



Exodus 3:2-6

The Burning Bush

Something really strange happened. The bush started talking to Moses!

Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness when: "The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2).

That would grab your attention on a cold, dark night in the wilderness! The thorny bush just kept on burning and burning. How long we don't know. But when it stopped burning it was not consumed. You guessed it. There probably wasn't even any ashes and smut on it.

The *Shekinah* glory of God was displayed before Moses. "The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush . . . "

Moses said to himself, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up" (v. 3).

That is when the bush started talking to Moses! "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am" (v. 4).

Moses was then told to take his sandals off because the ground upon which he was standing was rendered holy by God's presence (v. 5). The place where he was standing was holy because the LORD is holy.

This was a manifestation of God Himself. Verse two says, "The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a burning fire from the midst of a bush. . . ." Verse four tells us, "When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush . . ." In verse six he tells us the one speaking says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses moves us in his writing from the angel of the LORD to the LORD (*Yahweh*) Himself and further identifies Him as the God of Israel. The transition from the angel of the LORD in verse two to the LORD in verse four proves the identity of the two and the interchange between *Yahweh* (LORD) and *Elohim* (God) in verse four.

What would you have done? "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (v. 6b). He bowed and worshipped. The LORD is truly God. He is the same God who created the heavens and the earth and the One who cut the

same God who created the heavens and the earth and the One who cut the covenant with Abraham, and renewed it with Isaac and Jacob.

The same angel of the LORD had appeared to Sarah, Hagar, Abraham and Isaac four hundred years earlier. Now He appears to Moses as the burning bush and reveals Himself as the "I AM THAT I AM." The identity of the angel is not left in doubt. He clearly declares Himself as *Yahweh*.

Angel of the LORD

Let's pull together some observations of this angel in other Old Testament passages.

- He can refer to Himself as being sent of God and at the same time speak as God. In every instance the phrase must be translated "the angel of the LORD." He guides and protects (Ex. 14:19), is a companion to Israel in the wilderness (23:20-33; Num. 20:16), He punishes (2 Sam. 24:15-17), He is seen ministering (1 Kin. 19:7) and wins at war (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:21).
- The angel of the LORD is always dependent upon the LORD and subordinate to His commands (1 Chron. 21:27), yet He is addressed as the LORD (Ex. 23:23).
- The angel of the LORD exercises the prerogatives of *Yahweh* in forgiving sin and commanding obedience. His deity is never left in doubt. In Exodus 23:20-33 He is the Angel of the Covenant. People consistently recognize Him as deity and respond to Him in that way. In Joshua 5:13-6:2 He possesses the full character and authority of God.
- He bears the titles of deity. He is called *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, and *Yahweh's* Messenger. He is the object of worship. *Yahweh* is never applied to anyone other than the God of Israel (Isaiah 42:8).
- Alongside these appearances of the angel of the LORD are manifestations of *Yahweh* Himself in Theophanies. He is seen with His people talking, walking and eating. The inner life of deity is laid open. At the same time, He speaks of the LORD God in the third person. People recognize that He is God and they pray to Him, pay divine honor, offer sacrifices which He accepts and they worship Him. This angel of the LORD is essentially one with God (Ex. 33:20; Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Ex. 33:1). He is deity, regardless of His appearance or the service He renders. The angel of the LORD is one of the persons of the eternal Godhead.
- The angel of the LORD is not a created being, but a divine being Himself. He is in a class by Himself. The old Jewish synagogues regarded Him as the *Shekinah*. He is an "angel" only by his office.
- Here in the desert at the burning bush "the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of the bush . . ." (v. 2). There is no question about who He is. He identifies Himself clearly. He is the eternal "I AM." The One who is speaking from the burning bush is the same, yesterday, today and forever. The angel of the LORD announces that He is *Elohim*, the self-existent One and beside Him there is none else. He is the Absolute I. He told Moses, "I AM THAT I AM."
- Probably the outstanding observation is the angel of the LORD was a form in which the LORD Himself appeared to men. He revealed Himself in a form, which was more easily discernible by our human senses. The only difference was the method of appearing. It reminds us of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ in the Gospels and His appearing to the apostle Paul on the road to

appearances of Jesus Christ in the Gospels and His appearing to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Our Lord Jesus was "transfigured" before Peter, James and John and "appeared" with Moses and Elijah on the mountain side (Matthew 17:1-8). The invisible God made Himself visible so human being could know Him. He is the manifestation of God (John 1:18).

