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LESSER GODS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND SOME COMPARISONS WITH HEAVENLY BEINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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This study examines the concept and imagery of heavenly beings as they are described and depicted in the texts and iconography of the Ancient Near East and compares the variegated concept and imagery with the angelic realm in the OT.

Utilizing motifs commonly repeated in the mytho-epic literature of the Fertile Crescent—such as the divine assembly and its diverse constituency, the protector gods, the messenger gods, the sons of the gods, the warrior gods, the demonic gods, etc.—the study exposes the diversity among heavenly beings and their place within the divine realm or the hierarchical pantheon. The study abounds with drawings illustrative of the heavenly population as depicted in Ancient Near Eastern iconography.

The OT references to angelic beings, examined alongside the Ancient Near Eastern material, clearly show Israelite awareness of an elaborate tradition. Although a graphic representation of heavenly beings is totally lacking on the biblical side, descriptive semblances are found in the biblical material from Adamic times to Danielic days.

Finally, the study synthesizes the differences and similarities between the Ancient Near Eastern and OT imagery. Although the polytheistic side appears to be more colorful and varied, in both written and graphic sources, there is an appreciation for the uniqueness of the monotheistic view sustained in the biblical passages. The investigation concludes by asserting that the Ancient Near Eastern literary-graphic imagery of the celestial population serves to illustrate the biblical angelic realm. Biblical and non-biblical sources alike—in their own peculiar way—attest to the reality of angelic population.