

# Higher Orders of Celestial Beings— Angelic Princes, Cherubim, and Seraphim

## Introduction

In Holy Angels — Parts 1 and 2, we looked at God’s messengers that are without sin and will remain so eternally because they did not choose to follow Satan. Now we are going to examine the higher orders of celestial beings—angelic princes, cherubim, and seraphim. As we move through this Essentials teaching, keep in mind that cherubim and seraphim are celestial “creatures” and not angels. This distinction will become increasingly clear by the time we reach the conclusion.

## Angelic Organization

The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian church:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers [principalities], against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10–12)

The Greek noun, translated here in English as “rulers” or “principalities” in some other Bible versions, is *arche* which means “beginning” or “first.” The usage here implies the first place in a dominion of rule. Paul used it here as a leadership classification for the invisible organization of evil angelic forces.

The use of the English word “*principality*” in some translations is interesting because it implies that there are evil angelic “princes” with specific realms of authority delegated by Satan. Recall Satan’s interaction with Jesus in the wilderness:

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” (Luke 4:5–7)

Satan took one-third of the angels with him when he fell. One can thus imagine him delegating realms of authority to various evil spirits. Daniel's recorded experiences affirm such notions.

## The Great Prince

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, Daniel had the following experience:

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, and his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. ... So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face on the ground. (10:4–6, 8–9)

After comparing the following account from the apostle John, it is clear that Daniel saw the Lord Jesus Christ:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (Revelation 1:12–18)

Daniel's vision of the Lord was followed by an angel coming to him with the following message:

"Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me

twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.

"And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him. And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. (Daniel 10:12–14, 20–21, 11:1–2)

What can we learn from Daniel’s awesome experience?

- Daniel was seeking to understand God’s will. The angel Gabriel had visited him a few years before and declared to him the prophecy of the 70 weeks. Daniel seems to have been praying for more understanding concerning what would happen to his people. Daniel’s (partial) fasting and prayer led to an angelic dispatch with conflict in the heavenly realm. The arrival of the angelic dispatch and the subsequent prophecies (answers to Daniel’s prayerful questions) came as an accompaniment to the revelation of the Lord Jesus. *This shows us that when a righteous believer makes a serious commitment to seeking and following the will of God in Christ, real actions are taken in the spiritual realm.*
- This angelic messenger is not named, but Daniel told us that he is “one having the appearance of a man” (10:18). This angel seems to have a specific task of influencing the rise and fall of kingdoms in accordance with “the book of truth” which I would say is the will of God already inscribed in heaven. He mentioned that “in the first year of Darius the Mede” he “stood up to confirm and strengthen him.” Why was this relevant? Darius the Mede was a title for Cyrus the Great. The “first year of Darius the Mede” was the first year of the Persian Empire, being firmly established after the fall of Babylon. The ruling family of this empire would be responsible for commissioning the rebuilding of the temple and supporting the return of the exiled Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This angel confirmed and strengthened Darius the Mede because it was God’s will to end the Babylonian empire at this time and raise up the Persian empire.

- Satan has a head prince or principality assigned to rule every kingdom. Here it is revealed that there *is* a prince of Persia and a prince of Greece. Angelic beings cannot die (see [Holy Angels—Part 2](#)) so these princes still rule Iran and Greece today, no doubt in a weakened state.<sup>1</sup>
- The angel stated, “The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but *Michael one of the chief princes*, came to help me” and “I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. ...*there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.*” Later on, he would tell Daniel, “At that time shall arise *Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people*” (12:1; emphasis mine). Michael is the prince over Israel, but he is a holy angel.

