Angels (malak/angelos): Unlike the Sadducees' denial of the existence of angels (Acts 23:8), the Essenes like the Pharisees believed in angels. Fragments from 1 Enoch and Jubilees have been found and these works are sources of angelology. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400-407, 11Q17, Mas1k) is fully developed angelology. Temple Scroll (11Q19) on the other hand does not mention angels at all. A few pesharim use an angelic lexicon (Q174, 4Q177, 4Q182, 11Q13) whereas others do not. Allusion to the Nephilim in Bereshit 6:4 is made in the Damascus Document when reference is made to “the watchers of heaven who fell”. The allusion to the misadventures of the sons of G-d in Gen. 6:2 becomes the locus classicus for belief in evil angels. In the Book of Enoch the specific names of angels are given. This may beg comparison with Maseket Haggigah 12b-14b where angels such as the barakim, hashmalim (see Ps. 104:4), etc. are described. Jewish texts of the Greco-Roman time add detail to the traditions of angels found in the Tanakh (Jubilees 2:2; Ben Sira 16:26-30). In Enoch III angels have a hierarchical serving order in relation to G-d, each designated with a sphere of authority. Mention is made of Uriel, Raphael, Peniel, Metratron (not to be pronounced), and many others (I Enoch; Tobit; IV Ezra). Exceptional persons like Enoch, Elijah, and Serach bat Asher are elevated to angelic status (I Enoch; Zohar : 100a, 129b; T.Z. Hakdamah 16b). For the Qumran sect angels are divided into two camps in accordance with their proclivity to dualism. Angels of light and angles of darkness are illuminated in The War Scroll and The Manual of Discipline. The concept of fallen angels appears in the pseudepigraphic writings (I Enoch 6, from the section called, Book of the Watchers). It can be argued that this theological dualism of the concept of fallen angels becomes a major motif in Christianity. Starting in late antiquity including Beit Sheni inter-testamental period, angels are increasingly related to and seen as part of everyday life of persons and the functioning of the world. Thus the Dead Sea Scroll sect evokes the protective properties of specific angels. This later plays itself out perhaps in the appearance of amulets, magical inscriptions, and formulaic equations.

Josephus notes the Essene practice of keeping angelic names secret (The Jewish War 2:142). Angels in Qumran texts serve functions of ruling over nature, serving G-d, watching over the tree of knowledge, etc. Dead Sea Scroll texts are rich in angelic terms derived from combinations with the words El (G-d) or Elim; for example the War Scroll (1QMx.8). The phrase “holy ones” are also employed who appear at G-d’s side to destroy the sons of darkness (IQM i.16). Holy ones takes on double meanings as does ruah. “And a perverted spirit you purified from great violation, so that it might stand in rank with the host of holy ones, and so that it might come together with the congregation of the son’s of heaven. And you cast for man an eternal lot with the spirits of knowledge (1QHa ix [j]). Spirit like holy one can designate in the same context angels and human beings. Some scrolls refer to angels as “spirits of knowledge” (Elei da’at). The Dead Sea Scrolls also use the term “prince” or commander (sar). We must however be wary of systemization of Dead Sea Scroll angelology, for the “Prince of light” in the Rule of the Community from Qumran Cave 1 need not be the archangel Michael or Uriel. The Melchizedek scroll (11Q13) places Melchizedek in opposition to Belial (the evil one) and his angels. Melchizedek is a savior figure for the end of time. The Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen) speculates whether the appearance of the newborn Noah is a sign that his parents are indeed the watchers (angels who descended according to 1 Enoch). The three angels at Mamre hosted by Avraham as seen as angels in the Ages of Creation (4Q180). The dualism of the Sectarians influences their communion with angels. The sons of light and the sons of darkness are allotted to the principal angelic Princes of Light and
Princes of Darkness. The dualistic division of humankind is formulated in the Treatise on the Two Spirits now part of 1QRule of the Community (1QS iii.13-iv.26). A future battle of the prince of light with the sons of light against the forces of darkness is a dualistic impulse. The War Scroll develops the eschatological battle against Belial and his angels (1QM i.10-11, ix. 14-16, xii. 1-9). We are told that for the ultimate battle the names of the archangels will be written on the shields of the towers (1QM ix. 14-16). Certain people are banned from the camp because “for the angles of holiness are in the camp, together with their hosts (1QM vii.6 ).” The communion of the members of the Qumran commune with the angels is an explanation for the function of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400-407). Angels are not only involved with the fulfillment of liturgical and eschatological tasks but struggle for the future of individuals as in the Visions of Amram (4QS43 3, 6; 4QS44 3.12-14, 6.2-3). It is a matter of debate whether the sectarians saw the transformation of the just into angels based on the War Scroll (4Q491) which speaks of a figure enthroned in heaven. In Hodayot there is a certain critique against some of the angels (1QH xviii.34-35 [x.32-33]). G-d is in dispute with angels and seeks justice among them. In this text the angels’ knowledge of G-d is limited and they are unable to stand before his wrath. Punishing angels or demons are mentioned also.

