

# DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

## Lesson 4

### The Angel of the Lord

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Most people when they think of the doctrine of Christ think of the New Testament and specifically the gospels which teach us about the life and death of Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus appeared in the Old Testament too. Being God, He appears and is working all the way through the Old Testament. At times Jesus, before he was called Jesus, appeared in the Old Testament in what are called “christophanies” or “theophanies.” A theophany is when God appears to someone in the Old Testament in a visible form like the burning bush. A christophany is when Jesus appears in the Old Testament before being born. It is what some have called a “pre-incarnate” appearance or an appearance before He became a man.

Most theologians believe that all theophanies in the Old Testament are also christophanies. They believe this because of Jesus’ role in the godhead. He is the mediator between God and men. He is the one who represents God to men. And hence it would be consistent and logical to assume that when God appears in the Old Testament in a visible form that it is most likely the person of Christ, since that is the ministry He fulfills within the godhead or trinity. This makes studying theophanies very interesting. And probably one of the most fascinating forms that Jesus revealed to men in the Old Testament is as the Angel of the Lord. In this study we will investigate the Angel of the Lord and see if we can reasonably conclude that the Angel of the Lord is none other than Jesus before He became a man.

#### I. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- A. **Christophany** – a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the Old Testament in some visible form.
- B. **Pre-Incarnate** – literally means “before” (pre), and “made flesh,” (incarnate) or before being made flesh. So when you speak of a “pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ” you are talking about Jesus appearing in the Old Testament era in some visible form before He became a man.
- C. **The Angel of the Lord**
  - 1. *Jesus Christ Our Lord* – The Angel of Jehovah is specifically the second Person of the Trinity.”<sup>1</sup>
  - 2. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* – “Supernatural being who bears a message on behalf of God. In many passages in the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord is identified with God, while in other instances a distinction is made between the Lord and the angel. In general, however, the terms “the angel of the Lord,” “the Lord,” and “God” are interchangeable.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pg. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Elwell, gen. Ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, pg. 23.

3. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* – The special form in which God manifested himself to man, and hence Christ's visible form before the incarnation.<sup>3</sup>

#### D. Theophany

1. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* – An appearance or manifestation of God; a compound word derived from the Greek noun for "God" (*theos*) and the Greek verb "to appear" (*phano*). A theophany is a manifestation of God in temporary forms perceptible to the external senses. A theophany is . . . a divine revelation in which God's presence is made visible and recognizable to people.

God made himself known to people through a special messenger called the Angel of the Lord, through the pillar and cloud that accompanied the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, and through the shekinah glory indwelling the tabernacle.<sup>4</sup>

2. *New Dictionary of Theology* – Theophany refers to an 'appearance of God' to man. The OT records numerous theophanies, beginning with the early chapters of Genesis which record that God talked to Adam and walked in the garden (3:8). God manifested himself to man in three forms – human (see Anthropomorphism), angelic and non-human. The form of each theophany correlates to its function.

When God comes in judgment, he appears in a threatening guise. For instance, God presented himself as an irresistible warrior immediately preceding the conquest of Jericho (Jos. 5:13-15). . .

A second type of theophany occurred when God revealed himself to people in the form of an angel. Manoah and his wife received news of the birth of Samson from an angelic figure whom they later recognized as God himself (Jdg. 13). Many, if not most, evangelical scholars believe that the angel of the Lord is a pre-incarnation appearance of the second person of the Trinity. This is true as well of other theophanies in human form. Occasionally, these theophanies are more specifically referred to as 'christophanies'. Neither the OT nor the NT directly identifies Jesus Christ with the angel of the Lord. Scholars, though, reason backward from the teaching of the NT (Jn. 1:18) that no-one has seen God the Father.

A third form of theophany occurs on those occasions when God appeared among men and women in non-human form. At the critical juncture of the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant, God passed between divided animal carcasses in the form of a 'smoking fire pot with a blazing torch' (Gn. 15:17).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

<sup>4</sup>Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 1251.