## Michael

We are told that Michael is “one of the chief princes.” The Hebrew word, translated here in English as “chief,” is *ri'shown* which means “first in order or rank.” This implies that Michael is simply one of the princes over a nation or kingdom (Israel) or that he is one of a select group of a higher order of angelic princes or both. The angel later referred to him as “the great prince” which could even mean that he is the highest ranking angelic prince. The book of Jude and the book of Revelation imply this. Consider the following verses:

But when the *archangel* Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” (Jude 1:9; emphasis mine)

Now war arose in heaven, *Michael and his angels* fighting against the dragon [Satan]. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. (12:7–8; emphasis mine)

Archangel means “chief angel.” Michael is the only angel the Bible specifically refers to as an archangel. John’s wording in the above verse, “Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon,” implies that Michael is the head of the holy angels (and perhaps the most powerful of all angels).

Michael’s leadership aligns with the fact that God formed Israel to be His chosen people and the nation His Son would come through and will eventually return to rule the earth

through. These verses give us glimpses of Michael fighting to establish God's will for Israel, an essential component of His greater plan for man.

The angel told Daniel, "there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael." It could be that Michael is the only prince over a nation (Israel) that is not aligned with Satan. Is it any wonder that Israel is generally opposed by almost all nations today? And those whom would aid it are generally those that have a strong Christian heritage or at least a sensitivity to Biblical reverence.

The only other angel that the Bible mentions by name is Gabriel. We do not know if he is one of the great princes. He did tell Zechariah, "I stand in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19) and in Revelation 8:2 we learn that there are "seven angels who stand before God." Thus, Gabriel is likely one of these seven and Michael could be another one of the seven. Perhaps there are seven holy archangels and these are it. This is speculation on my part. What we do know to some extent is that God has an angelic organization with higher ranking leaders.

## **Cherubim**

A cherub (cherubim is plural) is a different type of celestial being. The cherubim are creatures—*not* angels—that carry the throne of God and cover God's *Shechinah* Glory presence. Because they dwell the closest to God's throne of all celestial beings, some Bible teachers consider them to be the highest order of celestial beings. Throughout the Bible, the cherubim are always associated with the presence of God.

Cherubim first appear in the Bible at the fall of man. We are told:

He [God] drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

The English word translated "placed" in this verse is the Hebrew verb *shakan* which means "to settle down, abide, dwell, tabernacle, or reside." It is the Hebrew root word for *Shechinah*, the Hebrew word for the visible manifestation of God's presence. The same word appears in Exodus 25:8 when God said, "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell [*shakan*] in their midst."

In his [Commentary on the Book of Genesis](#), Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, described this event as follows:

He actually placed two guards in front of the entrance. The first guard was *the Cherubim*, members of the highest order of created beings. They are frequently associated with the *Shechinah* Glory. However, the second guard was the *Shechinah* Glory itself: *the flame of a sword*. ... So now, this visible *Shechinah* Glory, the visible manifestation of the presence of God, was no longer a means of fellowship; but it was there to keep man out of the garden. So it remained, apparently, until the Flood; and with the Flood, the Garden of Eden disappeared. Since the entry to the Garden of Eden had this visible manifestation of God's presence, this may very well have been the place of sacrifice before the Flood. Because man brought his sacrifices to a specific place, this would be the logical place to bring them. The gate of the garden was on the *east* side of the Garden. By the same token, the entryway to the Tabernacle, the gate of the doorway of the Tabernacle faced east in front of the Tabernacle and the Altar of Sacrifice. The gate of the Garden of Eden faced east, and before it there may very well have been the place of sacrifice.

It seems like a bit of a stretch to affirm that the "the flame of a sword" was the *Shechinah* Glory, but in light of the rest of the Old Testament, the fact that the cherubim remained there with it certainly gives credence to this view. Cherubim are consistently found covering the *Shechinah* Glory.

Dr. Fruchtenbaum's postulation that the closed off entrance to the Garden of Eden "may very well have been the place of sacrifice before the Flood" is fascinating. We know that God had also just killed at least one animal—probably a lamb—to make clothing for Adam and Eve. My assertion that it was probably a lamb is backed up by the fact that Abel is later seen offering the firstborn of his flock of sheep, hence repeating a pattern shown to his parents. Here at the earliest stage of man's fall we have God demonstrating that the blood of a lamb was required to cover their sin. It makes sense that the flaming sword may have indeed served as an "altar" for early man to receive atonement for his sin.

