

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Series: A LITTLE BIT OF THIS, A LITTLE BIT OF THAT

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WHO IS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD?

1. Lesser Deity (Ancient Polytheistic Context)
 - This view suggests the Angel of the Lord comes from earlier polytheistic traditions, where the Angel was seen as a lesser god under YHWH
 - Uses Psalm 82 as evidence of a "council of gods," though mainstream Judaism and Christianity reject this interpretation
2. Multiple Redactors
 - Historical-critical scholars suggest different editorial sources combined "the LORD" and "the Angel" references
 - Points to narrative shifts like Exodus 3:2 as evidence, though critics see these as intentional theological devices
3. Purely Literary Figure
 - Views the Angel as a metaphorical device similar to personified Wisdom (Proverbs 8)
 - Interprets the Angel as representing God's presence rather than a distinct being
4. Non-Trinitarian Theophany
 - Sees the Angel as God appearing visibly without specific Trinitarian distinction
 - Notes interchangeable use of Angel, LORD, and God in passages like Exodus 3:2-4
5. Manifestation of the Father
 - Views these appearances as God the Father manifesting temporarily
 - Challenged by Biblical statements that the Father is unseen
6. Manifestation of The Holy Spirit
 - Proposes the Angel as an Old Testament appearance of the Spirit
 - Less common view with limited textual support. This interpretation likely arises from the fact that angels are called spirits, while overlooking the word angel's basic meaning of messenger.
7. Created Angel with Special Authority
 - Sees the Angel as a high-ranking created being speaking with divine authority
 - Challenged by instances of the Angel receiving worship and forgiving sins
8. Christophony
 - A preincarnate manifestation of the Son in a temporary physical form.
 - Many classical Trinitarians hold that the Angel of the LORD is the second Person of the Trinity appearing in the Old Testament before the incarnation.
 - These appearances are regarded as the Son taking on physical form, not having such form prior to or after the manifestation.
 - The Eternal Son in His Eternal Physical Form.
 - This view holds that the Son of God has always been the bodily nature of God, and thus the Son came in His eternal physical form and was referred to as the Angel of the LORD.
 - This is the view that I hold and will attempt to display through the passages that follow.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD PASSAGES

GENESIS 16:7-13

Hagar flees from Sarai and encounters "the angel of the LORD." He addresses her troubles, promises numerous descendants, and names her unborn child Ishmael. She then refers to this being as God Himself ("Thou God seest me"). This suggests a personal presence wielding God's authority, consistent with the view that this is no mere created being.

GENESIS 22:11-18

Just as Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, the angel of the LORD intervenes. This angel speaks in the first person as God, swears by Himself, and provides the covenant blessing. The angel says Abraham withheld nothing “from me,” identifying Himself with God’s identity.

EXODUS 3:1-16

Moses, tending Jethro’s flocks, sees a bush that burns without being consumed. “The angel of the LORD” appears, but then God Himself speaks from the bush, identifying Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses is commissioned to return to Egypt and deliver Israel. The text closely intertwines the presence of “the angel of the LORD” and “God” (YHWH) speaking.

This passage provides definitive evidence that “the angel of the LORD” is far more than a created being. He unequivocally proclaims God’s identity, wields divine authority in using the sacred name, and authoritatively commissions Moses. This is clearly the preincarnate Son appearing to Moses - He speaks as God Himself and reveals the divine name “I AM,” the very name Jesus later claims in John 8:58, establishing His eternal divine nature.

NUMBERS 22:22-27, 31-32, 34

Balaam sets off contrary to God’s will. The angel of the LORD blocks him multiple times, which the donkey sees before Balaam does. Finally, Balaam’s eyes are opened, and he realizes this angel has lethal authority. The angel challenges Balaam as though He is the one offended. The phrase “thy way is perverse before me...” implies that the angel is the LORD.

JUDGES 2:1-4

The angel speaks as though He is the very One who delivered Israel from Egypt and gave the covenant commands. This goes beyond the mere role of a messenger or subordinate agent.

JUDGES 5:23

During Deborah’s song, the angel of the LORD is quoted as pronouncing a curse on the inhabitants of Meroz for failing to aid Israel. Is there any time a normal angel gives a curse like this? In Scripture, angels sometimes deliver messages of doom (e.g., destroying angels), but they typically do so under God’s explicit command. Here, the angel himself utters the curse without the text stating he first received it from God. This is unusual unless the speaker is, in fact, acting as God.

JUDGES 6:12-23

The angel commissions Gideon, but as the dialogue continues, Scripture states “the LORD looked upon him” and Gideon fears for his life, having seen the angel of the LORD “face to face.” The text interchanges “angel of the LORD” and “the LORD” repeatedly. This close identification between the angel and the LORD is consistent with the idea that Gideon encountered a bodily appearance of the Son, who speaks as God yet is visible.

