

**“THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (JEHOVAH)”**  
**OR**  
**“THE ANGEL OF GOD (ELOHIM)”**  
**Gen.16:7-14; 21:17-19; Judg.6:20,21**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. It is no secret or surprise that angels are often referred to in both the O.T. and the N.T.
2. In fact, at the time of his betrayal by Judas to be tried and crucified, when Peter attempted to defend him with the sword against the enemies, Jesus rebuked him and said: “Thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels, But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” Mt.26:53,54.
3. Other passages in both O.T. and N.T. speak of “hosts” of angels, Psa.103: 20,21.
4. Thus angels in the plurality are often spoken of. Cf. Gen.32:1,2; Psa.68:17; 91:11; Heb.2:5.
5. But one of the most intriguing inquiries into the literature of the O.T. has to do with that mysterious being that is referred to in our three texts, along with several others, in the singular and designated as:
  - a. “*The* angel of the Lord (or Jehovah),” Gen.16:7-14; Judg.6:21.
  - b. “*The* angel of God (or Elohim),” Gen.21:17-19; Judg.6:20.
  - c. Obviously, the two expressions refer to or identify the same entity or person or being.
6. Who is this person? Who is the angel of Jehovah? Or the angel of Elohim?
  - a. Is he an angel who is a created being? Psa.148:2,5.
  - b. Or is he one who is not a created being? But one standing in a class all by himself as an uncreated being?
7. It shall be the burden of this lesson to answer this question and identify this being: The Angel of the Lord (Jehovah), or The Angel of God (Elohim).

**II. DISCUSSION**

- A. THE FIRST ISSUE TO BE ADDRESSED IS THE SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING OF THE TERM “ANGEL,” OFTEN TRANSLATED “MESSENGER” IN THE O.T.**

1. The Hebrew word translated “angel” or “messenger” is *Mal’ak* – mal-awk’.
  - a. Strong, #4397, p.66, defines it: “from an unused root meaning to dispatch as deputy; a messenger; spec. of God, i.e., an angel”
  - b. Robert Girdlestone (1973), Syn. Of the O.T., says it “simply signifies a messenger.”
    - (1) As we shall see, the nature of the messenger, whether a human being, or a created divine spirit being, or an uncreated divine being must be determined from the context.
  - c. Theological Wordbook of the O.T., Vol. I, pp.464,465, #1068a, defines it: “messenger, representative, courtier (“one who solicits the favor of another”), angel.” **Then adds:**
    - (1) “‘Messenger’ is an inadequate term for the range of tasks carried out by the O.T. *mal’ak* (*angel*). These were (1) to carry a message, (2) to perform some other specific commission, and (3) to represent more or less officially the one sending him. There were both human and supernatural *melakim* (angels or messengers, ejd), the latter including the angel of Yahweh (i.e., the angel of the Lord).”
2. Therefore, the term *Mal’ak* (angel) meaning messenger, representative or courtier – one dispatched as deputy to act for another – may apply to *human messengers* as message bearers with various kinds of messages.
  - a. They could be bearers of good news (1Sam.6:21); threats (1Kgs.19:2), or requests (Num.22:5,6; Judg.7:24).
  - b. They could spy (Josh.6:25, kill (1Sam.19:11; 2Kgs.6:32), or summon for immoral purposes (2Sam.11:4).
  - c. They could serve as diplomatic representatives (Judg.11:12-14; 2Sam.5:11; 1Kgs.20:2).
  - d. The O.T. prophets were called God’s messengers (Mal’ak, angels), his official representatives, as well as message bearers (2Chr.36:15,16; Hag.1:13).

3. Also, the term *Mal'-ak* (mal-awk') refers to supernatural messengers, or angels, who were created spirit beings (Psa.148:2,5) and who represented the same general range of functions as the human messengers.
  - a. More often they performed some particular commission such as guarding a human effort like the search for Isaac's bride (Gen.24:37-40).
  - b. They executed judgment (2Sam.24:17; Psa.78:49), they delivered (Gen.19:12-17), and they protected (Psa.91:11).
  - c. A special function of supernatural messengers/angels is that they, by their very presence, present an aspect of God's glory (Gen.28:10-19). Cf. Isa.6:1-4; Rev.4:6-8.
  - d. In addition, they join in active praise of God, Psa.148:2; Rev.4:8.