Concerning the ark of the covenant, God told Moses:

"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I

will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exodus 25:17–22)

How did Moses know what the cherubim looked like? God showed him when he was on Mount Sinai. We know this because God told Moses:

“Exactly *as I show you* concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.” (Exodus 25:9; emphasis mine)

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews reaffirms this and explains that the tabernacle was a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things”:

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest [Jesus Christ], one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” (8:1–5)

God’s presence previously dwelt (*Shechinah*) above the mercy seat between the cherubim in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle and then later in the temple. Since this was a copy of the heavenly pattern, we know that the role of cherubim is to cover the *Shechinah* Glory presence of God. Also, because of the description God gave Moses, we know that cherubim do have wings, unlike the angels.

Finally, the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ pulls back the curtain on the true tabernacle (temple) in heaven:

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. (11:19)

It is later revealed in Revelation that the throne of God resides *within* the temple of God in heaven:

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, *and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne*, saying, “It is done!” And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. (16:17–18; emphasis mine)

(See also Psalm 11:4, Isaiah 6:1, and Revelation 7:15.)

When King Solomon built the first temple, he made two large cherubim in the inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant of the LORD was to be placed:

In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. Five cubits was the length of one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the length of the other wing of the cherub; it was ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other. The other cherub also measured ten cubits; both cherubim had the same measure and the same form. The height of one cherub was ten cubits, and so was that of the other cherub. He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house. And the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; their other wings touched each other in the middle of the house. And he overlaid the cherubim with gold. (1 Kings 6:23–28)

The inner sanctuary was only twenty cubits wide so the combined wingspan of these two cherubim would have stretched the entire length of it.

Solomon also had engraved figures of cherubim (along with palm trees and open flowers) carved on the walls and doors throughout the temple. Everything was overlaid with gold. It would have been a marvelous sight to see.

## **Ezekiel's Powerful Visions**

Other than the description given Moses for the building of the tabernacle, which was later repeated and enhanced by Solomon, the only Bible passages that describe the cherubim come from the explosive revelations of Ezekiel's visions. Here is an excerpt from his dramatic first vision when God initially called him to prophesy to Israel:

As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four



faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl. And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings.

And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as

it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:4–28)

There were four cherub in the combined group of cherubim that Ezekiel saw. Each had a human likeness and each had a four-sided head with four different faces on each side. They each had a human face in the front, the face of a lion on the right, the face of an ox on the left, and the face of an eagle in the rear. Each had four wings, two of which covered their bodies and two of which touched each other, and human hands under their wings. They had straight legs with hooves.

Ezekiel tells us later in his book (10:15, 20) that the living creatures he described here are cherubim. He apparently did not know at the time that these were cherubim. How did he come to find out?

Ezekiel was a priest so he would have been familiar with the cherubim decorating the temple. However, the verses in the Bible explaining the construction of the tabernacle and (later) the temple, give us no reason to conclude that the cherubim decorating the temple had more than one face and more than two wings. Why then would Ezekiel classify the multi-faced cherub he saw with these? Of course, God may have simply given him this understanding during his visions which would affirm that the classification “cherubim” includes different kinds. As I pondered this over the course of several days, I finally realized why Ezekiel may have made this connection. It could have been because the cherubim decorating the temple and the actual cherubim he saw, although they were apparently different kinds, *both had wings*. Our culture has been so indoctrinated in the false concept of angels (messengers) having wings that we tend to conceptualize cherubim as angels, but they are not. There was no reason for an ancient Hebrew prophet like Ezekiel to have held this unbiblical misconception. The only celestial creatures with wings in his frame of reference were the cherubim. This is persuading to me, yet there is still another explanation.

