



Genesis 16:7-13

The Angel of the Lord

God's proper name is composed of the four letters *YHWH*. The Jewish people do not pronounce this name out of reverence for the sacredness of the divine name. For many years it has been transliterated as *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* using the vowels of the name *Adonai*. It is consistently translated in the majority of our English translations of the Old Testament as **LORD** with all four letters in capital letters. The name *Adonai* is distinguished **L'ord** in our English translations.

The "messenger of Yahweh" or "Angel of the LORD" (*mal'akh Yahweh*) is seen in the Old Testament as an important figure, mysterious as well as intriguing, revered and obeyed. It is interesting how often the appearance of "the Angel of the LORD" marked a turning point in history or brought about some event that produced long-lasting consequences. He is seen as the guardian over the chosen people of God who appears over and over again.

At times "the Angel of the LORD" is called "the Angel of the Countenance" meaning that He was ever before the face of God.

God made a promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation (Genesis 12:2, 7; 15:1-6). Abraham obeyed and walked by faith and entered into the Promised Land (Genesis 15:7). However, time passed and he had still not seen the birth of the promised son who was so crucial to the fulfillment of the covenant.

Desperate to have the promised son, Abraham listened to Sarah and got into deep trouble (Genesis 16:3-4). When left to human ingenuity, we often fail. God, however, wants it to be clearly understood by everyone involved that the child was in every sense to be a child of promise. Abraham and Sarah were now advanced in years and were both beyond child bearing age. Man can contribute nothing. Only the God of grace can provide the son of the promise.

Abraham and Sarah had waited long enough or so they thought.

Hagar was Sarah's maid, and she was the innocent party. She was just a family maid who was loyal to her master and a believer in the God of Abraham. Abraham made Hagar pregnant and strife broke out in the home (16:5-6). In despair Hagar ran away. "Sarah treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence" (16:6).

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It was while Hagar was in the wilderness, alone and fearful that "the angel of the LORD found her" and revealed Himself to her (16:7-10). This is the first occurrence of "the angel of the LORD" in the Scriptures.

Who is this "angel of *Yahweh*"? What makes "the angel of the LORD" different from other angels who appear in the Old Testament?

Our focus should not only be on the first occurrence of the Angel of the LORD in the Bible, but all of the passages in the Scriptures. When we study all of these passages, the conclusion is evident that the Angel of the LORD is part of the eternal Godhead (cf. Gen. 16:7-10, 13; 18:1-33; 21:17-20; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; 32:24-32; 48:15, 16; Ex. 3:2-14; Josh. 5:13-15; Judges 13:3-23; 2 Kings 19:35; 1 Chron. 21:15-18, 26-30; Ps. 34:7; Zech. 1:8-17; 3:1-2; 12:8).

A. H. Strong said, "Commonly in the Old Testament, the 'angel of Jehovah' is a theophany, a self-manifestation of God. The only distinction is that between Jehovah in Himself and Jehovah in manifestation. The appearance of the angel of Jehovah' seem to be preliminary manifestation of the divine Logos, as in Genesis 18:2, 13; Daniel 3:24-28 . . . "

I agree with E. W. Hengstenberg in *Christology of the Old Testament*, the German Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch, H. C. Leupold, Lewis Chafer, A. H. Strong and many other scholars as to the identification of this special person.

Several things stand out about this angel in various passages of Scripture.

- "The angel of the LORD" is distinct from *Yahweh*, yet identical with *Yahweh* (Gen. 16:10, 13; 22:11-18; 31:11, 13; Ex. 3:2, 4; Josh. 5:13-15; 6:2; Zech. 1:10-13; 3:1, 2). In several of these passages the term "the angel of *Yahweh*" is completely interchangeable with "*Yahweh*," "*Yahweh*'s "name," which is equivalent to the saying *Yahweh*'s being, is in His special angel (Ex. 23:20, 21). The conclusion is the presence of the angel of the LORD is the same as the presence of the LORD (Ex. 32:24-30, 34; 33:11, 14, 20; Isa. 63:9). He accepts worship due only to God. If He were only an ordinary angel, regardless of His stature, he would have refused the act of worship and corrected the behavior.
- Moreover, in some of the texts it seems impossible to distinguish between the angel of the LORD and the LORD Himself (Gen. 16:7-13; 21:17; 22:17-18; 24:7, 40; 31:11-13; 48:16; Ex. 3:2-10; Judges 6:12-14; 13:21-22). This unique Angel seems to possess full authority and character of God.
- "The angel of the LORD" speaks as God, identifies Himself with God, and claims the prerogatives of God (Gen. 16:7-14; 21:17-21; 22:11-18; 31:11, 13; Ex. 3:2; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12; 3:1; 12:8).
- "The angel of the LORD" was a divine person, and "He is to be regarded as a kind of pre incarnation of the Messiah." The identity of "the angel of the LORD" with *Yahweh* is fully established in Genesis 16:13. "Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are a God who sees'; for she said, 'Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?'" The angel of the LORD is not a created being, but the divine being Himself. He is recognized as a superior being by the writers of the Old Testament. This angel is of the Godhead because He bears the titles belonging to Deity alone--*Yahweh* and *Elohim*. Isaiah 42:8 reads, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. "

