

The Angel Of The Lord

By Heinrich Vogel

Besides the 99 occurrences of the word “angel” in the singular and the 81 occurrences of the plural “angels” in the New Testament in all of which the reference is evidently to created beings, doing the will of God, “who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire” (Ps 104:4), there are many passages in the Old Testament in which references to an Angel of the Lord occur, in which it appears that not a creature, but rather a divine Being, in other words, God Himself is indicated. The expressions that occur in the Old Testament in reference to the “Angel of the Lord” are *mal’akh YHWH*, *mal’akh ‘elohim*, and *mal’akh ha’elohim* in Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, and Judges, besides occasional references such as “his angel” (*mal’akho*, Ge 24:7,40), “the angel which redeemed me” (*hammal’akh haggero’el’othi* Ge 48:16), and either “an angel” or “mine angel” (*mal’akh or mal’akhi*, Ex 23:20,23; 32:34; 33.2; Nu 20:16).

On this identification the church fathers, commentators, interpreters, theologians, and dogmaticians have had various opinions. Some have regarded all these passages as mere references to created angels. Some believe that God may have used created angels as a medium for manifesting himself to human beings. Others see evidence in at least some of these passages that the “Angel of the Lord” is none other than a person of the Godhead. A fact that has disturbed some is the circumstance that the Angel of the Lord is sometimes distinguished from God, and at other times he seems to be identified with God. For this reason many believe that the Angel of the Lord is none other than the preincarnate Christ, the second person of the Godhead, who is indeed identical with God, “for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9), yet can be distinguished from God as the Son of God, a person distinct from God the Father.

The idea that all of these passages refer to a created angel is as old as St. Augustine, with whom St Jerome and Gregory the Great agree. This may account for the traditional position of the Roman church on this matter which is consistent with their custom of venerating the holy angels. The Socinians espouses this view also, which is understandable, when we consider their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Arminians and Rationalists also share this view. Among more recent theologians who consider the doctrine of the *Logos*, the incarnate Word, and therefore also the possibility of a pre-incarnate Word, as Alexandrian religious philosophy are F. C. K. von Hofman in his *Weissagung und Erfuellung*, F. H. R. Frank in his *System der christlichen Wahrheit*, J. H. Kurtz in his *Geschichte des Alten Bundes*, 2. Aufl., Franz Delitzsch in his *Kommentar zur Genesis*, C. E. Luthardt in his *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, F. A. G. Tholuck in his *Kommentar zum Evangelium des Johannes*, and Herman Cremer in *Biblischtheologisches Woerterbuch*. Some of these men arrive at this conclusion on the basis of their theological presuppositions, others by way of exegetical procedures or logical deductions.

However, the greater number of the church fathers, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Chrysostorn, Eusebius, Hilary, Clement of Alexandria, and Theodoret, as well as most orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians such as Abraham Calov in his *Biblia Illustrata*, Johann Gerhard in his *Loci Theologici*, and Johann Quermstedt in his *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, understand the Angel of the Lord in these Old Testament passages to be identical with the *Logos* of the New Testament, in other words, to be the pre-incarnate Christ, a manifestation of the second person of the Trinity before his incarnation. With these men agree E. W. Hengstenberg in his *Christologie*

des Alten Testaments, even Franz Delitzsch at least in his *Biblisch-prophetische Theologie*, J. K. F. Keil in his *Geschichte des Alten Bundes*, 1. Aufl., K. F. A. Kahnis, in his *Lutherische Dogmatik*, K. L. Nitzsch in his *System der christlichen Lehre*, F. W. K. Umbreit in his *Der Brief an die Roemer*, G. Thomasius in his *Christi Person und Werk*, and F. A. Philippi in his *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*. Men like E. R. Stier, H. A. C. Haevernick, J. T. Beck, and K. A. Auberlen are also in agreement with them. This is a rather formidable list of the outstanding Old Testament scholars and exegetes of the past century.