In Ezekiel’s subsequent vision where the Spirit took him to Jerusalem, he again saw the cherubim. He told us these were the same ones he saw during the first vision (previously described in detail):

These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the Chebar canal; and I knew that they were cherubim. Each had four faces, and each had four wings, and underneath their wings the likeness of human hands. *And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Chebar canal.* Each one of them went straight forward. (10:20–22; emphasis mine)

Ezekiel noted that “as for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the Chebar canal” which were human, lion, ox, and eagle (1:10). However, just a few verses prior to this he described them as follows:

And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. (10:14)

Ezekiel told us that the four faces he saw the second time on each cherub—cherub, human, lion, and eagle—were the same as the four faces he saw the first time on each cherub—human, ox, lion, and eagle. He thus interchanged “cherub” and “ox.” There is only one logical conclusion we can make here: *the face of the cherub looks like an ox.* This would also perhaps explain why; “Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot.”

One of the main aspects of Ezekiel’s vision where he was taken to Jerusalem by the Spirit (8:1 - 11:25) was him witnessing the *Shechinah* Glory (“the glory of the LORD”) leaving the temple as the wickedness of God’s people had reached the full measure. Ezekiel described this as follows:

Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. ... Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city. (10:18–19; 11:22–23)

Recall that Ezekiel had explained in the account of his first vision that:

“Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse their

wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. ... And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne ...”

This expanse is some sort of foundation for the throne of God. The cherubim stretch out their wings, “one toward another” to carry the expanse of the throne. Since the ox is known for its great strength it would make sense if the face of a cherub is the face of an ox. One of the primary roles of cherubim in the Bible is to uphold and carry this expanse underlying God’s throne.

In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John described this expanse as, “a sea of glass, like crystal” (4:6) which was similar to Ezekiel’s description of it “shining like awe-inspiring crystal.” The cherubim are not referenced at all in the book of the Revelation. *My suspicion is that this is because they were beneath this expanse at the time and thus not visible to John.*

## **Satan is a Cherub**

Ezekiel’s prophetic book also reveals to us that *Satan is a cherub*. Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning the king of Tyre in the 28th chapter shifts to a prophecy concerning Satan which includes the following description:

You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed [banished] you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. (14–16)

The English word “anointed” is the Hebrew word *mimshach* which means “expansion.” This is the only time *mimshach* appears in the Old Testament and the implied meaning in this context is “extended wings.” The English word “guardian” is the Hebrew *cakak* which means “cover, block, overshadow, screen, stop the approach, or shut off.” *Cakak* is used in Exodus to describe how the wings of the cherubim “overshadow” the mercy seat (25:20, 37:9) and also to describe how the veil was used to “screen” the ark (40:3, 21).

Recall that God “placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to *guard* the way to the tree of life.” In addition to carrying the throne of God, the cherubim apparently have a guardian relationship with respect to the presence of God. In fact, the terms “shadow of your wings” and “shelter of your wings” are commonly used in the

Psalms as a reference to the presence of God (see 17:8, 36:7, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7). This also comes out in the beautiful and powerful Psalm 91 where we are told: “He will cover you with his pinions [feathers], and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler” (4).

Satan remains a cherub, but no longer an anointed guardian of the throne of God.

In *Angelology: The Doctrine of the Elect Angels*, Dr. Fruchtenbaum pointed out: In Ezekiel 28:14–16, it states that Satan was a *cherub* when he was created. In fact, he was *the anointed cherub*. Just as Michael was the archangel, the one in authority over all the other angels, Satan was the arch-cherub, the one in authority over all the other *cherubim*. Since the *cherubim* are the highest order, and with Satan’s being the arch-cherub, this made him of a higher category than Michael.

Dr. Fruchtenbaum refers to cherubim as the highest order of celestial beings based on the premise that their apparent “guardian” role at the throne of God puts them in closest proximity to Him. Here is how he explained it:

Whereas the *seraphim* surround the throne, the *cherubim* actually carry the throne and also cover it from above. Because the *cherubim* bear and carry the throne of God, this is the reason why it is stated that God is the One who sits *above the cherubim*. The cherubim, then, are closely related to the throne of God; this closer proximity to the throne itself is the reason they are of a higher order than the *seraphim*.

