

# The Angel of the Lord: Jesus Christ in the Old Testament

**“Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.” (Exodus 23:20)**

## The Angel of the Lord

The primary words translated in our English Bibles as “angel” or “angels” are the Hebrew word *mal’ak* (Old Testament) and the Greek word *aggelos*. Both mean “messenger”. However, there are several Old Testament verses (e.g., Job 1:6 and 38:7) where angels are referred to as the “sons of God.” This is a characterization for the fact that God is spirit, angels are spirit beings, and angels are creations of God which have the appearance of young men (without wings). This distinction is important to understanding that *the* angel of the Lord or *the* angel of God in the Old Testament is actually not an angel, but the very Son of God.

In the Essentials teaching, [Holy Angels – Part 1](#), I explained the following concerning the Angel of the Lord:

The angel of the Lord was not an angelic messenger, but God Himself. He was the second person of the Trinity or Jesus Christ appearing pre-incarnate. In the 18th chapter of Genesis, He is simply referred to as the Lord. Notice that the angel of the Lord never appeared again in the Bible once Jesus Christ came on the scene as the God-man. In the Old Testament, roughly two-thirds of all the uses of the word "angel" and almost all references to an angel appearing are the angel of the Lord. The appearance of regular angels is far more frequent in the New Testament.

The angel of the Lord appeared many times in the Old Testament. We thus have more rich material about the Son of God—beyond the gospels—than is commonly recognized. We can study this to learn more about God the Father through Him. In essence, we can study Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. This makes this a truly Essential teaching.

After giving the Law to Moses, God gave him the following instruction:

"Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, **for my name is in him.**"

**"But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say,** then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." (Exodus 23:20-22)

The angel that God referred to here is the angel of the Lord. This is clear from His statement, "my name is in him," because in this context, my [name](#) refers to the "person" of God or the Son of God, the second person of God's [Triunity](#). Moreover, the statement, "obey his voice and do all that I say," implies that God is in him which He indeed is through the Son of God in His Triunity.

The focus of this Essentials teaching will be on who God revealed Himself to be—His character, His focus, His desires, etc.—through the angel of the Lord or the Son of God. I am fond of saying that Jesus Christ is where (in reality, through "whom") God meets man. A study of the angel of the Lord makes this even more apparent as we see how God began to reveal Himself through the Son of God. Let's dig into it.

## I AM

The most dramatic appearance of the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was when He called Moses to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hives, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me,

saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hives, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey." And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians." (Exodus 3)

God told Moses to tell the people that I AM sent him to them and that He is the same LORD (*Yehova*) that appeared to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Notably, Jesus would later have the following interaction with the Jews:

So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I am.**" (John 8:57-58)

The angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. The same Jesus, the Son of God, was the I AM with Moses in the deliverance of the Hebrews from the bondage of Egypt.

This appearance of the angel of the Lord in the burning bush revealed several things about God's character.

First, the Lord called out to Moses with exclamation, like a man calls his son: "Moses, Moses!" Stephen revealed that Moses knew (believed = *faith*) that God was going to use him to deliver the Hebrews from bondage before he fled Egypt at age 40 (Acts 7:23-25). So for at least forty years, God had been cultivating a *personal relationship* with Moses which undoubtedly prepared him for his future calling.

The first two times that the angel of the Lord is mentioned in Genesis (16:7-14 and 21:15-21), we are taught that God is a God Who sees us and hears us. He has personal relationships with those

who seek Him. Concerning Moses, the character of our present analysis, we are told:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, **for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.** (Hebrews 11:24-27)

Second, God made known to Moses that He is a holy God, as He declared:

"Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

His command to "take your sandals off" is indicative of the fact that God requires humility from us as He leads us in Christ, as He was planning to do before Moses. This is reminiscent of the manner in which the Lord taught us to pray:

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed [holy] be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)

Third, the Lord told Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians ..." This reveals that God is caring, merciful, and sensitive to the lives of His people. He will not sit by idly forever when they are suffering. He will act to deliver them. Ultimately, the angel of the Lord took on the form of a man (Jesus Christ) and became the ultimate sacrifice for sin on the cross—delivering all those who call on His name from the power of sin. He did this out of His great love for us as John famously wrote:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In the Bible, Egypt is often symbolic for the world. God's deliverance of the Hebrews in Egypt was a preview of what He would later do on the cross when He "delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). In *The Prophetic Plot Unfolds* Essentials teaching I

covered how God revealed this to Abraham as he acted out the sacrifice of his own son. This event in Genesis 22 included yet another Old Testament appearance of the angel of the Lord.

Fourth, He is a God that keeps His promises (in His timeline) and He will go to great lengths to fulfill what He has spoken. God brought Egypt to its knees to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to settle their descendants "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites" (Genesis 15:18b-21).

