showed the end of this mortal world in that the creature folding all of his wings (the work was done) and returned the sphere (back to its creator).

It would seem that Cherubim are very special. They attend the throne of God, above, below and around it. They secure the most treasured of God's possessions i.e.; the

tree of life, the Ark of the Covenant and Creation itself. Though it is not clear exactly what they look like, we know more about their abilities, responsibilities and characteristics than any of the rest of the heavenly host. And they do it all voluntarily without rest day or night. We know voluntarily, because Satan chose another course.

There is no indication that they ever function in the role of an "Angel" i.e.; a "messenger". Rather they are the guardians of God's holy possessions.