

2. WHERE IS CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

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So yes, Jesus saw himself portrayed in the Old Testament Scriptures, but he did not see himself as having been “**the** Angel of the LORD” prior to his coming to earth in the flesh as is a popular notion nowadays. Nor did the New Testament writers even hint at that possibility. In fact, they expressly say the exact opposite: Jesus was not, is not an angel for ...

To which of the angels did He ever say, “You are My Son, Today I have begotten you” (Heb. 1:5)?

Nevertheless, popular belief insists that just because an angel of the Lord seems to be worshipped on occasion, just because an angel speaks in the first person as though he were God Himself, or just because an angel seems to make promises which are only the prerogative of the Almighty to make, that we may reasonably deduce Jesus existed in a pre-incarnate state as the God-angel-man superangel.

THE PRINCIPLE OF AGENCY

In the last article I mentioned that I have dealt with these apparently reasonable deductions in previous writings. But for those of you who don't have access to my book *They Never Told Me This in Church!* I will simply mention that the answer is found in the Biblical concept called “agency”.

In Semitic and Biblical thought, when a representative was deputised to transact business on behalf of the sender, that messenger-angel “*was conceived of as being personally --- and in his very words --- the presence of the sender*”. ^{1 2}

The dictum “**the agent is as the principal himself**” concisely expresses this interpretive key so essential to understanding much of the Biblical way of thinking about agency. Did not our Lord himself teach this principle of agency when he cried out, “**He who believes in me does not believe in me, but in Him Who sent me. And he who beholds me beholds the One Who sent me**” (John 12: 44-45)?

Which is to say, when we see Jesus who has been “sent” (or **sealed** as per **John 6:27**) by his Father, we see God the Principal. When we hear Jesus who has been commissioned by his Father, we see God. For **the agent is as the principal himself**.

If you don't like calling Jesus an agent-messenger of the one true God Who sent him, then just stick with the Biblical description of Jesus being **the mediator between God and men** (e.g **1 Tim. 2: 5**)! Same difference.

One of today's acknowledged authorities on Ancient Near East (ANE) studies explains this law of agency very well;

In the ancient world direct communication between important parties was a rarity. Diplomatic and political exchange usually required the use of an intermediary, a function that our ambassadors exercise today ...

The messenger who served as the intermediary was a fully vested representative of the party he represented. He spoke for that party and with the authority of that party. He was

¹ Millar Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, Philadelphia, 1946, p 120.

² The word for ‘angel’ in the Hebrew is *malak* and in the Greek is *aggelos* and both simply mean “messenger”, or one who is sent. It refers to either a human representative of the one who sends him, or may of course, refer to a heavenly visitor!

accorded the same treatment as that party would enjoy were he there in person. While this was standard protocol, there was no confusion about the person's identity.

This explains how the angel in this chapter (Gen. 16) can comfortably use the first person to convey what God will do (16:11). When official words are spoken by the representative, everyone understands that he is not speaking for himself, but is merely conveying the words, opinions, policies, and decisions of his liege.

So in Ugaritic literature, when Baal sends messengers to Mot, **the messengers use first person forms of speech**. E.T. Mullen concludes that such usage 'signifies that the messengers to Mot use first person forms of speech ... and that such usages 'signify that the messengers not only are envoys of the god, but actually embody the power of their sender.' ³

All who think 'the Angel of the Lord' was Jesus in a pre-incarnate existence would do well to read their Bibles through these Hebrew eyes! The dictum, "the agent (the one sent or commissioned) is as the principal himself" is critical to understanding who Jesus is. Jesus is always the one whom the Father has sent and sealed (e.g. John 5: 19-27; 6:27, etc.).

This principle perfectly explains how an angel may speak as God, be acknowledged as God, make promises as God himself, without **being** God Himself!

Yes, angels are identified fully with God, the One Whose affairs they conduct. But they are never identical to God --- never! In the Bible God is the Creator of the angels;

He makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1: 7).

In the Bible, God may go or come, but He never sends Himself! Indeed, God cannot commission Himself! God cannot seal Himself! Sending, sealing, commissioning, authorising, imply subordination.

By definition Yahweh God is the Almighty! But His angels, His agents, His messengers, stand in His place *as though they are God Himself* when they speak and act for Him! An angel of the Lord *functions as though* he is God Himself!