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- The angel of the LORD definitely identifies Himself with *Yahweh* in a variety of circumstances. In Genesis 16:10, "Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.'" This is no ordinary messenger of God. He doesn't say, "God will." He says, "I will greatly multiply your descendents." Examine Genesis 18:19-24 and note who is speaking and who is making the promises to Abraham. "The angel of the LORD" in chapter seventeen is "God" in chapter eighteen. The angel of the LORD is God Himself. Sometimes He is called *Yahweh* and at other times *Yahweh's Messenger*. *Yahweh* says, "I will send My angel [or messenger]," but the Angel is clearly said to be *Yahweh* Himself. The same person is in view whether *Yahweh* says, "I will send my angel," or "I will go."
- The writers of the Old Testament call Him *Yahweh* (LORD). In a time of crisis the angel of the LORD visited Gideon to give encouragement (Judges 6:11-24). It climaxes with worship in verse 20-24, "The angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.' And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight." Note carefully what happens next. "When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, 'Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.' The Lord said to him, 'Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites" (vv. 22-24). You do not build altars to angels, and you do not worship angels. That would break the first commandment.
- The doctrine of the Trinity of the Godhead is here implied. This theophany is in perfect accordance with the earlier foreshadowing. He is perfectly equal with God – essentially one with God, yet a distinct person from *Yahweh* (Genesis 16:10; 17:20). Judges 2:1-2 has an interesting observation about the exodus. "Now the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?'" Here "the angel of the LORD" is God in His self-manifestation. This is similar to His dealings with Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. He speaks with authority as though He were God Himself. Only the Logos, or some other manifest personification of God, would be able to do that. He is an angel only by function or responsibilities meaning He is one with the Godhead who serves as messenger or revealer. In His person He is ever the manifestation of God (John 1:18). This Angel is Deity. He is of the Godhead.
- Godly men recognize this angel as God. The angel of the LORD reveals Himself to people and they understand Him to be a divine person (Genesis 16:13). In Judges 2:1-3; 6:14, 16 the angel of the LORD is referred to as the LORD (*Yahweh*). The angel of the LORD uses the first personal pronoun "I" (vv. 1-3, 14, 16) in speaking as God to Gideon. He performs the miracle and disappears thus causing Gideon to recognize Him. The only reasonable conclusion is that this was a true theophany. This angel uses the first person references while speaking in behalf of God. He is God Himself, more specifically the Second Person of the Godhead, here in theophany (cf. Gen. 18:1-21; Josh. 5:13-6:5).

The One who announced to Samson's mother his coming birth was the Second Person of the Godhead in pre-incarnate form (Judges 13:1-23). The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah and his wife promising them a son (Judges 13:2-23). The passage reaches its climax in verses 19-22. Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (v. 22). The angel of the LORD is God.

Malachi 3:1 reads, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger [or "angel"], and he will clear the way before me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in

me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts." The Messenger of the Covenant (Angel of the Covenant) will suddenly come to "His temple." The implication is that the Messenger is *Yahweh* who abode in the temple for whom it existed. Jesus Christ, when he was here on the earth, was ever in the temple. It was His house. His "triumphal" entry into Jerusalem was a conspicuous advent of *Yahweh* to His temple (Matt. 21:1-17; Mk. 11:35-37; Luke 19:28-48; John 12:12-16; cf. Zech. 9:9). Jesus Christ fulfilled the expectations concerning the Messiah and was none other than the Messenger of *Yahweh* or Messenger of the Covenant in the Old Testament.

Therefore, many Old Testament scholars identify the angel of the LORD as a true theophany. He is the pre-incarnate Logos. Hence it is best to see the angel as a self-manifestation of *Yahweh* in a form that would communicate His immanence and direct concern to those to whom He attended.

It is clear from this and other passages of Scripture that this Person was an appearance of God Himself, the Second person of the Godhead who assumed a temporary natural body. The angel ceases to appear to men after the incarnation of the Logos of Jesus Christ.

A theophany is a self-manifestation of God in visible and bodily form to men before the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The theophanies are chiefly appearances of the angel of the LORD, who is clearly distinct from angelic beings. They are actual occurrences, not imaginary, not hallucinatory experiences. They take place in historical settings initiated only by God.

Several scholars have observed that the natural unity and integrity of Scripture would be broken if it could be proved that the crucial high point in the Old Testament revelation was a creature angel, while that of the New Testament is the incarnation of the God-Man.

Who is this angel of the LORD? The earliest church fathers and most conservative evangelical Bible scholars agree that the angel of the LORD is no one other than Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the second person of the God head. These theophanies are pre-incarnate appearances of God the Son in human form. The angel of the LORD appeared only in the Old Testament. Theophanies are unknown in the New Testament after the permanent incarnation of Christ.

Our study of the Angel of the LORD leaves no room for doubt that the term denotes God Himself as seen in human form. This messenger is God made visible, and at the same time God sent. The Angel of the LORD is a term for the Lord Himself, the pre-existent Son of God.

It is the teaching of Scripture that the angel of LORD is specifically the Second Person of the Trinity. The Angel of the LORD of the Old Testament is the Christ of the New Testament.

Jesus Christ was and is *Yahweh*, and since He is *Yahweh*, He preexisted from all eternity. The Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is clearly the same person identified as the Christ of the New Testament. The Angel of the LORD and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior is the same person. The image of the Invisible has become flesh and dwelt among us and redeemed us by the atoning sacrifice of Himself.

In the fullness of time, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . 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 1:14, 18). When you look into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, you see the face of God. In Him we have the perfect vision of what God is like. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

This is why the early church proclaimed there is salvation in no other person. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus declared, I'am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. . . . Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father . . . (John 14:6, 9).

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