We can summarize these observations in the following way:

- The angel of the LORD is distinct from *Yahweh*, yet identical with *Yahweh* as revealed in Genesis, Exodus and Joshua.
- The angel of the LORD seems completely interchangeable with *Yahweh*. *Yahweh's* "name" is equivalent to saying *Yahweh's* being is in His special angel (Ex. 23:20, 21).
- The presence of the angel of the LORD is the same as the presence of *Yahweh* (Ex. 32:30, 34; 33:14).

I AM THAT I AM

In Exodus 3:14 Moses makes it very clear that the identity of this angel is *Yahweh*. He moves us in his writing from the angel of the LORD to the LORD Himself. God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM ; and He said, Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you ”(Exodus 3:14). *Yahweh* is traditionally rendered the LORD in most English translations. The ASV uses *Jehovah* and the Spanish translations *Jehová*. In verse 14 the verb I AM is used in place of the name to indicate its meaning and to remind Moses of the promise of the LORD in verse 12. Then He makes it even clearer in v. 15 by using the actual name *Yahweh* (the LORD). God, furthermore, said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations ” (Exodus 3:15). Who is sending Moses to the people of Israel? *Yahweh* . . . has sent me. He is the I AM THAT I AM. ”

The name *Yahweh* is formed from I AM of I AM THAT I AM. The pronunciation of *JHVH* was long lost because of a misinterpretation of Leviticus 24:16 after the Babylonian captivity. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (*Septuagint*) the Lord (*o kurios*) was substituted which is also followed in the New Testament.

He is the self-existent, absolute *I*, the absolute personality, moving in unlimited freedom beside whom there is none other. He is the personal God in His historic manifestation in which the fullness of the Divine Being has revealed Himself to His creation. He is the living One, without beginning and ending, from everlasting to everlasting, eternal through the ages, pervading history, and demonstrating Himself in His creation. But most importantly He is the personal God of His Promised People. He will deliver His people because He is always consistently the same, eternally changeless.

I AM expresses the idea that God is always with His people all the time, even in the future. The LORD is sovereignty independent of all His creation. When He uses His name *Yahweh* He is communicating to His people that He is the God of the covenant with them.

Yahweh is the God of salvation. He is the God of grace. It was the LORD who manifested Himself to Abraham and later to Moses and the prophets.

Jesus is the great I AM

Jesus used this powerful I am statement on several occasions to present the truth about Himself (John 8:58). The I AM who stood before Moses at the burning bush declared Himself saying, I am the bread of life (6:35), I am the light of the world (8:12), I am the door (10:7), I am the good Shepherd (10:11), I am

Exodus 3:2-6 The Burning Bush

life (6:35), I'am the light of the world (8:12), I'am the door (10:7), I'am the good Shepherd (10:11), I'am the resurrection and life (11:15), I'am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), I'am the true vine (15:1) and there is none other. He told the Jewish leaders, I'am the eternal one.

In the angel of the LORD we find the pre-existent "Word of God," the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity functioning in the Old Testament. The apostle John knew Him best of all. He said, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*" (John 1:18). No one had seen God's essential nature before Jesus came. God is Spirit. "The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." Jesus is the exegesis of God. God has revealed Himself to man in a personal intimate way.

The apostle Paul is referring to Jesus Christ when he says, "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. . . For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 1:15; 2:9).

Ever since the first recorded Theophany of the Bible God appears many times to individuals until finally He appears in the Man Jesus Christ to atone for all sin (cf. Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus said to his disciple Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, Show us the Father?" (John 14:9).

The angel of the LORD was none other than the *Logos*, who not only was "with God," but "was God", and in the person of Jesus Christ "was made flesh" and "came unto His own." The only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, was sent by the Father into the world as the angel of the LORD before He became incarnate and dwelt among us. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was at once a new manifestation and the appearance of One who was not a newcomer on the earthly scene. The prophet Mica spoke of Him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (5:2). The resurrected, ascended glorified Son of Man was seen by the apostle John in his vision walking in the midst of the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 1).

The veiled angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is revealed perfectly in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ when He took upon Himself human flesh. God manifest Himself fully in visible form in the person of our Lord and Savior. The angel no longer appears after the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth.

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah saw the LORD sitting on a throne in his vision. "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). He heard the seraphim sing the song of the holiness of God, the temple filled with smoke, the foundations trembled and Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Who was it that Isaiah saw on the throne? He saw the preincarnate Son of God. The apostle John wrote, "These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him" (John 12:41). He saw Christ in His preincarnate glory on the throne.

The angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is the Messiah of the New Testament. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not only deity, but He existed as such from all eternity.

The apostle John who observed Jesus Christ daily for three years explained it this way in 1 John 1:1-3.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life –and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was

Exodus 3:2-6 The Burning Bush

was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us —what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

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