**B. THERE IS A VAST AMOUNT OF EVIDENCE LEADING TO THE CONCLUSION THAT "THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (JEHOVAH)" WAS A NOT ONLY A SUPERNATURAL BEING, BUT A DIVINE BEING, NOT A CREATED BEING.**

1. For the term *Mal'-ak* (angel/messenger) is used to designate this special messenger of "The Angel of the Lord (Yehovah – yeh-ho-vow' – Jehovah)", or "The Angel of God (Elohim)".
2. O.T. Word Studies, Wilson, says: "The 'Angel of Jehovah' is evidently appropriated to an uncreated being, and the designation of the Messiah". Cf. 1Cor.10:1-4.
  - a. By this designation this angel/messenger is singled out and distinguished from angels in general.
  - b. This one is the angel of the Lord, or the angel of God, not simply an angel, or one of many angels used as messengers of God.
    - (1) In the Greek N.T., the definite article (the word "the") is never used when an angel appears.
    - (2) Some translations do wrongly use the definite article, but the Greek never used it in referring to angels in general.

- c. This angel has the same general range of functions as other messengers/angels, such as:
    - (1) He brought messages, good (Gen.16:10-13), and threatening (Judg.5:23).
    - (2) He performed specific commissions of judgment (2Kgs.19:35; Psa.35:5,6) and deliverance (Psa.34:7).
  - d. But this angel alone had the ministry of intercession with God in behalf of men, Zech.1:12-16; 3:1-10.
  - e. He alone speaks for God in the first person, Gen.16:10; Exo. 3:2,6; Judg.2:1.
  - f. He alone accepted worship and spoke as God (Exo.3:1-6; Josh.5:13-6:2; Judg.6:19-24). Ordinary angels refuse – do not permit – worship (Rev.19:10; 22:8,9).
3. As we examine Gen.16:7-14, we note that in v.7, we are first introduced to the expression “the angel of the Lord” (i.e., of Yahweh, yeh-ho-vaw’, of Jehovah) – elsewhere called “the angel of God” (i.e., of Elohim), Gen.21:17; 31:11; Judg.6:20; 13:9.
- a. The name Yahweh or Jehovah is used in the O.T. to designate God as *the covenant God; the self-Existent or Eternal*, the Jewish national name of God.
  - b. The name Elohim is used in the O.T. to designate *God the Creator; of the Supreme God*.
  - c. There is but one God, of course: hence the name **Elohim** pictures him in his omnipotence especially (Isa.57:15; Gen.1:1); and the name **Yahweh or Jehovah** portrays him in his benevolence, goodness, etc., with respect to his creatures, especially man (Eph.4:6; 1Tim.2:5).
  - d. By comparing Vv.9,10,11,13, various scholars have concluded that here, as well as in many other instances, the angel’s identify with Yahweh or Jehovah is fully confirmed, that he is both at once identified with God (as deity) and differentiated from him.
  - e. In other words, “The Angel of the Lord” here is not a created being (hence not one member of “the innumerable hosts” of “ministering spirits”, called

“angels,” or created spirit beings called angels, who figure repeatedly in the story of the unfolding of God’s plan of human redemption, such as, Heb.1:14; 12:22; Col.1:16; Psa.148:2,5; but the Divine Being Himself.

f. Now note Whitelaw’s arguments from Pulpit Commentary on Gen.16:7:

(1) The *Maleach* (angel) Jehovah explicitly identifies himself with Jehovah, v.10: (“I will multiply thy seed, that it shall not be numbered for multitude”), and with Elohim, Gen.22:12: (“...for I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me”).

(2) Those to whom he makes his presence known recognize him as Divine:

(a) Gen.16:13: “And she called the name of the Lord that spoke unto her, Thou God seest me...”