I want to emphasize that specific “orders” or rankings of celestial beings is *not* a clear, affirmative Biblical concept. It is *presumed* based on the limited information we have from a few verses.

It is interesting to consider that if a cherub face indeed looks like an ox, then Satan could potentially look like an ox or perhaps did so before he fell. Including the human-like characteristics of the cherub, *Satan could potentially even resemble something that looks like a minotaur with wings* and maybe even have horns! Notably, the statue of Satan used by [The Satanic Temple of Detroit](#) is of a human-like figure having a goat head with horns and wings. Such a view of Satan starts to gain traction when one considers how prominent the worship of gods resembling bulls or horned goats, such as molech, were in the ancient world. When the Israelites turned away from God in the wilderness, they made for themselves a golden *calf*.

Having speculated all of this, the fact remains that the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ does refer to Satan as a dragon and a serpent. For example, the following verse:

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (12:9; see also 20:2)

These names could simply be symbolic—“ancient serpent” clearly being a historical reference to the garden of Eden—or perhaps his appearance changed to something more dragon-like after the fall. To be sure, this discussion of Satan’s appearance is all just speculation on my part. Regarding the cherubim in general though, Ezekiel’s description leaves me inclined to believe that the face of a cherub resembles an ox.

### Other Attributes of Cherubim

The thrust of the early chapters of the book of Ezekiel was God withdrawing from His sanctuary (see 5:11). The *Shechinah* Glory was going to leave the Most Holy Place of the temple. The cherubim appear so prominently in these chapters because of their key relationship to the *Shechinah* Glory. The following verses detail how the *Shechinah* finally left:

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city. (11:22–23)

The *Shechinah* Glory does not reappear in the Biblical record until the birth of Jesus Christ (see Luke 2:9).

The cherubim’s connection to the *Shechinah* Glory has been made clear. What are some other attributes of these cherubim?

Each of the four cherubs was seemingly connected or associated with a wheel within a wheel for we are told twice that “the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.” These creatures went with their wheels “wherever the spirit wanted to go.” Ezekiel emphasized this unique feature so we could comprehend the *living connection* these cherubim have to these whirling wheels. In his second account of the cherubim, he told us specifically:

And their whole body, their rims, and their spokes, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around—the wheels that the four of them had. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing “the whirling wheels.” (10:12–13)

In his first account Ezekiel told us that *only the rims* were “full of eyes all around.” I don’t know if he had a better look the second time or if something changed, but here he described their *entire bodies, wings, and connected wheels* as being “full of eyes all around.” The word “likeness” appears thirteen times in the ESV during these two accounts of the cherubim. We must remember that Ezekiel was doing his best to describe what he saw, but actual results may vary. It is startling enough to conceive of a four-faced creature connected to wheels, yet alone one that has eyes everywhere in the same assemblage. In his first account, Ezekiel also described these creatures as follows:

As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning. (1:13–14)

Including this description with the previous one regarding their eyes, I note the following attributes of these cherubim:

- eyes everywhere
- dart “to and fro” (like flashes lightning)
- bright, fiery appearance

These distinctions remind me of the following Bible verses:

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. (2 Chronicles 16:9a)

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)

The fact that these cherubim carry the throne of God almost makes their abundance of eyes symbolic for the omnipresence of God. The four faces of these cherubim—man, ox, lion, and eagle—may be symbolic for the attributes of Jesus Christ accentuated in the four gospels: Matthew (king - lion), Mark (powerful servant - ox), Luke (humanity - man), and John (Spirit - eagle). Setting the gospel impressions aside, if we take all these symbolic attributes and synthesize them a bit we have the Son of God, *the second person of the triunity, as a Powerful, Spiritual, All-knowing, King.*

God may have created the cherubim to symbolically reflect some of His attributes which is inline with what Paul explained to the Colossians church:

He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.  
(Colossians 1:15–17)

When we get to the seraphim, we will see that they were also created with these same key characteristics.

