

Jesus in the Old Testament

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“Was the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament also Jesus?” — Amelia in Texas

The Angel of the Lord referred to in the Old Testament was indeed Jesus Christ. This was Jesus’ title and form before He came to Earth to be born as a human being. The Angel of the Lord was Jesus’ preincarnate state, meaning who and what He was before manifesting Himself in human form.

Existence Before His Birth

We know according to the Gospels that Jesus existed before He was born of a virgin because the Bible teaches that Jesus is actually God Himself. The following verses bear witness to the fact that Jesus existed before His incarnation as a man.

In John 8:58, Jesus declared that He existed before the Patriarch Abraham was ever alive, and that was almost 1,800 years earlier: “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

John the Baptist’s message included a verification in John 1:15 that Jesus, who was a few months younger than John in birth order, existed before John was even ever conceived: “John testifies concerning Him. He cries out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.’”

One of the best verses demonstrating Jesus’ pre-existence can be found in John 17:5 where Jesus declared that He existed even before the creation of the universe: “And now, Father, glorify Me in your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.”

Again, the Lamb shown in Revelation 13:8, where Lamb is another name given to Jesus, is said to have existed before the Creation: “The book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

We even know from John 10:30 that Jesus had no beginning for He flat out declared that He was one with the Father and so shared God’s eternal attributes: “I and the Father are one.”

Old Testament Activity

The Bible gives the reader many indicators that the Angel of the Lord wasn’t just an angel, or even a specially designated angel, but God Himself. We know this because when the Angel of the Lord interacted with people in the Old Testament they treated Him with the reverence due only to God.

Notice for instance the switch between “Angel of the Lord” and “LORD” in Judges 6:11-24. In this Old Testament story, the budding judge Gideon is greeted by the Angel of the Lord. Verse 11 tells that in a very human fashion, and indeed probably looking just like a human, the Angel of the Lord sat down under an oak tree and struck up a conversation with Gideon. Gideon then asked why the Lord had not fulfilled the wonders God promised the people of Israel that he was waiting for. The reaction was that “the LORD [Yahweh, the name of God] turned to him” and replied, which identifies the Angel as God Himself. Gideon later that day brought food to the Angel of the Lord



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whose staff consumed it by fire, followed by a suddenly dramatic disappearance. Gideon’s terrified reply to such a wondrous sight in verse 22 was, “Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face!” Gideon feared dying due to seeing the living God. Absent in form but still clearly present, the Lord in verse 23, with just His disembodied voice, replied back, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.” Clearly, this angel was no angel at all, but the Lord God Himself.

There are many other Old Testament visits from the Angel of the Lord in which the recipients of the visit gave the title and honor due only to God. Hagar called the Angel of the Lord “LORD,” “God,” and “One” in Genesis 16:7-13. Jesus appeared to Abraham when the three men visited in Genesis 18, to Jacob whom He wrestled in Genesis 32:22-31, and to Manoah to give the promise of a son named Samson in Judges 13:2-6.

The Angel of the Lord even declared Himself to be God from the burning bush to Moses in Exodus 3:2-6 with the use of the title “I Am.” Jesus later claimed that title for Himself in John 8:58. Jesus by saying He was “I Am” was making the awesome claim that He was the great Yahweh, or as we know Him today, as Jehovah God.

Another Member of the Trinity?

Couldn’t the Angel of the Lord have been Father God or the Holy Spirit instead of Jesus?

Among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who all make up the Trinity, the Father after the Fall wouldn’t be seen without causing the death of the onlooker, such as when God told the Israelites not to approach His mountain or they would surely die (Exodus 19:12). The Father today remains physically separated from sinful mankind until believers are reunited with Him in Heaven and are no longer beholden to our sin nature.

And, when the Holy Spirit interacted in the Old Testament, He was always spiritual in form to empower a chosen individual, like giving super strength to Samson or the gift of prophecy to King Saul.

When human form was needed, the second person of the Trinity — Jesus Christ — in His preincarnate form fulfilled that role as the Angel of the Lord. ❖