(b) “Gen.18:22-33, Abraham’s intercession for Sodom.

© Gen.28:12,13-19, Jacob and the vision of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven (note vv. 13-16).

(d) Exo.3:2-11, Moses, the angel of the Lord and the burning bush (vv.2,6).

(e) Judg.6:12-23, The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon (note vv.13-16,22).

(3) The Biblical writers constantly speak of him as Divine, calling him Jehovah without the least reserve:

(a) Gen.16:13.

(b) Gen.18:1,22-33.

© Gen.22:15-18.

(d) Exo.3:1-11.

(e) Judg.2:1,2.

(f) Judg.6:12.

(4) It is true that “the angel (messenger) of the Lord” was a human messenger in Hag.1:13, as the context proves because it calls Haggai, the

prophet, “the messenger/angel of the Lord,” and in many other places, and a created being or angel in Gen.24:39,40; Psa.148:2,5; Mt.1:20; Ac.8:26; 12:7.

- (5) But commonly, in the O.T., as the context proves, “the Angel of the Lord (Jehovah)” is a theophany, a self-manifestation of God to man by actual experience. The only distinction is that between Jehovah in Himself and Jehovah in manifestation.
  - (6) The doctrine here implied of a plurality of persons in the Godhead is in complete accordance with earlier foreshadowing (Gen.1:26; 11:7), and later revelations of the same truth (Jno.1:1-3; Phil.2:5-11; Jno.17:1-3; Col.1:16-19).
4. Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary on Gen.16:7: “This remarkable title occurs here for the first time in the O.T. Here it is evidently to be understood of God himself (v.13). God, who is himself invisible, visited her under the appearance of an angel, ‘the angel of covenant’ – the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity (the Godhead, ejd) who has ever manifested God to man.” – p.323.
  5. This angel appears in the history of Hagar a second time (Gen.21: 17-19), and this time as “the angel of God” (*Maleach Elohim*), not as the *Maleach Jehovah* or “the angel of the Lord”; for the question here is not about a return to Abraham’s house (as it was in Gen.16:7-14), but about the independent settlement with Ishmael in the wilderness.
  6. The person who tempts (tries) Abraham in Gen.22:1 is Elohim – God as he manifests himself and commands him to offer his son Isaac.
    - a. In the rest of the narrative this angel of God (Elohim) identifies himself throughout with Jehovah God (vv.11-16).
  7. To Jacob in a dream (Gen.28:12,13; 31:11), but throughout is identified with Jehovah.
  8. To Jacob in Gen.32:24-30

- a. This, the greatest event of revelation in the life of Jacob, is the grand theophany, in the night, through a vision, but the man who wrestles with him calls himself God and man (men) at the same time. Cf. 35:1-9.
- b. According to Hos.12:3,4,,5, note the definite article “the”, *the* angel, v.4.
  - (1) God had met him in the form of a man: God in the angel, i.e., not in a created angel, but in “the Angel of Jehovah,” the visible manifestation of the invisible God.
  - (2) But Hosea does not speak of Jehovah, or the angel of Jehovah, but of Elohim, for the purpose of bringing out the contrast between God, the Creator, and man, the creature.

**C. THEREFORE, THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH, IDENTIFIED AS A DIVINE BEING, IS SEPARATE AND DISTINCT FROM JEHOVAH.**

- 1. This Being, though Deity, Jehovah, is also distinguished from “Jehovah”, or God, the Father.
- 2. This Being is not only Jehovah himself, but he is acting on behalf of another who is also Jehovah.
- 3. In Exo.23:20-23, Jehovah promised the children of Israel that he would “send an angel” before them as they sojourned in the wilderness of Sinai, v.20a.
  - a. This angel would keep them, and bring them finally to the land of Canaan, v.20b.
  - b. They were warned to listen to (obey) this angel’s voice and not provoke him; otherwise, he would “***not pardon your transgressions***,”v.21a.
  - c. Then Jehovah said: “for ***my*** name is in ***him***,” v.21b.
  - d. Does this not suggest deity since he possessed the traits, characteristics and prerogatives of deity?
  - e. Yet note the distinction between “***my***” and “***him***”. There are two distinct divine persons here.
- 4. Question: How can this being or person be both “Jehovah,” and yet be a messenger “***from Jehovah***”? Is the designation “Jehovah” applied to more than one divine person? And one of the be “sent”?
  - a. The answer is, Yes. In the N.T. Jesus, God, is “sent”.

