

## Who or What is the Angel of YHWH?

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### **References to the Angel of YHWH can be classified as:**

1. The angel is identified with YHWH – they are one and the same, the angel is manifestation of YHWH.
2. The angel is an independent entity with a particular mission from YHWH.
3. Non-deterministic – could be either of the above.

מַלְאָכִים - mal'ak: 'messenger, representative, courtier, angel' Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 1068a, page 464

## **I. Patriarchal Period**

### **God spoke freely to the Patriarchs:**

- **Noah:** Gn6:13-21 instructions to build the ark; Gn7:1-5 instructions on animals to take; Gn9:1-16 the everlasting covenant
- **Abraham:** Gn12:1-3 instructions to leave Haran; Gn13:14-17 promise of inheritance of the land of Canaan; Gn15:1-20 the covenant ceremony (note vs1 'in a vision'); Gn17:1-14 confirmation of the covenant; Gn17:15-22 promise of Isaac

### **Hagar Incidents (Gn16:1-14, 21:8-19):**

- Gn16:1-6 Hagar becomes pregnant, so Sarai sends her away
- Gn16:7-13 Hagar is rescued in the wilderness: note 'the angel of YHWH' in verses 7, 9, 10, 11 speaks with Hagar; then, verse 11 'YHWH has listened' and verse 13 'YHWH who spoke to her' – Hagar seems to identify the 'angel of YHWH' with 'YHWH' himself, i.e., the angel is a manifestation of YHWH so that he can deal with a human being.
- Gn21:8-14 Isaac has been born; Sarah becomes jealous of Ishmael; so, requires Abraham to send away Hagar and Ishmael
- Gn21:15-19 Hagar and Ishmael are rescued: note verse 17 'God heard' but 'the angel of God' speaks with Hagar; v18 'I will make ...' the angel speaks on God's behalf; v19 'God opened her eyes' – again the 'angel' appears to be a manifestation of God so that he can deal with a human being.

### **Prelude to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn18:1-17):**

- 18:1 'YHWH appeared'; verse 2 three 'men' are there – one of whom is YHWH manifested as a 'man'; Abraham knows it is YHWH – v3 calls him 'Adonai' (lord, master), Abraham calls himself his 'servant' in v3 and v5; 'YHWH said' v10, v13, and v17; v14 YHWH refers to himself as 'YHWH'
- Clearly, this is YHWH manifested as a man freely interacting with Abraham with no attempt at secrecy.

### **Sacrifice of Isaac (Gn22:1-16):**

- 22:1 'God tested Abraham and said to him'; v11 'the angel of YHWH called ...' saying v12 '... you have not withheld your son ... from me'; v14 Abraham says 'YHWH will provide'; v15 'the angel of YHWH called' then v16 'By myself ... declares YHWH'
- Clearly, the 'angel of YHWH' and YHWH/God are one and the same – a manifestation for a public situation.

### **Jacob Wrestles with God (Gn32:22-30):**

- 32:24 'a man wrestled' and v25 'the man' – as in Gn18, God/YHWH was manifested in human form; verse 28 'the man' changes Jacob's name to 'Israel' for 'you have striven with God'; v30 Jacob says 'I have seen God face to face'
- Hs12:3-4 Jacob 'strove with God ... he strove with the angel' - Hosea identifies them as one and the same

## **II. The Mosaic Period**

### **The Burning Bush (Ex3:1-13):**

- 3:2 'angel of YHWH' appears in the burning bush; v4 'God called', v6 'I am ... God' clearly God and the Angel of YHWH are one and the same; v7 'YHWH said'; v13 'Moses said to God' – the manifestation is to allow God to interact with a human being

- At 7:30-34 Stephan recounting the incident says, 'an angel appeared' and the 'voice of the Lord: I am ... God'
- After this first encounter between YHWH and Moses, all through Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers YHWH speaks freely with Moses as he did with the patriarchs.

#### ***The Pillar of Cloud and Fire:***

- Ex13:21 'YHWH went before them in pillar of cloud ... and ... in a pillar of fire'; Ex14:19 'the angel of God ... the pillar of cloud ... stood behind'; v24 'YHWH in the pillar of fire and cloud'
- Ex23:20-21 'I send an angel before you ... my name is in him' (see also Gn32:29, Jdg13:18, Ex34:5); v23 'my angel goes before you ... to the Amorites (etc.) ... and I blot them out'
- Ex33:2-3 'I send an angel before you ... I will not go among you'; v9 'pillar of cloud would descend and ... he (YHWH) would speak with Moses'; v14 YHWH said, 'My presence ...' in the pillar, i.e. the angel of YHWH (Is63:9)
- Nm12:5-6 'YHWH ... in a pillar of cloud ... called ... hear my words'; Nm14:14 'O YHWH ... you go before them in a pillar of cloud ... and a pillar of fire'

#### ***The Theophany to Moses (Ex33:11-23, 34:1-9):***

- 33:11 'YHWH use to speak to Moses face to face' – via the pillar v9; Moses requests to 'see' YHWH v13 and v18
- 33:20 'you cannot see my face ... and live' – hence, the necessity for YHWH to manifest himself in various forms to deal with human beings; v23 'you shall see my back'; 34:6 'YHWH passed before him ...'