### **A Third Type of Cherub**

Years later, Ezekiel was again taken to Jerusalem in visions of God and shown how the millennial temple is to be built. The long description he was given included the following aspect concerning the wooden walls inside:

And on all the walls all around, inside and outside, was a measured pattern. It was carved of cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Every cherub had two faces: a human face toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side. They were carved on the whole temple all around. From the floor to above the door, cherubim and palm trees were carved; similarly the wall of the nave. (41:17–20)

The cherubim that will be carved into the walls of the millennial temple will only have two faces.

All this reveals that there are at least three different kinds of the “living creatures” classified as cherubim. The main characteristics that causes them to vary is their number and types of faces.

### **Seraphim**

We are introduced to something called seraphim through Isaiah’s vision of the Lord in 756 B.C.:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the



voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” (Isaiah 6:1–7)

The Hebrew noun *saraph*, translated in English as “seraphim,” means “fiery serpent.” It is derived from the Hebrew verb *saraph* which means “burn.”

One question that comes to mind here is, “How did Isaiah know they were called *saraph*?” It seems to me that he did not and just assigned the description of “fiery serpent” based on his experience. These seraphim appear later in the book of Revelation but John does not assign them a specific name, he simply describes them as “living creatures.” Isaiah seems to have labeled them “fiery serpent” to reflect his experience of them *flying* to touch his mouth with a *burning* coal from the heavenly altar and announcing that his sin was atoned for. He may have drawn upon Israel’s wilderness experience for this description. Recall the following account:

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the LORD sent *fiery serpents* among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a *fiery serpent* and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Numbers 21:4–9; emphasis mine)

The Hebrews who were bitten simply had to look at bronze serpent on the pole to be healed. Likewise, during this same vision God told Isaiah, “Make the heart of this people dull [or fat], and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; *lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed*” (6:10; emphasis mine).

It is interesting to note that there were actually flying fiery serpents in the ancient Middle East that may have had **bat-like wings**. Isaiah knew about these serpents because he referred to them elsewhere in his prophecies as coming from the Negeb:

An oracle of the beasts of the Negeb. Through a land of trouble and anguish, from where come the lioness and the lion, the adder *and the flying fiery serpent*, they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them. (40:6; emphasis mine)

The knowledge of these flying fiery serpents may have influenced Isaiah's description of the seraphim that he saw at the throne of God.

The takeaway here for our purposes of study is the fact that there is no reason to conclude that these winged creatures are actually serpent-like. They fly and they handle fire so "flying fiery serpent" was an apt description for creatures he did not know the name of. Furthermore, Isaiah's description seems to have included symbolism to reflect his experience and the need for God's people to turn to Him to be healed and restored. This recognition is needful as we examine the "living creatures" of Revelation residing around God's throne which are these same seraphim that Isaiah saw.

## Playing With Fire

The apostle John described the seraphim as follows:

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. (Revelation 4:6b-10)

The seraphim reappear throughout the book of Revelation, sometimes worshipping God, but often in an administrative role with respect to the unfolding events, such as the following:

- And when he [the Lamb] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying:  
  
    “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (5:8–10)
- Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” ... When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” ... When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” ... When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” (6:1,3,5,7)
- “And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God ...” (15:7)

The creatures described by Isaiah and John would seem to be the same thing because in both instances they:

- reside at the throne of God
- have six wings
- say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord ....”
- administer the will of God

Neither Isaiah or John made reference to the seraphim having a human likeness. They seem to be distinctly animal-like, although one of them does have the face of a man. (*I suppose one could use this to make the case that animals in heaven talk!*) John noted that there are only four and that each is stationed on one of the four sides of the throne. He specified that the first was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third had the face of a man, and the fourth was like an eagle *in flight*. He also described them as having eyes all around and within. Each individual seraph has its own singular face, unlike the four cherubim Ezekiel saw that each had four faces. Each seraph embodies a singular

characteristic in its entirety, whereas the cherubim that Ezekiel saw were all the same—a human likeness each with the same four faces. This is a key difference.