To reach a conclusion in a matter of this type, consulting specialists and inquiring concerning their opinions is not a reliable procedure, however, especially in view of the fact that some of them can be quoted on both sides of the question depending upon which work of theirs or which edition one reads. One could easily come to either conclusion depending upon whom you consult and whose views you are willing to share. Here the only safe way is to approach the problem from the principles of biblical interpretation, to examine the pertinent passages in their immediate and wider context, and to determine in this manner whether the “Angel of the Lord” in each case is a created angel sent by God or the pre-incarnate Christ

This is the method Johann Quenstedt used in approaching the question, “Whether the Angel of the Lord who appeared to the fathers in the Old Testament and who sometimes is himself described as God, was a created or an uncreated angel, namely the Son of God?” His thesis is: “Whenever and wherever either the name of Jehovah or a divine attribute or work and divine worship are ascribed to the angel who appeared to the patriarchs and to other believers, there not some created angel is to be understood, but the uncreated angel, namely the Son of God, the leader of the heavenly host, the Lord of all the angels, for in fact he frequently appeared in some assumed visible form to the fathers in the Old Testament by some unspeakable condescension, and thus this was a foregleam of his future incarnation.”¹

The word rendered “angel” in our English Bible is the Hebrew *mal’akh*, derived from an unused Hebrew root *la’akh*, which, however, occurs in both Arabic and Ethiopian and in these languages means “to send.” The meaning of *mal’akh*, formed from this root by means of the preformative *mem* which makes a noun out of the verbal stem, is “one who is sent,” or “a messenger.” “Angel of the Lord” or “angel of God” then means “one who is sent by God,” or “messenger of God.”

In every passage of the Old Testament where the expression “Angel of the Lord” or “Angel of God” occurs, it designates someone who is an emissary of God, someone sent by God. It is obvious that this expression is capable of several different meanings, depending upon the individual who is sent by God. Examples of the various uses of this term will demonstrate this truth. For example, in Haggai 1:13 the prophet calls himself a *mal’akh YHWW*. “the Lord’s messenger .” That is exactly what the prophets were. They were sent by God to his people to proclaim God’s Word to men. In this sense they were messengers of God. In Malachi 2:7 we read, “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts, (*mal’akh YHWH-tsebhah’ oth*).” Here the priest is called the messenger of the Lord of hosts because it is his duty to teach God’s law to God’s people. For this purpose he is sent. In the very next chapter (3:1) Malachi predicts the coming of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord, with the words” “Behold, I will send my messenger (*mal’akhi*), and he shall prepare the way before me.” For this purpose John was sent to God’s people before Jesus himself taught publicly, to prepare the way into men’s hearts for the message which Jesus would bring them. In this sense John was the messenger of God. So was Jesus, for as we read on in the same verse we hear, “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to

his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts,” Here we have a passage in which very obviously both John the Baptist, the forerunner and Jesus himself are referred to as messengers of God, each in a slightly different way, since each had a different task to perform, but both were alike in this that they served as messengers of God to men and are therefore designated as *mal’akhi* and *mal’akhi habberith* respectively.

In the books of Genesis, Job, and Psalms there are thirteen occurrences of the word “angel” (*mal’akh*) in the plural.² All of these refer to created angels. Of this there can be no doubt. These passages do not come into consideration for the purposes of our study, therefore.

Several times in the Old Testament the word *mal’akh* is used to ascribe some angelic quality to a human being, as in 1 Samuel 29:9, where David, who at the time was fleeing from Saul, went to Achish, the king of the Philistines, and offered to serve him. King Achish had to refuse the services of David because the Philistine lords were suspicious of David, but Achish said to David, “I know that thou art good in my sight as an angel of God” (*kemal’ahh ‘elohim*). Angels were known for their holiness, their goodness, and a flattering compliment paid by Achish to David compares him with one of these heavenly creatures for goodness. A similar use of the word is found in 2 Samuel 14:17, where we hear of the attempt of Joab to reconcile David with his son Absalom. He sent a wise woman of Tekoah to David to flatter him for his wisdom, and she said to David, “As angel of God (*kemal’akh ha’elohim*), so is my lord the king to discern good and bad.” In both of these passages the reference is simply to a created angel, one of the attributes of which is predicated of David in both instances. These passages therefore also contribute nothing to the solution of our problem.

Besides these passages, however, there is quite a number, particularly in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and Judges, which are of such a nature that they do not necessarily refer to a created angel or in many instances cannot refer to a created angel for one reason or another. It is with these passages that we are concerned in our study of the expression, “Angel of the Lord.” In the lists of these passages found in Quenstedt; Gerhard, Philippt or in Hoenecke’s *Dogmatik*, there is no exact uniformity, some omitting one and others another, but in the main there is a very definite number of passages that have the characteristics which enable us to determine who the Angel of the Lord is in each case.