#### ***Bile`am and his Donkey (Nm22:7-38):***

- 22:7-21 the messengers present Balak's offer; note: YHWH/God speaks freely to Bile`am in private
- 22:22-23 along the way 'the angel of YHWH took his stand ... and the donkey saw ...'; v28 'YHWH opened the mouth of the Donkey; v31 'YHWH opened the eyes of Bile`am and he saw the angel of YHWH ...'; v35 '... the angel of YHWH said ... speak only the word I tell you'; v38 Bile`am says, '... the word that God puts in my mouth ...'

### **III. The Post-Mosaic Period**

#### ***The Commander of YHWH's Army (Jsh5:13-15):***

- 5:13 'a man standing' whom Joshua does NOT recognize 'Are you for us, or for our adversaries'
- 5:14 the 'man' reveals himself as 'commander of the army of YHWH', and Joshua worships him realizing he is YHWH

#### ***The Bochim Incident (Jdg2:1-5):***

- 2:1 The 'angel of YHWH' appears to the whole congregation (v4), and speaks as YHWH 'I brought you up ...'; v2 'you have not obeyed my voice'

#### ***The commissioning of Gideon (Jdg6:11-23)***

- 6:11-12 '... Gideon was beating out wheat ... the angel of YHWH appeared and said ...'; v14 'YHWH ... said ... do I not send you?' v16 'YHWH said to him ...'
- Gideon is not sure who it is, v13 '... YHWH has forsaken us ...', v17 '...show me a sign that it is you who speak with me.'
- 6:19-20 Gideon prepares an offering; v20 'the angel of God said ...', v21 'the angel of YHWH reached out [his] staff ... and consumed the [offering] ... and vanished ...', v22 'Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of YHWH. Gideon said ... Adonai YHWH'

#### ***The Theophany to Manoah and his wife (Jdg13:2-25):***

- 13:3 'the angel of YHWH appeared' to the wife of Manoah; v6 she calls him 'a man of God' with 'the appearance of the angel of God'
- 13:8 Manoah prays to see the 'man of God'; v9 God listens and sends 'the angel of God'; v10 'the man ... has appeared'; v13 'the angel of YHWH' speaks; v15 Manoah proposes an offering to the 'man'; who says, v16, 'offer it to YHWH' – parenthetical statement affirms Manoah does not recognize 'the angel of YHWH'
- 13:19 Manoah offers a goat to YHWH; v20 'the angel of YHWH' disappears with the offering smoke; v21 they knew it was 'the angel of YHWH'; v22 Manoah fears death 'for we have seen God'

***The Census of Israel (2Sm24:1-17, 1Chr21:1-17):***

- 1Chr21:12 ‘...with the angel of YHWH destroying ...’ v15 ‘God sent the angel ... YHWH saw ... and he said to the angel ...’
- 2Sm24:16 ‘the angel stretched out his hand ... YHWH relented ... and said to the angel ... it is enough ... the angel of YHWH was by the threshing floor ...’
- Here the angel of YHWH is clearly a distinct entity from YHWH

***The Destruction of the Assyrian Army (2Kg19:32-35 // Is37:33-36, 2Chr32:21):***

- 2Kg19:32, 34 ‘...thus says YHWH ... I will defend this city ...’, v35 ‘... that night the angel of YHWH ...’ – could be YHWH or a separate entity
- 2Chr32:21 ‘... YHWH sent an angel ...’ – implies a separate entity

***The final manifestation of YHWH – Jesus Christ (Zc2:8-11, 4:9, 6:15, MI:3:1-2) [see Jh1:1, 1Cr10:4, Dt32:4]:***

- Zc2:8-9 “I” and “me” are ambiguous – the only reasonable antecedent is ‘another angel’ in v3; this angel speaks on behalf of YHWH in vs4-5; therefore, the most probable identity of this angel is the ‘angel of YHWH’
- Zc2:10 ‘...I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares YHWH.’ – a prophecy of the first coming of the Messiah
- Zc2:11 “me” again ambiguous, but the only reasonable antecedent is the same as vs8-9 who is sent by YHWH and will “...dwell in your midst...” same as v10: unity of YHWH and the ‘one sent’
- Zc4:9 and 6:15 again ambiguous “me” – context is the Messiah ‘the top stone’ 4:7 (Ps118:22, Mt21:42) and ‘Branch’ 6:12
- MI3:1 “me” is YHWH (the LORD); the Lord (adon) is the Messiah – who is YHWH

**IV. Excursus: “man shall not see me and live” Ex33:20 [see Is57:15a, 1Cr15:50-53]**

- Gn16:13 ‘I have seen him who looks after me’ Hagar affirms she recognizes God in the angel of YHWH
- Gn32:30 ‘I have seen God face to face ...’ Jacob affirms he recognizes God in the man with whom he wrestled
- Ex3:6 ‘Moses ... was afraid to look at God’ Moses recognizes God in the burning bush (At7:32)
- Ex19:12 ‘Whoever touches the mountain ... put to death’; v18 ‘YHWH had descended ...’; v21 ‘... to look and many perish’; 20:19 ‘... do not let God speak to us lest we die’
- Ex24:9-11 ‘Moses’ and others ‘... saw the God of Israel ... they beheld God’; v17 ‘the appearance of the glory of YHWH was like a devouring fire ...’
- Dt5:24 ‘... YHWH ... has shown us his glory ... we have seen God speak with man, and man still live.’
- Jdg6:22-23 Gideon says, ‘...I have seen the angel of YHWH face to face...’; YHWH says ‘...you shall not die.’
- Jdg13:22 Manoah says, ‘We shall surely die, for we have seen God.’
- Is6:5 Isaiah says, ‘Woe is me! ... for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’