<sup>5</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, c1988), 681.

## II. KEY SCRIPTURES ADDRESSING THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

### A. Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar

1. **Gen. 16:7-13** Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 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." 9 Then the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." 10 Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count." 11 The angel of the Lord said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. 12 "He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, And everyone's hand will be against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers." 13 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?"
2. **Gen. 21:17-19** God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

### B. The Angel of the Lord stays the hand of Abraham from Sacrificing Isaac

**Gen. 22:11-18** But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out 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." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided." 15 Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 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, 17 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. 18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

C. **The Angel of the Lord ministers to Jacob**

**Gen. 31:11-13** “Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am.’ 12 “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. 13 ‘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.’ ”

D. **Jacob Wrestles with a man/the Angel of the Lord/the Lord/God**

1. **Gen. 32:24-30** Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.” But he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” 27 So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” 28 He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”
2. **Hos. 12:3-5** In the womb [Jacob] took his brother by the heel, And in his maturity he contended with God. 4 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, 5 Even the Lord, the God of hosts, The Lord is His name.

E. **The Angel of the Lord Appears in the Burning Bush**

1. **Exod. 3:2-7** The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6 He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.

2. **Acts 7:30-33** “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. 31 “When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 “But the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

**F. The Angel of the Lord as a Pillar of Fire and Cloud**

1. **Exod. 13:21** The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.
2. **Ex. 14:19** 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.

**G. The Angel of the Lord goes before and guards Israel**

**Exod. 23:20-23** “Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 “Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. 22 “But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. 23 “For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land. . . (see also Ex. 32:34; 33:2; Numb. 20:16)

**H. The Angel of the Lord Is the Lord Who Brought Israel out of Egypt and Made Covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**

**Judges 2:1-4** Now the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you, 2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? 3 “Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’ ” 4 When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept.

## I. **The Angel of the Lord Receives Gideon's Sacrifice**

**Judges 6:11-24** Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior." 13 Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 The Lord looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" 15 He said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." 16 But the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." 17 So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me. 18 "Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And He said, "I will remain until you return." 19 Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them. 20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. 21 Then the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. 22 When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, "Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." 23 The Lord said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die." 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

## J. **The Angel of the Lord Appears to Samson's Parents**

**Judges 13:3-20** Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. 4 "Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. 5 "For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." 6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. 7 "But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" 8 Then Manoah entreated the Lord and said, "O Lord, please let the

man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.” 9 God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. 10 So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came the other day has appeared to me.” 11 Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to the woman?” And he said, “I am.” 12 Manoah said, “Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy’s mode of life and his vocation?” 13 So the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. 14 “She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded.” 15 Then Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a young goat for you.” 16 The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord.” For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord. 17 Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?” 18 But the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” 19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the Lord, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground.

#### K. **The Angel of the Lord Clothes Zechariah**

**Zech. 3:1-7** Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 2 The Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. 4 He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” Again he said to him, “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.” 5 Then I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the Lord was standing by. 6 And the angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 7 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing here.

**L. The Angel of the Lord or “an” Angel of the Lord?**

In **Matt. 1:24** we read, “And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife.” Some have wondered if the Angel of the Lord could be the pre-incarnate Christ because of this text. Mary was already pregnant at this time and Christ could not have appeared as the Angel of the Lord if He was in Mary’s womb. The problem is easily solved. In the near context of **vs. 20** it is clear that the angel that appeared to Joseph was “an” angel of the Lord, not “The” Angel of the Lord. When the angel that appeared to Joseph is referenced specifically it is proper grammar to say “the angel of the Lord” as a specific one, the one that appeared to Joseph, is being referred to.

**III. APPARENT PARADOX**

Walvoord gives three primary reasons for identifying the Angel of the Lord with Christ.

