

177709 - Are Angels Superior or the Prophets and the Righteous?

the question

Do the angels worship Allah better and more perfectly than the Prophets themselves?

Detailed answer

The angels are honoured slaves and do not disobey Allah in what He commands them to do; they do whatever they are commanded. Allah created them and made their innate nature one of obedience and worship of Him. Some angels are appointed in charge of the revelation, some in charge of provision, some in charge of the mountains and some are created to worship, pray, and glorify and remember Allah.

At-Tirmidhi narrated, in a report which he classed as hasan (sound), that Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Verily I see what you do not see and I hear what you do not hear. The heaven is creaking and it should creak, for there is no space in it the width of four fingers but there is an angel there, placing his forehead in prostration to Allah.”

In the hadeeth (narration) of the Isra’ (Prophet’s Night Journey) it says: “Then the Much-Frequented House (al-bayt al-ma’moor/equivalent of the k’abah in the seventh heaven) was raised up for me, and I asked Jibreel (about it). He said: “This is the Much-Frequented House. Every day seventy thousand angels enter it and when they depart from it, they never return to it.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

At-Tabari narrated in his Tafseer (exegesis) from Ibn Mas’ood (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: Among the heavens is one in which there is no space the size of a hand span but on it there is the forehead of an angel or his foot standing there. Then he recited the words: “Verily, we (angels), we stand in rows for the prayers (as you Muslims stand in rows for your prayers). Verily, we (angels), we are they who glorify (Allah’s Praises i.e. perform prayers)” [37:165-166].

Such worship is beyond the capabilities of any human being, and they are not able to do it. The angels do not slow down nor do they become tired, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“But if they are too proud (to do so), then there are those who are with your Lord (angels who) glorify Him night and day, and never are they tired” [41:38].

What is instilled in human beings is human nature, including the Prophets and Messengers of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon them); they are different from the angels in their attributes and natures.

The angels are able to do feats of worship that no human is able to do. But the fact that their worship is greater does not mean that they are superior to the Prophets; the Prophets are to be viewed on the basis that they are human beings with human nature. It is because they have risen to such a high status in obedience to their Lord that they have a particular virtue and sublime position; so much so that more than one of the scholars has said that the righteous among mankind are of a higher status than the angels, because the angels do not have any inclination towards evil or disobedience, whereas the righteous among mankind have these inclinations, but they resist them and overcome them in order to obey Allah.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah was asked about those who obey Allah among the ummah (followers) of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): are they superior to the angels?

He replied: It was proven that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The angels said: O Allah, You have created the sons of Adam, and they eat and drink and enjoy life in the world; create for us the Hereafter as you created the world for them. He said: I shall not do that. They asked Him again and He said: I shall not do that. Then they asked Him again two or three times and He said: By My Glory, I cannot regard the righteous among the descendants of the one whom I have created with My own Hand as being like one to whom I said: Be! And he was (i.e., the angels). This was narrated by ‘Uthmaan ibn Sa‘eed ad-Daarimi.

It was narrated from ‘Abdullah ibn Salaam that he said: Allah has not created any creation dearer to Him than Muhammad. It was said to him: Not even Jibreel and Mika’eel? He said to the one who asked him: Do you know what Jibreel and Mika’eel are? Jibreel and Mika’eel are subjugated creations like the sun and the moon. Allah has not created anyone who is dearer to him than Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

I do not know of any one among the Sahabah (companions of the Prophet) who disagrees with this. This is the well-known view among those who claim to belong to Ahl as-Sunnah (followers of the prophetic teachings), the companions of the four imams and others, namely (the view that) the prophets and close friends of Allah (awliya) are superior to the angels. End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa, (4/344).

He also said: Allah created Adam from clay; because He shaped him and breathed into him the spirit He created for him, and instructed the angels to prostrate to him, and He favoured him over them by teaching him the names of all things and He created him with His own Hand and so on, he and the righteous among his descendants are superior to the angels, even though mankind was created from clay and the angels from light. End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa, (11/95).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Allah, may He be glorified, created from inferior material that which is superior to that which was created from something else. This is a sign of His perfect power, may He be glorified. Hence Muhammad, Ibrahim, Moosa, ‘Isa, Nooh and the Messengers are superior to the angels. The view of Ahl as-Sunnah is that the righteous among mankind are superior to the angels, even though their substance is light and the substance of mankind is dust. End quote from as-Sawaa’iq al-Mursalah, (3/1002).

He also said: The righteous among mankind are superior to the angels, because the worship of the angels is free from any contamination of the whims and desires of the human nafs (soul); it is done by beings that have nothing to prevent, undermine or resist it. It is like breathing for the living. As for the acts of worship of human beings, they are done despite the inclinations of their hearts and by suppressing their whims and desires and going against their natural urges. So

they are more perfect. Hence most of the scholars have said that humans were superior to the angels for this reason and others.

End quote from Tareeq al-Hijratayn, 349-350

There are some scholars who highlighted a different approach to this issue. Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Comparing angels to the righteous among mankind is a matter concerning which there are differences among the scholars, each of whom quoted texts to support his opinion. But the most correct view is that the righteous among mankind are superior to the angels on the basis of the final outcome because Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, will give them reward the like of which cannot be attained by the angels as far as we know. Rather the angels will be in the abode of the believers – namely Paradise – and will enter upon them from every gate, congratulating them (with the words): “Salamun Alaikum (peace be upon you) for that you persevered in patience! Excellent indeed is the final home!” [13:24 – interpretation of the meaning]. From the point of view of their origin, the angels are superior because they were created from light and their innate nature is to worship and obey Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and they have been given the strength to do that. Allah, may He be exalted, says that among the angels are the angels of Hell:

“Over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who disobey not, (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah, but do that which they are commanded” [66:6]

“And those who are near Him (i.e. the angels) are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they weary (of His worship).

They (i.e. the angels) glorify His Praises night and day, (and) they never slacken (to do so)” [7:206].

This is the decisive view concerning this matter. Indulging in discussion of this matter and seeking to determine whether the righteous among mankind or the angels are superior is a kind of superfluous knowledge. Man has no need of understanding and learning about this matter. End quote from Fataawa Noor ‘ala ad-Darb, (8/6).

He is right, may Allah have mercy on him. This and similar matters are things that people have no need to indulge in discussion of and enter into disputes as to which group is superior and which group worships more. It is a kind of superfluous knowledge and the Muslim has no need to know which group is superior and more perfect. What the Muslim should do is focus on putting his own affairs in order by obeying his Lord.

And Allah knows best.