JUDGES 13:3-22

The angel announces Samson’s birth, refuses to share His name, and ascends in the flame of Manoah’s sacrifice. Manoah’s reaction—“we have seen God”—shows the angel is more than an ordinary messenger. Many connect the “secret” or “wonderful” name with the unique identity of the Son.

2 SAMUEL 24:16 (SEE ALSO 1 CHRONICLES 21:12-30)

David's sin of numbering the people leads to judgment. The angel of the LORD executes the plague and stands ready to strike Jerusalem. God then halts the angel's hand.

This passage demonstrates the Angel of the Lord wielding divine authority over life and death - power that belongs to God alone. The Angel's personal exercise of such judgment strongly indicates this is an appearance of the Son, who inherently possesses the divine right to execute judgment. Significantly, this location became the site of Solomon's Temple and, by tradition, is identified as both the place of creation and where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac on Mount Moriah - suggesting this is a sacred spot where the Lord Himself has appeared multiple times throughout history.

1 KINGS 19:7

After Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal and his subsequent flight into the wilderness, the angel of the LORD appears twice to provide food and water. This sustains Elijah for a 40-day journey to Horeb (Sinai).

2 KINGS 1:3, 15

King Ahaziah, after an accident, sends messengers to inquire of a foreign god. The angel of the LORD intercepts Elijah and commissions him to deliver a bold prophecy to the king's messengers. Later, when a captain and fifty men approach, the angel of the LORD tells Elijah to go without fear.

As in all other appearances, the angel unmistakably demonstrates divine authority and foreknowledge. This clearly demonstrates the Son's divine prerogative to direct prophets and pronounce judgment, distinguishing Him from any mere created messenger.

2 KINGS 19:35

See also Isaiah 37:36, a parallel passage.

When Sennacherib invades Judah and threatens Jerusalem under King Hezekiah, the angel of the LORD slays 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night, ending the siege. Such an act of judgment—instantly destroying a vast army—demonstrates direct, lethal authority typically reserved to God.

PSALMS 34:7, 35:5-6

Psalms 34 and 35 portray the angel of the LORD protecting and delivering the righteous. Psalm 35 describes Him as an agent of divine justice against enemies. The language depicts both protection and pursuit. While these references could signify God's guardian power through an angelic representative, the interweaving of direct deliverance and judgment resonates with the Son's dual role of Savior and righteous Judge.

ZECHARIAH 1:11-12, 3:1-5, 12:8

In Zechariah 1, the angel of the LORD communicates directly with the LORD of hosts, interceding for Jerusalem. In Zechariah 3, this angel presides over Joshua's cleansing from sin, and in 12:8, the angel is equated with God's defense of Jerusalem. The text sometimes distinguishes "the LORD" and "the angel of the LORD" but also treats them closely.

The angel's intercession on behalf of God's people and authority to remove iniquity align with the Son's mediatorial role. Zechariah 3, especially, portrays the angel addressing Satan's accusation against the high priest, paralleling the Son's role as advocate and cleanser of sin (cf. 1 John 2:1).

This is further evidenced in Mark 2:7,10, where the scribes correctly assert that only God can forgive sins, yet Jesus demonstrates His status by both healing and forgiving the paralytic man. This parallel helps establish that the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament shares the same divine prerogatives as Christ in the New Testament.

The parallel between Zechariah 12:8's equation of the angel of the Lord with God Himself ("the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them") provides one of the strongest textual evidences for the deity of the Angel. Here, the text explicitly places "God" and "the angel of the LORD" in apposition, treating them as equivalent. This equivalence cannot be explained if the Angel were merely a created being, as it would violate the fundamental distinction between Creator and creature. Instead, it points to the Angel's divine nature while maintaining His distinct personhood - exactly what we would expect if this is indeed the pre-incarnate Son.

SYNOPSIS

The Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament exhibits the same nature and role as Jesus does in the New Testament. Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus "the image of the invisible God," and John 1:18 insists that nobody has seen the Father at any time except through the Son, who "hath declared him." Jesus also applies the divine name "I AM" to Himself (John 8:58), directly recalling God's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 3. The Word who "was with God" and "was God" (John 1:1) is the same One who "was made flesh" (John 1:14). This consistent revelation across both Testaments indicates that any visible, tangible appearance of God in the Old Testament—especially under the title "the Angel of the LORD"—is best understood as the Second Person of the Trinity appearing prior to His incarnation as Jesus. The same Person who walked the earth as Jesus of Nazareth later in history is the One who appeared throughout the Old Testament, thus binding the Scriptures together in a unified testimony of the eternal Son's work and presence.