CHRIST IS IN THE FORESHADOWS.

So, if we don't find a personally pre-existing "eternal Son of God" in the guise of "the Angel of the Lord" in the OT, exactly where is Christ to be found?

Leaving aside for the moment the explicit pronouncements in the OT concerning the coming Messiah, we find Christ implicitly foreshadowed. We know that, with the benefit of hindsight after the resurrection, the NT writers found Jesus prefigured in many prophetic sketches. They variously describe these "portraits" as **types, examples, shadows, allegories and figures** (I Cor. 10: 6; Col. 2: 16-17; Gal. 4:24; Hebrews 8: 5; 9:9, etc.).

One obvious example where Jesus saw himself prefigured in type was the bronze serpent on the pole hung up to save the Israelites from their snake bites (John 3: 14).

Another well-known example is found in I Corinthians 10. Referring to the wilderness journey of Israel under Moses, the apostle Paul indicates that the miraculous provision of drinking water from the rock was a "type" of Christians drinking from the living Christ now (v.6). ⁴

³ John Walton's Commentary on Genesis in the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. (Bold emphasis mine).

⁴ For a full look at this passage see my article *The Rock That Rolled* earlier in this ARTICLES section.

Likewise, the manna from heaven is also said to be their **spiritual food (v. 3)** which portrayed how Christians would be fed by Christ himself in beautiful spiritual union with their Lord.

Again, every commentator knows that Abraham's offering up of his son Isaac is a beautiful depiction of Messiah's sacrifice at Calvary. Here's how ...

HE WAS THE SACRIFICE.

The LORD instructed Moses to offer the **'Tamid'** or daily burnt offering. You find this in **Exodus 29: 38-43**. Every single day, two unblemished one year old lambs were to be offered up on the altar, which was erected in front of the Holy of Holies. One lamb was offered in the morning and one at twilight (literally, between the two evenings) **(v. 38-39)**.

There were two other components to the sacrifice. As well as the lamb offered at the third hour (9 a.m.) and at the ninth hour (3 p.m.) there was bread which was anointed with oil, and wine offered as a **libation** with the whole being **an offering by fire to the LORD" (vs. 40-41)**.

Now here's the thing. When the Temple was built, every morning one of the Levitical priests was selected to carry a beam of wood up the stairs to the massive bronze altar and to light the fire. The steps were 12 feet high and the altar was 20 feet across!

Every devout Jew understood this was a portrayal and a remembrance of Isaac carrying the wood up for his own sacrifice! The imagery was rich and pregnant with meaning, for Jesus carried his own beam to Calvary.

In the court outside where this priestly work was performed, the people would gather to do two things. First, they would recite their monotheistic creed, the Shema; **Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God ... (Deut. 6:4)**.

Then they would recite 18 Benedictions, or blessings. This daily **Tamid** went on for generations, right up, of course, to the days when Jesus walked in the Temple precincts.

On the Day of Pentecost it seems Peter preached his famous sermon to the very crowd that had gathered outside the Temple for the morning burnt sacrifice for, we are told, it was **the third hour**, or 9 a.m.! And in the very next chapter, **Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer (Acts 3: 1)!**

After their miracle of the healing of the lame man, who is famous for his **walking and leaping and praising God (v.8)**, we read that **all the people saw this and were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him (v.10)**.

More significantly, on the Day of Jesus' crucifixion, we note that Jesus, the perfect and final Lamb of God, breathed his last and died at the precise moment of the ninth hour (3 p.m.) in the afternoon exactly when the **Tamid** was being killed and offered at the Temple!

We recall that the night before his death, Jesus had held the other two elements up before his followers --- the bread anointed with oil and the wine --- Jesus had said of the bread, **This is my body which is broken for you, take, eat in remembrance of me**. Likewise, he took the cup saying, **This is my blood of the covenant, which is to be shed for many for forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26: 26f)**.

The very next day they nailed the Lamb of God himself to the accursed tree *at the third hour*, and he expired *at the ninth hour*, thus fulfilling all the three components of the **Tamid** which faithful Israel had observed for generations.

What a Saviour! God's timing was perfect. And yes, it's easier to see these things after their fulfillment. But there, right in the very centre of her national cultic life, was the Christ faithfully portrayed to Israel in the types and shadows of their prophetic word.

