

Understanding Angels

Who is the Angel of the Lord?

(List of scriptural passages compiled by Edward Myers in [A Study of Angels](#))

In Genesis...

- Because Sarai didn't think she would be able to give Abram a son, she allowed Abram to have a child with her maidservant, Hagar. After Hagar had conceived, Sarai became upset, and Hagar fled into the wilderness. Genesis 16:7-12 – *Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." Then the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her authority." Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count...Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"*
- In this passage, "the Angel of the Lord" is called by Hagar "the God who sees," and this angel does not correct her.
- In Genesis 18-19, we see angels in the form of man. Genesis 18:1 says that the Lord appeared to Abraham, and verse 2 tells us there were three men standing before him. Verses 13, 17, and 20 all use this phrase – "the Lord said..." In verse 22, the two men walk away but Abraham still stands before the Lord. In chapter 19, the two angels enter Sodom. So, although we often think of these three as angels, one of them was the Lord in the form of man.
- In Genesis 22, Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham is stopped before he can sacrifice Isaac, beginning in verse 11 – *"But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 15 Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies."* Here, the Angel of the Lord speaks about blessings from God in the first person.
- In Genesis 28, Jacob sees a vision with angels going up and down a ladder. In this vision, the Lord calls down to him. When he reflects on this vision in Genesis 31:11-13, he states, *"Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'" Jacob refers to the one calling down (previously identified as the Lord), as the angel of God.*
- In Genesis 32, we read about Jacob wrestling with a man, and then saying that he saw God face to face. Hosea refers to this in Hosea 12:3-5 – *"In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor. He found him at Bethel and there He spoke with us, even the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is His name."* Hosea refers to this individual as both an angel and the Lord.

In Exodus...

- In Exodus 3, Moses encounters the burning bush. In verse 2, the text states that the angel of the Lord appeared to him. In verse 4, God called to him from the bush.
- Exodus 13:21 tells us that the Lord was going before the Israelites in the form of a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. Exodus 14:19 states, *“The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.”* In Exodus 23:30, God said He is sending an angel ahead of them, and in Exodus 33:14, He said He was sending His presence ahead of them.

In Other Old Testament Passages...

- Numbers 22-23 tells the story of Balak, the king of Moab, and Balaam the prophet. Balaam was going to curse the children of Israel when the angel of the Lord stood in his way. In 22:35, the angel said, *“Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you.”* In 23:5, we read that the Lord put a word in Balaam’s mouth. In one case the angel told him a message, and in the second reference the Lord gave him the words.
- Joshua 5:13-15 – *Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” He said, “No: rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?” The captain of the Lord’s host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.”* Throughout the Bible, neither angels nor apostles accept worship, which is only reserved for God. Yet this “captain of the host of the Lord” does accept worship.
- In Judges 6, we find the story of Gideon. In verse 12, the “angel of the Lord” appeared to Gideon. In verse 14, “the Lord” looked at Gideon and responded to him. Both descriptions are used for the same individual.
- In Judges 13, the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife. In verse 22, Manoah states, “We will surely die, for we have seen God.” Seeing the angel of the Lord was considered equal to seeing God.

The Identity of the Angel of the Lord

- Scripture tells us that the Angel of the Lord is differentiated from the Father (God could send the Angel of the Lord to accomplish a purpose), and yet there is more than one case in which He is identified as God. The Angel of the Lord accepts worship and speaks about what God will do in first person.
- While many have proposed different theories about this angel, the one that seems most likely is that this angel is the Son (referred to as “the Word” in John 1) before he became flesh as Jesus.
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 – *“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”*
- John 8:56-58 – *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” 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 born, I am.”* When Moses encountered the burning bush, that was how God identified Himself – “I AM.”