Angels may be invoked and employed by humans diviners appears in the Testament of Solomon and later ma’asei Merkavah texts. Rabbinic texts minimize the importance of angels when compared with their role in the priestly Qumran, apocalyptic, and mystical traditions. In Shabbat 88b and Gen. R. 48:11 angels are said to have no free will, differing from the Qumran notions. Rabbis however conceded that angels do have intellect and inner life and are capable of errors (Sanh. 38b; Midrash Psalms 18:13). For the Rabbis most angels exist to do a single task (B.M. 86b; Gen. R. 50:2) and as exalted as they may be are subordinate to the Tzadikim (Gen. R. 21; Sanh. 93a; Ned. 32a; Deut. R.1). Rabbis see many divine actions in the Tanakh as ascribed to angels (Deut. R. 9; Gen R. 31:8; Sanh. 105b). The Pesah Haggadah is an exception to these opinions. It denies that angels played an important role in the yitziat mimitzrayim (see Magid).

The pusek Na-aseh Adam betzelmenu kidemuteinu is seen as the heavenly host. Gabriel is seen as the angel who guards the gates of Gan Eden with the sword that flashes every which way. Three malakhim are hosted by Avraham and Sarah at Mamre, one being Raphael to cure Avraham of the brit milah. At the Akedah (Gen. 22) Sforno names the malakh who stops Avraham from shechting Yitzak as, Michael, when he says, “al tishlach yadchah al ha-naar.” Rashi names the unnamed man as an angel who instructs Yosef that his brothers are sheparding their flocks at Dothan. An angel is said to be with the children of Israel in the desert. In Haftorah Yetro the seraphim, ofanim, and hayot hakodesh is the subject of great exegesis in the Rabbinic imagination. These angels appear to be winged parts of Hashem’s throne (Isa. 6) or of the divine chariot (Ezek.1). That all angels (and not just seraphim and cherubim have wings is mentioned in Chag. 16a; PdRE4). Al Kanfeh Shekhinah (under the wings of the Shekhinah) also evokes wing imagery. In Homer we find the phrase “winged words” but in Rabbinic parlance angels have wings and move at different speeds depending upon their mission (Ber. 4b). G-d’s speed is often given in parasangs, a Persian measurement. The idea of seraphim being associated with fire may find correlaries with the Islamic ifrit, or from the oxymoronic (opposites uniting) unifications of fire and water (Sefer Yetzirah 1:7; S of S R. 10; J.R.H. 58; Gedulat Moshe; Rashi on the hail as fire and
water). In post-modern science we are interestingly told of a real state where water exists as a gas, liquid, and ice, known as the triple point!

The rationalistic philosophic tradition of Rambam and Ralbag however holds that angels are immaterial, incorporeal disembodied intellects. Rambam spurns the notion that “angels eat” and even Rashi concedes that the 3 angels at Mamre hosted by Avraham, from the midrash, only “appear to be eating.” This is a controversy in rabbinic texts (see Judg. 13; Gen. R.48:14; B.M. 86b; Zohar I: 102b). The strong philosophic rationalism of the Rambam and Ralbag intellectualizes angelology within an Aristotelian modality. Rambam expounds on angels in Hilchot Yisodei Ha-Torah (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah). His expertise in classification is applied not only in halakhah but in this esoteric area. Rambam classifies angelic ranking into ten levels. In the Moreh Nevukhim further elaboration is given equating angels with Aristotelian “intelligences.” These “intelligences” mediate between the spheres. They possess the attribute of consciousness and govern the spheres in their motion. Influenced from Aristotle, Rambam holds that they are forms (eidos) of natural causation rather than supernatural beings, has vehalilah with bodies. As forms of causation they are thus absolutely incorporeal without bodies. Rambam in the Aristotelian mode remarks on the libidinous impulse of the “angel of lust.” As remarked before the Rambam holds that the “sense of touch is a shame to us” a remark also found in Aristotle, but not to be understood in the Christiological sense of shame, but rather for those who have experienced the life of the mind totally as pure spirit (not Hegelian necessarily) or the experience of the sekel hapoal as transcendent even of time itself. To enter into the perfection of the tautology of what it is to think thinking itself as sui generis, is beyond all body and gashmius. Rambam denies that angels ever take corporeal form. They are extensions of the faculty of the human and divine intellects. As such the encounters in the Tanakh according to Rambam of angels are only the dream visions of the Avot, and Matriarchs. Moses is the chief of the prophets in that his prophecy was completely vibrant and clear not in dreams but while awake. To Moses, night appears as day (see Moreh Nevukhim). By contrast other Rabbinic traditions like the German Pietist such as Eleazar of Worms, adhere unapologetically to supernatural angelology. Rituals for summoning angels, especially angels who can reveal secrets of Torah (sitrei Torah), like the Sar ha-Torah and Sar ha-Panim (The prince of the Torah and Prince of the Presence of Haderat Panim), are sighted, cited, and sited! The Hasidic tradition also departs from the strict Maimonidean rationalism in this regard and regards texts such as Sefer ha-Razim catalogs of hundreds of angels, along with how to influence them and employ their names in constructing protective amulets, throwing curses, and gaining spiritual power as a mode of practical Kabbalah. The Zohar is sighted with its tradition of angelic taxonomy, ranking angels to the four worlds of emanation (I. 11-40), as well as assigning angels feminine and masculine attributes (I: 119b).