Fifth, and finally here, God is the only God—the one true God. He has no comparison. He always has been and always will be. His response to Moses' hypothetical question, which was framed in the shaky context of there potentially being more than one God, was met with the bold response: "I AM WHO I AM." In other words, God was telling Moses that I alone am God and there is no other. I am the only one you can call God. Jeremiah wrote, "But the LORD is the **true** God; he is the **living** God and the **everlasting King**" (10:10a). Because this everlasting King has no comparison, He demands our full devotion as Jesus reminded the Jews concerning the most important commandment:

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" (Mark 12:29-30)

## **Cloud by Day, Fire by Night**

The Lord told Moses that He *came down* "to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey." In Exodus, we find that the angel of the Lord is the same Lord having come down:

Then **the angel of God** who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. (Exodus 14:19-20)

And **the LORD** went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Exodus 13:21-22)

The angel of the Lord was *the* cloud by day and fire by night Who led the Hebrews in the wilderness. This is what is called a *theophany*—a visible manifestation of God to man. The Son of God was with His chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2) at all times, leading them day by day. Here we have a typological picture of Jesus Christ in His church. Consider the following description of how the Lord led the congregation in the wilderness:

On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped. At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the LORD they remained in camp; then according to the command of the LORD they set out. And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out. At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses. (Numbers 9:15-23)

This is a marvelous example of how the church should be led by the Lord and how the rhythm of His commands varies according to His will.

The Lord is with His people as David wrote and sang:

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. (Psalm 34:7)

God fights for His people who honor and obey Him. Concerning the angel of the Lord, He told the Hebrews: " if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries" (Exodus 23:22). Notwithstanding, God's blessings of justice and protection can be forfeited to the discipline of God should we not obey His voice. Consider what the angel of the LORD later declared to the Israelites here:

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' **But you have not obeyed my voice.** What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. (Judges 2:1-4)

There are three points that I wish to make here:

1. God never breaks His covenant. In other words, as mentioned earlier, He never breaks His promises. Colossians tells us that "all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (1:16b-17). Thus, God has crafted a world that His truth and justice are woven into the very fabric of—unchangeable as the following verses reaffirm:



The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit. (Job 37:23-24)

But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness. (Psalm 9:7-8)

Given this, God will not, indeed cannot, bend His justice.

1. The *Heavenly Father's* commands are for the protection and spiritual enrichment of His *children* in the midst of a corrupted world. They also cause His family to be distinct and shine forth in the light of Christ (Matthew 5:14).

2. *God's promises reveal Him in our lives, not the world.* When God originally commanded the Israelites to make no covenants with the inhabitants of the Promised Land, He did so in the following context:

"Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim [wooden images] (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a Jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. (Exodus 34:11-16)

Moreover, Moses gave the following warning to the Israelites before his death:

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire." (Deuteronomy 7:1-5)

God's plan was to "drive out" the inhabitants of the land before the Israelites. He wanted the inhabitants and all traces of their gods destroyed so that they would not be a snare to Israel and cause them to violate His first two commandments (Exodus 20:3-6). The wickedness of idolatry (Deuteronomy 9:5) must be completely eradicated from our lives or it will destroy the life that God has purposed for us. There can be no compromise.

God's plan is to reveal Himself in the lives of His people. Jesus Christ is to be revealed through His church. It is to this end that God's promises are destined. Agreements with the spirit of the world will choke off God's promises. Consider what Jesus taught here:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:5-11)

The angel of the Lord condemned Israel for not obeying His voice. Jesus instructed His disciples to keep His commandments. Jesus wants His church to obey His voice so that He can fill and lead

us as our cloud by day and fire by night. This is the life where we find perfect joy.

## **Empowerment of the Lord**

Not only did God reveal Himself in the Old Testament period through the angel of the LORD but He also came at times to empower various individuals that He called. The account of Gideon is a fine example. First, the introduction:

Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the LORD said to him, "**But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.**" And he said to him, "if now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."

So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites. (Judges 6:11-24)

God had gifted Gideon with "might" which was to be brought out through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Notably, Gideon had the *humility* that the Lord looks for in individuals so that He can show Himself strong on their behalf. And what did the Lord say in response to this humility? "I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." Young's Literal Translation (YLT) translates the Lord's response: 'Because I am with thee—thou hast smitten the Midianites as one man.' The second part of this translation is *past tense* which reveals that it was already done

in the mind of the Lord. Still, there is more revelation here: the Lord was telling Gideon that because of His empowerment, *He would do it through Him*. Later on, in the account of Gideon, we are told the following:

Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. **But the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon**, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet him. (Judges 6:33-35)

Here we see this empowerment brought to fruition as “the Spirit of the LORD *clothed* Gideon.”

The Lord calls those with humility so that He can do the impossible works of God through them for His glory. The historical account of Gideon is a great example of the Jesus Christ doing this in the Old Testament as the angel of the Lord.

## Ten Takeaways

To conclude, there are ten notable takeaways about the character of God that can be gleaned from our study of the angel of the Lord.

1. God has personal relationships with those who seek Him in truth. He sees us, He hears us, and the fact that we are told to obey His voice reveals that He communicates with us.
2. God is a holy God who requires humility as He leads us.
3. God is caring, merciful, and sensitive to the lives of His people Whom He loves.
4. God is a proven deliverer beyond our wildest expectations.
5. God always keeps His promises.
6. God has no equal and demands our full devotion.
7. Jesus Christ is in the midst of His people and leads them day by day.
8. God is a God of unswerving truth and justice.
9. God disciplines His own that do not listen to Him.
10. God’s intention is to empower us so that He may be revealed in us instead of the lifestyle of the world.

This Essentials teaching is so very essential since it is rich with Old Testament material that reveals the nature of God and how He interacts with His people.