But wait, there is more! Not only was Jesus himself the sin offering, but ...

HE WAS THE OFFICIATING HIGH PRIEST MAKING THE OFFERING!

The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took his outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. They said therefore to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be;' that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "They divided my outer garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things (John 19: 23-25).

Why does the Gospel writer mention this seamless robe **woven in one piece**? Would it not be more symbolically significant if he had mentioned something like, "And there was growing next to the cross a **hyssop bush**?" Hyssop of course, was used to apply the blood of the lamb to the lintel and door-posts of the Exodus. But whether there was a hyssop bush there or not, is pure speculation.

So, why mention the seamless robe of Christ? It must be significant, for no detail in Scripture is without meaning. **Josephus** points out;

The high priest is indeed adorned with ... a vestment of a blue colour. This also is a long robe, reaching to his feet ... Now this vesture was not composed of two pieces, nor was it sewed together upon the shoulders and the sides, but it was one long vestment so woven as to have an aperture for the neck ... (*Antiquities, 3: 159-161*).

The High Priest of Israel wore one long robe, **not composed of two pieces, nor was it sewed together ... but it was one long vestment so woven ...** This description fits perfectly with **Exodus 39: 22f** which stipulated the high priest's robe must be of **woven work, all of blue** with **binding all around** the opening for the neck **that it might not be torn!**

The seamless robe the soldiers cast lots for surely pointed to Christ as our High Priest? The book of **Hebrews** states that Jesus is the **High Priest of our confession (3:1)**. He has entered into the heavenly sanctuary, **within the veil (6:19)**, the Holiest of All, having **offered up himself (7: 27)**, presenting his own blood as the all-sufficient sacrifice for his people for all time, thus obtaining **eternal redemption for us (9:12)**.

All of which is to make the point that, Jesus Christ is both high priest and sacrifice for us. Do you not think that, when he wrote his Gospel, John mentions that Jesus' robe was **seamless, woven in one piece** for a deliberate purpose? Scripture was being fulfilled, **therefore the soldiers did these things (Jn. 19: 25)!**

All of this is to say that, Christ is anticipated in the OT by various prophetic outlines which Bible scholars usually call 'types'. Plainly speaking, this means the place to look for Christ in the OT is not as the Son of God Himself living and speaking and acting before his alleged incarnation --- whether in the guise of "the Angel of the Lord" or as "God the Son". Rather, we will find him in the many "examples" in the prophetic shadows which anticipated his promised arrival as God's anointed human being.

All very good so far. But we still haven't quite gotten to the bottom of our inquiry. Where did Jesus see himself in his Hebrew Bible?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Every Bible student knows that Jesus' favourite theme concerned the Kingdom of God, or in Matthew's Gospel, "the kingdom of heaven".⁵ When Jesus came proclaiming God's kingdom was **at hand** his announcement came at a time when Jews were at fever pitch with anticipation that "the Coming one", the promised Messianic Lord, might appear at any moment.

They found this hope particularly expressed in the book of **Daniel** in his oracle about the great statue of various metals representing the great pagan kingdoms of the earth (chapter 2). The vision declared God would set up a kingdom **not made with human hands** --- that is to say, it is of heavenly origin --- after the beastly kingdoms had run their course.

Indeed, God would send a **stone** to strike down the statue. The stone would pulverise the image of the statue into fine powder and then it would **become a great mountain that filled the whole earth** (**Dan. 2:31-35**).

Tom Wright, leading Bible historian and scholar notes,

The passage was regularly interpreted, from at least as early as the first century, to refer to the Messiah, and to the kingdom that would be set up through him.⁶

First Century Jews believed that sometime during the reign of the fourth beast (the Roman Empire) God was going to send his all-conquering Messiah. **Josephus** himself mentions that this **ambiguous oracle** from the Jewish Bible **more than all else incited [the Jews] to war** with Rome since it proclaimed that **one from their country would become ruler of the world**.⁷

This was the *milieu*, the cultural and Biblical context which Jesus worked in. It is this heavenly kingdom coming to govern the earth through God's appointed Messiah which Jesus came announcing as happening *soon...* **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand** (**Mk. 1: 15**). We will not properly understand Jesus if we neglect this background.