In Rabbinic tradition little children are told to recite the formula before going to sleep that Gabriel is at the left, Michael at the right, Oriel in front, and Raphael behind one.

For the rabbis an angel is a spiritual entity in the service of Hashem with no will other than Hashem’s. Angels can be classified into the following types: Malach, Irin, Cheruv, Saraf, Ofan, Cahyyah, Sar, Memuneh, Ben Elokim, Kodesh. The malach (messenger) is one variety. Distinguished from malachim are the Irinim (Watchers/High angels). Sarim (Princes), Serafim (Fiery ones), Chayyot (Holy Creatures), and Ofanim (Wheels) are different types. They are alluded to in collective designations that
include: Tzeva (Host), B’nai ha-Elokim, or B’nai Elim (sons of G-d), and Kedoshim (Holy ones). Their divine assembly is sometimes called Adat Kel (Ps. 82, Job 1). Their forms are unspecified as in Judg. 6:11-14 and Zech. 4). They appear humanoid in most biblical testimonies (Num. 22) and are therefore indistinguishable from human form (Gen. 18, 32: 10-13; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 13:1-5). Sometimes they manifest in pillars of fire and cloud, or the firey bushes that are not consumed (Ex. 14:3). On the Aron ha-Kodesh (Ex. 25) cherubim were artistically represented and the shekhinah was felt to dwell there. The idea that angels envy humanity is found in pseudepigraphic texts and in rabbinic and medieval texts (Sanh. 88b-89a; 109a; Gen. R. 118:6; ChdM).

The function of Biblical angels can convey knowledge to mortals (Zech.1-4), shielding (Ex. 14), rescuing (Gen. 21), and smiting Israel’s enemies. They have responsibility but no authority except in the Book of Daniel. Daniel holds that all the nations of the world have their own angelic prince, arranged hierarchically, with limited spheres of control over mortal realms (also see Deut. 32). Angels have prominent roles especially in biblical roles written by Kohanim who were prophets including Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. In Zechariah the host of heaven is differentiated into groupings of angels governing and serving different levels of heaven. Zechariah makes reference to the seven eyes of G-d (4:10), referring to seven arch angels, or the seven angel hosts in the seven heavens. This has parallels with Enoch 61 and Testament of the Patriarchs, Levi.

The Jewish concept of personal angel, of malach sharet, mazal, or memuneh, “ministering” or “guarding angel” and an angelic “deputy” also is apparent in texts such as Rashi on Meg. 3a; Mid. Prov. 11:27 and Sch 129, 633, 1162. The rabbis expand in commentary to a great extent on angels forming choirs of singing praises to G-d (i.e. Gen. R. 78:1) and yet G-d is “beyond” even the greatest of praises (lailah liailah) which is invoked during the Yamim Noraim.

Gershom Scholem has recently brought to light the motif of angelology as a component of ma’aseh merkavah mysticism within the academic discourses. These texts describe how the practitioner to the Pardes in this world, or the pilgrim disembodied soul in the next life, wishing to ascend through the palaces of the heavens and achieve a vision of the divine glory needs to know “passwords” to get past the archons (gatekeepers) at each level (III Enoch). For how this archetype relates to Kafka’s parable Vor Dem Gesetz (Before the Law) and the Jewish mystical subtexts in texts ranging from Hechalot Rabbati and Zutrat to Orhot Tzadikim, see: http://student.ccbcmd.edu/~dlevy11/Kafka.pdf

The second half of this paper has been retracted from the reshut harabim on Rabbinic advise that this material should not be made public! Angels can be conjured to be summoned and brought down to earth to serve the human practitioner. Many rituals and practices devoted to this end are preserved in Hechalot writings.