The first of these is the appearance of the Angel of the Lord to Hagar in the wilderness reported in Genesis 16. In verse 7 we read that the Angel of the Lord found Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness, and after asking the reason for her being there advised her to return to Sarai her mistress, promising her (verse 10), “I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, so that it shall not be numbered for multitude.” Here the Angel of the Lord makes Hagar a promise which no created angel could make—he promises that he will give her an exceedingly great progeny. This is a divine attribute by which Hagar “called the name of the Lord (*YHWH*) that spake to her, Thou God seest me; for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” Had Hagar merely seen a created angel, she would not have been surprised to be alive after the vision. She was astonished that she had seen God and lived. In this instance it is obvious that the Angel of the Lord was no creature, but God himself.

The second such occurrence is the appearance of the Angel of God to Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba reported in Genesis 21 after Abraham had sent Hagar and Ishmael away. Hagar feared that Ishmael would die and withdrew a short distance from him, so as not to see the death of the child, and wept. Now we read in verses 17 and 18, “And God heard the voice of the lad, and the Angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, What aileth thee,

Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.” In verse 17 the Angel of God seems to distinguish between himself and God, of whom he speaks in the third person, “God hath heard the voice of the lad.” But then he continues in the next verse to repeat the promise made before, “I will make of him a great nation.” The speaker here is God himself, yet a person distinct from God. This apparent contradiction has disturbed many exegetes. It appears to be an inconsistency. Yet it is not when we remember that God is portrayed also in the Old Testament as triune, when we recall that the three persons of the Trinity were known to Old Testament believers, then we see

here merely added evidence of the three persons in the one Godhead. The Angel of God is doubtless the second person of the Trinity referring to the first person as “God.” Actually we would not have to read any farther to ascertain that the Angel of the Lord or the Angel of God is not a created angel but the uncreated pre-incarnate second person of the Godhead. But there is much more evidence of this in the Old Testament.

In Genesis 22 we read that God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to him as a burnt offering in the land of Moriah. When Abraham arrived at the site on the third day, made the necessary preparations and was about to slay his son, “The Angel of the Lord called Abraham out of heaven, and said . . . Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy sort, thine only son from me” (verses 11 and 12). Again the Angel of the Lord speaks of God in the third person, “I know that thou fearest God,” but then adds, “thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” Here too the Angel of the Lord distinguishes between himself and God while at the same time identifying himself with God. Again we are forced to the conclusion that this is another person of the Godhead other than God the Father. In verses 15 to 18 “The Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” These words might indeed, be construed as direct quotations transmitted by a heavenly messenger, who then would be a created angel. But why would God use this means in communicating with Abraham, to whom he had appeared several times before both in person and in a vision (Ge 12:1; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1)? It would be very strange if after such direct communication with Abraham God would now speak to him through the mediation of a creature.

Jacob, too, had an encounter with the Angel of the Lord as he relates to Rachel and Leah in Genesis 31, “The Angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob, I am the God of Bethel, where thou annointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me; now arise, get thee out of this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (verse 11-13). Here the Angel of God very clearly identifies himself as the God of Bethel, whom Jacob had encountered on his way to Mesopotamia, and to whom he had made a vow. This passage more clearly than any other reveals the true identity of the Angel of God. It is God himself. There is one further reference to this encounter of Jacob with the Angel of the Lord in the blessing, which in his old age he spoke on Joseph and his sons. He said on that occasion (Ge 48:15-16), “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil bless the lads” Here he too makes the identification of the Angel “which redeemed me from all evil” with the God of his fathers.

Also in the book of Exodus there are references to this Angel of the Lord. When “Moses led the flock of Jethro to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb, the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” (Ex 3:2). When Moses turned aside to see why the bush was burning but was not consumed by the fire, “God called unto him out of the midst of the bush” (verse 4). Here again the Angel of the Lord is clearly identified with God, who then introduces himself as “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (verse 6). Farther on in this same chapter God reveals to Moses his distinctive name, I AM THAT I AM (verse 14). In this incident it is again obvious that the Angel of the Lord was no creature, but God in person.