- b. The name “Jehovah” (Yahweh) is derived from a root form, *havah*, which means “to be,” or “being”.
  - (1) It suggests that deity is absolutely self-existent, -- Nathan Stone (1944), *Names of God*, Moody Press.
  - (2) It thus is a fitting name for each of the persons within the Godhead, since each of these is characterized by uninitiated existence.

**D. OUR CONCLUSION: “THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH” WAS THE PRE-INCARNATE CHRIST.**

- 1. A strong case has been made for the fact that “the angel (messenger) of Jehovah”, who operated in the interests of the people of God of the O.T., was none other than the Divine Word, who became flesh and dwelt among men, Jno.1:1,2,14, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ himself.
- 2. Consider also Mal.3:1, where, as the O.T. narrative draws to a close, the last prophet speaks of the coming ministry of John the Baptizer.
  - a. Concerning John and his mission, Jehovah says:
    - (1) “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me,” Mal.3:1a. Cf. Mt.11:10; 3:1-3.
    - (2) “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the *messenger (angel) of the covenant*,” whom ye delight in, Mal.3:1b.
    - (3) “behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts,” Mal.3:1c.
  - b. Note the expression “*messenger (angel) of the covenant*”, and “*he shall come*”.
  - c. The ancient Jews held this passage to be a reference to the coming Messiah. (Ebenezer Henderson [1980], *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, Baker Book House.
  - d. Mt.3:1-3, etc. prove it.

**III. CONCLUSION**

- 1. Conservative Bible scholars are commonly (but not universally) agreed that “the angel of the Lord (Jehovah)” or “the angel of God (Elohim)”, so prominent in the O.T., was the Lord Jesus in his pre-incarnate state.



2. To this we may add the inspired testimony of the apostle Paul, who affirmed the actual presence of Christ as a sustaining companion of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, 1Cor.10:4.
3. Take note of the following from Frederic Louis Godet, Commentary On First Corinthians, Kregel Publications, commenting on 1Cor.10:4b:

“...by the numerous sayings of Deut...the Lord is called the Rock of Israel: ‘He is the Rock, his work if perfect,’ (32:4); (Israel) ‘lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation’ (32:15); ‘of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful’ (32:18), etc.

“And by all those similar ones of Isaiah: ‘...and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength (Isa.17:10); ‘Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is the rock of ages (marg.)’ (Isa.26:4)...

“Only what is special in the passage of Paul is, that this title of Rock of Israel, during the wilderness history, is ascribed here, not to Jehovah, but to the Christ... Christ is represented...by Paul...as pre-existent before his coming to the earth, and presiding over the theocratic history (“pertaining to a theocracy”; “theocracy”: “the government of a state by the immediate direction of God”).

“In 1Cor.8:6, Paul had designated Christ as the Being by whom God created all things. Here he represents Him as the Divine Being who accompanied God’s people in the cloud through the wilderness, and who gave them the deliverance which they needed (cf.Exo.23:20-23, ejd).

“We have the same view here as appears in the *angel of the Lord*, so often identified with the Lord Himself, and yet distinct from Him, in the Being who is called in Isaiah the *angel of his presence* (Isa.63:9), and in Malachi the *angel of the covenant* (Mal.3:1), the Mediator between God and the world, specially with a view to the work of salvation.”

4. This being true, then a study of “the angel of the Lord (Jehovah)” in the O.T. amounts to a preview of the approaching Messenger of God, the Messiah, the One who would manifest God to man.