There is a possible revelation available here when we pay attention to detail. John *specified* an order to his *descriptions* of these four seraphim: lion, ox, man, and eagle. This order matches that of the four gospels. Matthew emphasized Jesus as the Jewish King (the “lion” of the tribe of Judah; Revelation 5:5), Mark emphasized Jesus as a powerful servant (God’s “servant” in Isaiah 42, 52; ox), Luke emphasized Jesus’ humanity (man), and John wrote to Christians, emphasizing the Holy Spirit (soaring in Christ; John described the fourth creature as “an eagle *in flight*”).<sup>2</sup> Isaiah *specified* that each seraphim “covered his face” with two wings and “covered his feet” with two wings. The identity of these seraphim was hidden to Isaiah which may be a reflection of the fact that the revelation of Jesus Christ was a mystery hidden in the Old Testament (see Romans 16:25–27, Ephesians 3:8–12, Colossians 1:24–26). John saw the seraphim after the death and resurrection of Christ and so their symbolic gospel identities were no longer hidden.

If accurate, and similar to what I discussed with the cherubim, God may have created these four seraphim to specifically reflect the four attributes of Jesus Christ revealed in the gospels. The four gospels that we have are not simply four surviving manuscripts that the church continues to use to understand the life of Christ. They are, as the angel told Daniel, “inscribed in the book of truth.” That is, these are four heavenly books—parts of a greater book of truth—predetermined before the foundation of the world to reveal Christ in these last days.

## Conclusion

These studies of the angelic world and heavenly creatures do much to enhance the fact that everything in God’s order revolves around Jesus Christ. God reveals Himself through the things He has made (Romans 1:20) and these heavenly creatures are certainly included.

Another valuable conclusion we need to grasp here is that cherubim and seraphim are heavenly creatures and not angels. This is clear in the fact that they both have wings (like birds or some dinosaurs did) and at least one class of cherubim has hooves. There are different kinds of cherubim that vary by the number and types of faces they have. Seraphim are always found around the throne of God. Cherubim are always found covering the *Shechinah* Glory or carrying the throne of the Son of God on an earthly mission. Both carry out important tasks, but they are never seen fighting or sending

messages to God's people like the angels. Angels do not have wings and are like male human beings.

Biblical misunderstanding, artistic renditions, and popular culture have blurred people's conceptions of angels. People tend to falsely view angels as having a mixture of attributes from both angels and these heavenly creatures. This is Biblically inaccurate because angels, cherubim, and seraphim are distinctly different types of beings created by God for different reasons. I hope you have found, as I have, that clearly delineating these types unlocks a greater level of Biblical understanding.

I am emphasizing this distinction because it is important to understanding Satan. He is a cherub and not an angel. The Bible never says he is an angel. He only "*disguises* himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14; emphasis mine). Satan is a kind of cherub, a celestial *creature* with wings. He has mobilized one-third of the angels into his army. We will study this adversary in detail in a future Essentials teaching.

## Endnotes

1. This is one reason why the study of history is helpful for understanding the present and projecting the future. Secular observers recognize that historical patterns repeat because human nature does not change. Biblically, we can see that historical patterns often repeat because men continue to live under the same spiritual atmospheres that have sway over them.
2. To some it may seem a stretch to compare the flight of an eagle to the Holy Spirit, however, the Greek word here for eagle, *aetos* is derived from the root words *aer* which means "air" and *aemi* which means "breath unconsciously." Also, John said the fourth seraphim was "*like* an eagle in flight" (emphasis mine). He did not say it was an eagle. He was simply trying to describe it from his frame of reverence.