THE SON OF MAN

Since the Kingdom of God was Jesus' favourite topic, we must ask why his favourite self-description was to call himself **the Son of Man** (**Matt. 11:18-19; Lk. 9: 57-58; Mark 14: 21, etc.**)?

The answer is that both concepts of the Kingdom of God and the Son of Man are joined in Jesus' mind. He found both ideas linked inexorably in the Book of Daniel.⁸ Specifically, Jesus saw himself in Daniel's famous vision in chapter 7. There a Son of Man inherits/receives God's promised kingdom, after the nefarious empires have run their course.

In his vision of the future, Daniel sees a progression of four beast kingdoms followed by the coming of **one like a son of man** (**Dan. 7: 12f**). God's final kingdom is given to this **son of man** in **Dan. 7: 13-14**);

One like a Son of man was coming ... and to him was given an everlasting dominion ...

⁵ "The Kingdom of heaven" does not mean "the kingdom located in heaven". Rather, it means the kingdom that originates with or from God in heaven before it comes to the earth.

⁶ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1996, p 500.

⁷ Josephus, *War*, 6.312-15.

⁸ Certainly the description **son of man** occurs in the Hebrew Bible as a generic term for *a human being* such as in **Psalm 8: 4-5** or **Ezekiel 2:1,3,6,8, etc.** The *double entendre* suited Jesus' purpose admirably in the volatile political climate of his day. However, observe carefully that Jesus uses the definite article, **the Son of man**, so has a specific individual in mind --- himself!

Putting the two visions from Daniel chapter 2 and chapter 7 together, we see the same sequence of the four pagan empires followed by the coming of the kingdom of God. In the first vision, the pagan empires are likened to various metals. In the second vision, the pagan empires are likened to various cruel beasts.

In the first vision, the coming conqueror is likened to a stone whose influence grows into a mountain, and whose kingdom will know no end. And in the second vision, the coming ruler and heir of God's earthly kingdom is likened to **a son of man**.

There is neither room nor the reason in this brief article to elaborate all the details of these amazing prophecies. Sufficient for our purposes is to observe that, after the four kingdoms and their representative kings, comes the Son of Man and his everlasting kingdom. The Son of Man is the king of the fifth kingdom which happens to also be the kingdom of God on earth. That kingdom and its king will be established after the fourth beast is destroyed. (Read Daniel 7: 9-28).

Given that Daniel's fourth beast-king was the Roman Empire, we can see how Jews living in Jesus' day were stirred with anticipation that the ruler of the kingdom of God would arise in their generation to be their own promised Messiah. ⁹

MESSIAH WOULD DIE

When Jesus therefore came announcing God's kingdom was at hand, and that he himself was that Son of Man, you can be sure **Jesus had found himself in Daniel's visions!** However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Jesus didn't stop reading Daniel there. For it is evident he went on to read of the sinister fate awaiting the Messiah, the Son of Man which Daniel also predicted. Not many Jews liked reading that bit! They only anticipated a glorious, all-conquering Messiah; not a condemned one.

Jesus knew beforehand how **the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed** (Mk 8: 31). Notice that when speaking about this tragedy of public execution that he described these things as happening to **the Son of Man**. The Gospel of Mark says,

And he was stating the matter plainly (Mk. 8: 32).

How could Jesus be so adamant that **the Son of Man must suffer ... and be killed?** Well, we can't read the life of Jesus without noticing how many times he did something, said something, or an event happened, so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled. It is evident Jesus saw himself in his Bible as suffering a cruel death to fulfill God's prophetic word.

As far as I am aware, there is only one place in all the OT where **the Son of Man** dies, and it's Daniel's Son of Man. To this remarkable prophecy we shall turn in our next instalment. ¹⁰

⁹ The four beast empires in order were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Many Jewish commentaries said as much. The popular First Century book *1 Enoch* explicitly identified **the son of Man** as "the Messiah" (48:10; 52:4). The book of *Ezra* also of the First Century interprets Daniel's vision of "the figure of a man" in the "clouds of heaven" as a reference to the Son of God (*4 Ezra 13: 1-52*). Later rabbis made the same connection, such as in the *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a; Numbers Rabbah 13:14*.

¹⁰ Isaiah speaks of the death of the Suffering Servant, but that one is not specifically identified as the Son of Man.