At the occasion of the Exodus from Egypt “the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (Ex 14:15). Then he explained that he would lead the children of Israel on dry ground through the midst of the sea. In verse 19 we read, “And the Angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them.” From this account it is apparent that the Angel of God which went before the children of Israel made his presence perceptible by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night which led them through the wilderness and on this occasion protected them from the pursuing Egyptians. Again the Angel of God is seen to be God himself, and not a created angel.

In the divine legislation on Mt Sinai God told Moses among other things “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring them in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off” (Ex 23:20-23). It is this promise that helps us understand the problem Moses encountered after the incident of the golden calf. Moses had pleaded with the Lord to forgive the sin of the people, and if that were impossible, to blot Moses out of the book which God had written. The Lord replied that “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee; behold mine angel shall go before thee; nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them” (Ex 32:33-34). The Lord repeated this offer to Moses (Ex 33:2), “I will send an angel before thee, and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite; unto a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people; lest I consume thee in the way” (Ex 33:2-3). Moses was not satisfied with this arrangement and told God so. In the same chapter Moses complains, “See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people; and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight shew me thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight, and consider that this nation is thy people” (Ex 33:12-13). The Lord replied to him, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (verse 14). To this Moses replied, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” (verse 15). Moses makes a sharp distinction between “an angel” who would be a created being whom God offered to send with him and “thy presence” which would be God in person. Here we have a passage in which there is a reference to an angel who is not to be identified, but is rather to be contrasted with the person of God himself. Yet in Numbers 20:16 Moses tells the king of Edom, “When we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth

out of Egypt” According to Exodus 33:14-15 this “angel” or messenger was none other than God’s presence in person. In these verses we have a good example of how the word “angel” is used variously in the Old Testament Scriptures. Sometimes it is a common noun referring to creatures of God, sometimes it is a proper noun referring to God Himself. Only the context will reveal in each instance, which is the case. Yet in all these passages the basic meaning of the word *mal’akh* is always “messenger,” a messenger sent by God to men. Doubtless these passages are also the key to the understanding of the cryptic expression in Isaiah 63:9 where the unique term “angel of his presence” occurs, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.”

Hengstenberg calls attention to a remarkable incident related in the book of Joshua which is strongly suggestive of the Angel of the Lord although he is not thus designated here. It is the occasion when after the Jordan river had been crossed, “It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand; and Joshua went unto him, and said, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so” (Jos 5,13-16). The fact that this “captain of the Lord’s host” accepted worship from Joshua and that the place where he appeared to Joshua became holy by his very presence, as had the area around the burning bush in Exodus 3:5, is evidence that this was none other than God himself appearing, this time not as the Angel of the Lord, but as the captain of the Lord’s host. This must be the same Prince of the Angels who said, Matthew 26:53, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” This captain of the Lord’s host undoubtedly is just another form in which the pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Old Testament believers on occasion.

In Judges 6: 11 we read of the appearance of an Angel of the Lord to Gideon under the oak which is in Ophrah to commission him to save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. When Gideon brought forth a present a kid, and unleavened cakes of an *ephah* of flour, the angel told him to place it upon a rock, and “the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes.” Only then does Gideon seem to have realized that the Angel of the Lord who appeared to him was God himself. He deplors this fact, since he fears that he must now die “Alas, O Lord God for, because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.” But the Lord assured him, “Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die.” This appearance of the Angel of the Lord to Gideon was doubtless another in a series of appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ to Old Testament believers.

The Book of Judges contains another appearance of the Angel of the Lord in chapter 13. The wife of Manoah, a Danite, was visited by the Angel of the Lord to announce to her the birth of Samson (verse 3). When Manoah’s wife reported this to her husband, she said, “A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible; but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name” (verse 6). In answer to Manoah’s prayer “the angel of the Lord came again unto the woman as she sat in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her, (verse 9). The woman informed her husband of the man’s return, “And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man” (verse 11) and asked him to repeat the instructions for rearing Samson which he had given to his wife, which the Angel of the

Lord gladly did. Manoah then invited the Angel of the Lord to dine with them, to which he replied, “Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord” (verse 16). Here the writer inserts the information into the narrative, “For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the Lord.” Manoah then inquired as to the name of the angel, and he replied, “Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret?” (verse 18). Manoah now prepared a kid with a meat offering and offered it upon a rock, and “It came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended: in the flame of the altar” (verse 20). But now Manoah and his wife became frightened and Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God” (verse 22). Yet his wife comforted him with the thought “If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these” (verse 23). The Angel of the Lord, called by Manoah’s wife “a man” and “a man of God,” accepted worship from them in the form of sacrifices. This makes it clear that this was neither an ordinary man or prophet, nor a created angel, but God himself, as both Manoah and his wife concluded after this experience.