- A. Christ as the Angel of Jehovah is identified as Jehovah in numerous Old Testament passages.
- B. The Angel of Jehovah is also revealed to be a distinct Person from Jehovah, that is, a Person of the Trinity.
- C. The Angel of Jehovah is the second Person of the Trinity. Having determined the deity of the Angel of Jehovah and that He is a Person of the Trinity, it remains to demonstrate that He is the second Person. That is, in fact, the only solution of an otherwise confused picture. How can a Person be God and at the same time address God? The answer lies in the personal distinctions of the Trinity. There are at least four lines of evidence which identify the Angel of Jehovah as the second Person:
  - 1. The second Person is the visible God of the New testament. It is logical that the same Person of the Trinity should appear in bodily form in both Testaments.
  - 2. The Angel of Jehovah of the Old Testament no longer appears after the incarnation. It is a natural inference that the Angel of the Lord is now the incarnate Christ.
  - 3. The similarity of function between the Angel of Jehovah and Christ can be observed in the fact that both are sent by the Father.
  - 4. By process of elimination, it can be demonstrated that the Angel of Jehovah could not be either the first Person or the third Person of the trinity (John 1:18).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pgs. 45-46.



**IV. INTERESTING PARALLELS IN THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD**

- A. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ reveal God’s name (**Ex. 3:2, 4, 6, 14 cf. Jn. 1:14, 18; Col. 2:9; Jn. 17:6**).
- B. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ are commissioned by God (**Ex. 3:7-8; Judg. 6:11-23; 13:1-21; cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Jn. 20:21**).
- C. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ deliver God’s people (**compare verses above with Eph. 1:7; Heb. 2:14-15**).
- D. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ protect those who fear God (**Psa. 34:7; II Kings 19:35 cf. John 10:27-31; Heb. 13:5**).
- E. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ intercede for the saints (**Zech. 1:12-13 cf. Heb. 7:25**).
- F. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ are advocates for the saints (**Zech. 3:1-7 cf. I Jn. 2:1-2**).
- G. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ ratify covenants with the people of God (**Gen. 22:11-18; {12:1-3; 15:8-21}; Judg. 2:1 cf. Matt. 26:28; Rom. 15:8-9; Heb. 9:15**).
- H. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ have a ministry of comfort (**Gen. 16:7-13; cf. Lk. 4:16-19; Jn. 9:35; 16:1-4**).
- I. Both the Angel of the Lord and Christ exercise judgement (**I Chron. 21:1, 14-15; II Kings 19:35 cf. Matt. 24:44-51; 25:32-42; II Thess. 1:5-10; Rev. 5:5; 6:1-7**).<sup>7</sup>

**CHRIST IS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD**

Reference to the Angel of the Lord	Common Activity or Attribute	Reference to Christ
Gen. 16:7, 13	Called "Lord"	John 20:28
Gen. 48:15-16	Called "God"	Heb. 1:8
Exodus 3:2, 5, 6, 14	Claimed to Be "I Am"	John 8:58
Judges 13:15, 18	His Name Was "Wonderful"	Isa. 9:6
Exodus 23:20	Sent From God	John 5:30; 6:38
Exodus 14:19	Guides God's People	Matt. 28:20
Isa. 63:9	Loved and Redeemed His Own	Eph. 5:25
Joshua 5:13-15	Commander of the Lord's Army	Rev. 19:11-14

<sup>7</sup> Parallels taken from Fred Dickason's book, *Angels Elect and Evil*, pgs. 81-83.

V. **APPLICATION**

- A. What can we learn from Christ's pre-incarnate existence as the Angel of the Lord that assures us of His love for us?
- B. How does the Angel of the Lord help give an answer to those who believe the God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the New Testament?
- C. How was the Angel of the Lord's ministry similar to Christ's ministry to believers today?
- D. Why do you think that the Angel of the Lord appeared in the Old Testament?
- E. What does the Angel of the Lord teach us about the character and nature of Christ?

I am rather inclined, however, to agree with ancient writers, that in those passages wherein it is stated that the angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, Christ was that angel.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, xiv, 5.