

## WATCHER עֵר

I. Daniel chap. 4 (vv 10, 14, 20) is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible where the noun עֵר is commonly understood to refer to a heavenly being. Nebuchadnezzar reports that he saw in his dream "a watcher and holy one come down from heaven". The meaning of 'watcher' is assured by the juxtaposition with 'holy one' and the statement that he came down from heaven. The word is simply transliterated in Theodotion. The Old Greek uses the single word ἄγγελος (→Angel) in place of "watcher and holy one". Both Aquila and Symmachus read ἐγρήγορος, wakeful one or watcher, presumably from the Semitic root עוּר, wake up.

II. The 'Watchers' are widely attested in Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. The most famous attestation is in the 'Book of the Watchers' (*1 Enoch* 1-36) where the term is used for the fallen angels. The Enochic book is an elaboration of the story of the →'sons of God' of Gen 6, who took wives from the children of men. The episode in Genesis is elliptic, and is presented without clear judgment. The offspring of the 'sons of God' are presented in a positive light as "heroes of old, men of renown". In the Book of Enoch, however, the action of the Watchers is clearly rebellious. They swear an oath and bind each other with curses not to alter the plan. They conspire to take human wives, and two hundred of them come down on Mt. Hermon. They have intercourse with the women and beget →giants, who cause havoc on earth. The Watchers also impart illicit revelation, about astrology, roots and spells and the making of weapons. When the earth cries out to the LORD, the →archangels are sent to imprison the Watchers under the earth to await the final judgment. The

Watchers subsequently appeal to →Enoch to intercede on their behalf, but he is instructed to tell them that they should intercede for men, not men for them (*1 Enoch* 15:2). The spirits of the giants are to remain on earth as evil spirits to disturb humanity (15:8 - 16:1).

A variant of this story in the Book of Jubilees has the Watchers come down to teach men to do what is just and right on earth (Jub 3:15). They are only subsequently corrupted when they see the daughters of men (Jub 5:1). In Jubilees, the evil spirits have a leader, →Mastema, who persuades God to let one tenth of the evil spirits remain with him on earth to corrupt humanity and lead it astray.

The term 'Watchers' occurs in Hebrew in CD 2:18, with reference to the fall of "the Watchers of heaven", a phrase used in *1 Enoch* 13:10 (in Aramaic); 12:4; 15:2 (Ethiopic). Further attestations with reference to the fallen angels are found in *T. Reuben* 5:6-7, and *T. Naphtali* 3:5 (Greek: ἐγρήγοροι). Such beings are not always referred to as 'Watchers'; cf. the 'Peshier on Azazel and the Angels' from Qumran (4Q180; MILIK 1976: 112) and the statement in 2 Peter 2:4 that "God did not spare the angels when they sinned".

The name "Watchers" is not confined to the fallen angels, however. Several passages in *1 Enoch* speak of angels "who watch" or "who sleep not": 20:1 (the four archangels); 39:12-13; 71:7. The Aramaic עֵר is also found at *1 Enoch* 22:6 with reference to →Raphael, and again at 93:2 (plural) where the Greek and Ethiopic versions have "angel". In *2 Enoch* 18 (Slavonic Enoch) the "Grigori" (ἐγρήγοροι) are located in the fifth heaven. While "200 princes" of them have fallen, the remainder resume the heavenly liturgy. *2 Enoch* is usually dated to the late first century CE, but some scholars

place it much later. The Hebrew 3 *Enoch* (*Sefer Hekalot*) which dates from the fifth or sixth century discusses the "four great princes called Watchers and holy ones" in chap. 28, with specific reference to Daniel 4. Watchers and holy ones are frequently mentioned together, e.g., *1 Enoch* 12:2; 22:6; 93:2 (Aramaic).

In IQapGen the Watchers are associated with the holy ones and the Nephilim (2:1) and with the sons of heaven (2:16) in the context of the birth of Noah. The same context may underlie the references in the fragmentary 4QMessAr 2:16,18. The עִרְיָן are also mentioned in the fragmentary 4QEn-Giants, and 4QAmram.

III. The oldest non-biblical attestations are probably those in the Enochic 'Book of the Watchers' dating from sometime in the third century BCE. There are indications that the story as found in *1 Enoch* combines older sources, one of which names the leader Semihazah and focuses on the sin of illicit mingling with human women, while the other names him Asael or →Azazel and emphasizes the sin of illicit revelation (HANSON 1977). Contrary to the suggestion of MILIK (1976:31), however, no part of the story as found in *1 Enoch* is presupposed in Genesis, since the Genesis story does not even condemn the action of the 'sons of God' as sinful.

Attempts to identify the Watchers in earlier material are hitherto inconclusive. DAHOOD (1966: 55) proposed that Ps 9:7 נִשְׁמַר וְעָרִים be translated "root out their gods" and derived עָרִים from Ugaritic ḡyr "to protect". He identified the same root and meaning in Mic 5:13; Jer 2:28; 19:15 and Dan 4 among other passages. Others (MURRAY 1984; BARKER 1987) have gone farther in suggesting that the Watchers were heavenly beings, venerated in the pre-exilic Jerusalem cult but deliberately suppressed in most of the Masoretic Bible. None of the proposed identifications of the noun עִר in the Hebrew Bible before Daniel is compelling, however. The idea of protecting deities or angels was widely known in the ancient world and re-appears in Daniel 10-12, but

we do not have any reliable instance of the use of עִר in that context. Some biblical precedents for the notion of angelic beings as 'watchful ones', but with different terminology, have been proposed. The most noteworthy is Zech 4:10 which refers to seven "eyes of the LORD which range through the whole earth". The Watchers, however, never have this function in Daniel or the non-canonical literature. A more helpful biblical passage is found in Ps 121:4: "Behold, he neither slumbers nor sleeps, the guardian of Israel", with reference to →Yahweh himself (→Protectors). The "angels who keep watch" (*1 Enoch* 20:1) share this divine characteristic, and the class of heavenly beings known as Watchers may have been named in this way. Their function overlaps with that of the מְלָאכִים in so far as they can convey a divine message to earth, but they were apparently conceived as a distinct class of angelic beings.

IV. Interest in such intermediary beings was widespread in pagan as well as Jewish circles in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. According to Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 252-53: "Zeus has thrice ten thousand spirits, watchers of mortal men, and these keep watch on judgements and deeds of wrong as they roam, clothed in mist, all over the earth" (The word for watchers here, φύλακες, is not the same as that used in Daniel or *Enoch*). The most intriguing pagan parallel to the Watchers is found in the *Phoenician History* of Philo Byblios, which refers to the 'Zophasemin' (often corrected into Zophesamin = צַפִּי שְׂמִיָּן) or 'heavenly observers'. These creatures are mentioned in the context of a cosmogony and they are assigned no function which might be compared to the Jewish Watchers, but then Philo's Hellenized account hardly does justice to their role in Phoenician mythology. No conclusions can be based on such an enigmatic reference, however. Other (inconclusive) pagan parallels which have been suggested include "the many-eyed Amesha Spentas" of Zoroastrianism and the planetary gods of the Chaldeans in Diodorus Siculus 2.30.

## V. Bibliography

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