On the basis of the passages we have considered it is obvious that before the institution of prophecy, in the days of the patriarchs, of Joshua, and of the judges of Israel, God used this method of communicating with his Old Testament believers that he sent his special messenger, the Angel of the Lord, to Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Manoah and his wife in order to bring them special messages important for the development of God’s plan of salvation for mankind. This Angel of the Lord is obviously one of the persons of the Trinity, for in several of these passages he is identified as God. He performs divine acts, receives divine worship, and displays divine attributes. He is not God the Father, who is the person of the Trinity who sends the Angel of the Lord. There are then two remaining possibilities. He is either the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, or the third person, the Holy Spirit. The latter possibility is virtually excluded by the fact that there are many rather direct references in the Old Testament to the Holy Ghost the third person of the Trinity, and that these references are easily recognizable as they designate him simply as the Spirit of God. This leaves us with but one conclusion, as H. C. Leupold says in reference to Genesis 16:7:

But the angel of the Lord (*mal’akh Yahweh*), who was He? We believe Hengstenberg and Keil demonstrated adequately both that he was divine and that he is to be regarded as a kind of pre-incarnation of the Messiah—using the term “pre-incarnation” as indeed open to criticism if pressed too closely. For our passage his identity with *Yahweh* is fully established by verse 13. For the present we offer Whitelaw’s five arguments (condensed) for this position. The Angel of the Lord is not a created being but the Divine Being Himself, for

1. He explicitly identifies himself with *Yahweh* on various occasions.
2. Those to whom he makes his presence known recognize him as divine.
3. The Biblical writers call him *Yahweh*.
4. The doctrine here implied of a plurality of persons in the Godhead is in complete accordance with earlier foreshadowing.
5. The organic unity of Scripture would be broken if it could be proved that the central point in the Old Testament revelation was a

created angel, while that of the New is the incarnation of the God-Man.³

In this evaluation Leupold agrees exactly with Johann Gerhard who says, “When either the name Jehovah or divine works or divine worship is attributed in Scripture to an angel, then this Angel must be understood to be the Son of God.”⁴ Francis Pieper quotes with approval F. A. Philippi, who in his *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, after enumerating the passages in which “the Angel of the Lord is different from Jehovah in regard to his person, and yet one with him in “essence,” says,

In their native sense these passages teach that the Angel of the Lord is the uncreated angel, identical with Jehovah to whom divine attributes, works, names, and worship are ascribed. If we found in these passages only oriental hyperbolism, then we would sacrifice the solid basis for Scripture interpretation, and, following such a course consistently, would with the rationalist dissolve and cancel even the firmest and most indestructible revelation.⁵

Other theologians taking the same position are Hengstenberg, Keil, Thomasius, Rohnert, and also Joseph Addison Alexander, who remarks on Isaiah 63:9:

The old Christian doctrine is that the Angel of God’s presence was that Divine Being who is represented in the New Testament as the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His Person, the image of God, in whose face the glory of God shines and in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.⁶

There are, of course, those who do not share this view. They like to regard the Angel of the Lord always as a created angel, who indeed on occasion may represent God in his contacts with human beings, may even quote him directly, but must always (so they insist) be understood to be a mere creature, an emissary of God to transmit God’s word to mortal man, much in the manner in which the prophets did in subsequent centuries. They support this theory with two lines of argument. According to one, the frequent occurrence of an angel of the Lord in the New Testament is always such a created angel. They then reason, that since in New Testament Greek *aggelos kyriou* always designates a created angel, therefore its cognate expression in the Old Testament must necessarily also always designate such a creature. This is patently a *non sequitur*. Others deny the identification of the Angel of the Lord with the pre-incarnate Christ on the grounds that Jesus is in their opinion merely a human being who displayed many Godlike qualities, but who has no pre-existence in Old Testament times, and therefore the Angel of the Lord must be a created angel. This is a conclusion based on unbelief and contrary to Scripture. Hermann Cremer, using a logical approach, argues thus:

In the New Testament a clear distinction is made between Jesus and his angel (Revelation 1:1 and 22:6-9). In the Old Testament the Angel of the Lord is similarly distinguished from Jehovah. Both of them were used to reveal God’s word to men. But to draw the conclusion from these facts, that a definite relationship exists between the Angel of the Lord and the Son of God, or even that the former is a pre-incarnation of the latter, is not only illogically, but also exegetically in the-highest degree a hasty conclusion, since in no passage of the New Testament anything similar to this is said concerning this relationship, which is of such great importance for the messianicity of Jesus. Besides this conclusion is also totally

contrary to the New Testament since both from Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 2:2 as well as especially from the manner in which Stephen introduces the Angel of the Lord in Acts 7, where the Old Testament does not allude to him, and also from the disappearance of the Angel of the Lord in the New Testament, only this conclusion can be drawn, that a substitution of the service of angels for the presence of God, and a transmission of divine revelation by means of angels also characterizes the Old Testament dispensation in the same manner as the presence of God in Christ characterizes the New Testament dispensation. From the replacement of the Angel of the Lord by Christ—if we want to express it thus—the conclusion must be drawn in view of the passages quoted above, that the Angel of the Lord is not the Old Testament manifestation of Christ but that they stand in the same relationship to one another as the Old and New Testament. —In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:13).⁷

All these objections reveal a woefully inadequate understanding of the Old Testament on the part of those who advance them. They merely prove again that anyone who cannot find Christ in the Old Testament does not comprehend God's plan of salvation set forth in those thirty-nine books.

Besides the passages we have examined there are many others in the Old Testament in which there is found a reference to angels. In most of these it is at once evident that they are references to created beings that carry out the will of God, ministering spirits of God. There are indeed a few passages in the Old Testament where the angel mentioned may well have been the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ but the reference to him does not contain sufficient data to make the identification positively. Such passages would be, for example, the one in Numbers 22:22-35, in which the angel of the Lord appeared to Balaam and stopped him on the way until he was certain that Balaam understood the conditions under which he could proceed, or Judges 2:14, where an angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua to warn him not to make any league with the inhabitants of Canaan, or Isaiah 37:36, where the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand. Whether these passages allude to other appearances of the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ or to a created angel, may have to remain an open question, since we have not enough detail in any of these passages to identify him definitely. In either case God's will was being carried out by a messenger he had sent. We are just unable to identify the messenger exactly.

In the New Testament Christ is fully revealed to all men by his incarnation. Through the process of his conception and birth he became one of us, lived and walked among us, talked with us, taught us, and finally redeemed us from eternal death by his own self-sacrifice for us. The Old Testament believers viewed this entire process only through the dim vision of prophecy, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (1:1-2). If Christ was active in the work of creation, and if he spoke to Old Testament believers through the prophets and to New Testament believers in person, what should be so strange about having found other ways to communicate with the patriarchs and believers between the time of creation and the age of prophecy? The passages we have examined in this study indicate not only that this

was possible, but also that this method was used. Long before his incarnation for the purpose of carrying out the work of salvation our Savior was already participating in the process of making God's plan of salvation known to Old Testament believers and doing what was necessary to bring about its orderly development and eventual success. In this sense the pre-incarnate Christ was a very special emissary of God, a very special messenger of God the Father, a very special Angel of the Lord.

Endnotes:

1. Theol. did. pol., Pars I, Cap. Sect. 11, *Qu*: X1, p 494.
2. Genesis 19:1,15; 28:12; 32: 1, Job 4: 18; Psalm 8:5; 68:17; 78:25,49, 91:11103:20; 104:4; 148:2.
3. H. C. Leopold, *Exposition of Genesis*, pp 500-501.
4. Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Tom II, Loc. V *de creatione et angelis*, par. 37, p 6.
5. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I, 397.
6. J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 11, 420.
7. Hermann Cremer, *Woerterbuch der Neuteslamentlichen Graecitaet*, pp 23-24.