The rabbis offer the opinions on the origins of angels. Some hold that angels did not pre-exist Creation, but were formed as part of the heavens on the second day (Gen. R. 1:3, 3). Another rabbinic opinion posits their origin on the second day (Gen. R. 1:3, 3). A third opinion holds on the fifth day along with the winged and gliding beings (bird and fish) creations. In Chag. 14b; PdRE 4 speculation is asserted reconciling Midrash Rabbah that different kinds of angels came into being at different stages of Creation. The Zohar teaches that all angels result from specific manifestations of sefirot. For examples
angels of love emanate from hesed while punishing angels emanate from gevurah, each type coming into existence coinciding with the manifestation of the sefirah that is its source (I: 46a-b). Chag 14a and Gen. R. 78:1 reveal the distinction between angels which are enduring and anonymous ephemeral angels, which are constantly coming in and going out of existence (kiyamut). According to Rabbi Chaim Vital, the Talmud Mivuhak of HaAri HaKodesh, and other Chasidic masters, the ephemeral angels are the direct result of human actions. Goodly deeds create good angels while destructive behavior creates destructive angels, etc. Thus some angels are the products of “gathering the sparks.” The power of the word “amen” itself can create multitudes of angels. Human actions thus become the cause of angelic and demonic forces (kelipot). Human action and decision have infinite consequences. As Louis Jacob’s book Their Heads in Heaven (see review by David B. Levy) alludes... man stands upon the earth and his head reaches to the heavens, and the angels of the Eternal ascend and descend with him (Ben Porat Yosef 42a). Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizans thus brings down the interpretation that the ladder that Yakov dreams, with angels going up and down, has the gematria of mammon (correlating to Tzedakah), kol (voice correlating to prayer), and tzum (fasting). Thus Chasidic masters emphasize the value of seeking the help of angels. The Rambam as rationalist however views such intermediary worship as avodah zarah and insists that one must only davon to Hashem. The most comprehensive Chasidic meditation on angelology is Sichat Malachei ha-Shareit (Meditation on the Guardian Angels) by Tzadok ha-kohen Rabinowitz.

Rabbi Josef Karo in his Maggid Mesharim gives testimony to being visited by the Shekhinah personified as the mishnah who gave angelic wisdom over to the Kabbalist. The mystic-legalist was taught Torah ha-Sod as testified in Maggid Mesharim. In this trajectory, the Baal Shem Tov, characterized angels as “the garments of G-d.” Thus according to Jacob Katz the Kabbalists “killed Medieval Philosphic Rationalism” or at least reacted to it by re-anthropocentrizing Judaism. Remember Rambam set out in the Moreh Nevukhim to understand all Biblical anthropomorphisms (deoreita) in philosophic modes. That is, for example, to be in the image of Hashem was to possess the sekel hapoel, not crude anthropomorphic resemblance. Thus the “strong hand and outstretched arm of Hashem” is the yad hazakah, mishnah Torah, itself, that will free one of their mental Egyptians, initiating them cognitively into the redeemed noetic realm of true knowledge rather than false opinions.

The Essenes also have their own system (makreket) for hierarchical designation of the angels (angelos, or messengers.) The priests who contributed to the Dead Sea Scrolls believed in a transitory fusion with angels when they performed their mystical liturgy. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice illustrate this. Ma’asei Merkavah mystics who descend to the chariot to ascend to the palaces, also engaged in correllary kinds of angelic experiences through their techniques of ascent. A Midrash holds that in the 9 months of pregnancy a malakh teaches the developing fetus all the torah, and our job in life is to remember and recollect what the malakh taught. Michael, the angelic prince over Israel, serves as Kohen Gadol in Yerushalyim shel malah, (Chag. 12b). L’havdil this is different than Plato’s notion of recollection of the truth (aleithea/wahrheit) before being born. Aletheia is not the equivalent of the Hebrew Emet. In Jewish law Emet is trumped in the scenario for example if someone is hiding Jews from the Nazis, and the Nazis demand, “Are you hiding Jews?” Torah law dictates lying to save the Jews.
A great interest in folk traditions surrounding Elijah have seen light in recent years. Legends concerning this prophet turned angel (Ber. 4b) is a motif in many maseh (tales) of the Hasidim. Elijah frequently appears among mortals, bearing revelations of childbirth, parnassah, miracles, and heavenly news, as well as resolving kashes of difficult problems.