

Greetings

FINDING GOD, THE SON, (Old Testament) is the third in a series of six Bible studies on ‘Discovering God in the Old and New Testaments’. When I presented this material as a sermon series I entitled it “*When Jesus Walked in the Old Testament.*” It created quite a stir! We know about “angels” like Gabriel and Michael but to think that there is a special “Angel of the Lord” that is none other than Jesus, the Son of God, appearing from time to time in the Old Testament, is mind blowing!

I pray that you will be blessed. *Brian Hooper.*

FINDING GOD THE SON

PART TWO: OLD TESTAMENT

[“When Jesus Walked in the Old Testament”]

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PREFACE TO PART ONE OLD TESTAMENT

In our first study on “**Seeking God the Father**” (in the Old Testament) we began our search in the first part of our Bible and saw God’s work in creation, delivering his people from bondage, teaching them the meaning of blood sacrifices, helping them through their many trials and pointing them to the future. In our second study on “**Seeking God the Father**” (in the New Testament) the four gospel writers quote Jesus as calling God his “Father” several hundred times. God is called ‘Father’ just 9 times in the Old Testament.

We now return to the Old Testament and make an exciting discovery that Jesus Christ actually visited people living in those times. Of course, he is not called “Jesus” because that was a name given to him for his earthly period. And he is not called “Christ” because it was not God’s intention to have the Messiah appear in Old Testament times. He came as Messiah in the New Testament times. So – God gives him the unique and exclusive designation “The angel (or ‘messenger’) of the Lord.” [Hebrew: **malak** means ‘messenger’]

The idea of a triune God is not easily seen in the Old Testament. However, there are very clear indications that there is more to God than singleness. The first word for God in the Old Testament, and the word in most general use, is **Elohim**. The interesting thing about this name is that it is a plural noun. It hints that our God is more complex than simply singular. In contrast with this most general name of God there is **JeHoVaH**. *Jehovah* is an artificial English word put together from the four Hebrew consonants JHVH and the vowels of the Hebrew word *Adonai*, or Lord. The Jews developed a dread of pronouncing **JHVH** so they said *Adonai* instead. Later, the vowels of *Adonai* were written into the manuscripts, and so people have been saying *Jehovah*.

In Genesis 1:26 when God said, “*Let US make man in OUR image.*” God wasn’t talking to the angels. God was talking with someone who was part of Him. Our God had an image referred to as “our image.” This is an early biblical hint of our triune God.

Another Old Testament hint is the appearance of that interesting person **The Angel of the Lord**. Many Christian Scholars believe that this “Angel” is none other than Jesus Christ – the eternal Son of God – appearing in the Old Testament times. It is a fascinating study to trace, through the Old Testament, the appearances of Jesus Christ as “The Angel of the Lord”. No appearance by Jesus in the Old Testament is unimportant. Thus we explore “the messenger of the Lord” in this third series of these studies.

One of the clearest pictures of a special person close to the Most High God is given in Daniel 7 verses 13 and 14. “*I was watching in the night visions and saw One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days. They brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away. And His kingdom shall not be destroyed.*” In the New Testament, Jesus identified himself with this special person by frequently designating himself as the **Son of Man** (Matthew 24:3, 30 etc.)

With the coming of **God's Son, Jesus the Christ (Messiah)**, we find that on almost every page of the New Testament some mention of Jesus as the Son of God or of God the Father. We cannot study every reference to God the Father, but we will list them – all 253 mentions – and enjoy looking at 10 specific references to “Father” God.

A further hint of the complexity of God in the Old Testament is the many references to God's *Spirit*. The Spirit is described as an agent in creation (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Isaiah 32:15). The Spirit sustains what has been created (Psalm 104:30; Job 34:14). The creative agent which animates the universe also vitalises the human organism (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4). When we come to the New Testament, Jesus teaches that this “Spirit” of God is not only intimately connected with God but is also a distinct personality (John 14:16). This verse has the **Son** praying to the **Father** about the **Spirit** coming. In our final two series we will experience walking with God's wonderful Holy Spirit.

Brian William Hooper

AN OVERVIEW OF FINDING THE SON [*“When Jesus Walked in the Old Testament.”*]

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| 1. | WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ APPEARS TO HAGAR | Genesis 16:1-16 |
| 2. | WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ CALLS TO ABRAHAM | Genesis 22 |
| 3. | WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ SPEAKS TO MOSES | Exodus 1-3 |
| 4. | WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ CONFRONTS BALAAM | Numbers 22:22-35 |
| 5. | WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ VISITS SINFUL ISRAEL | Judges 2:1-7 |
| 6. | WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ APPEARS TO GIDEON | Judges 6:11-22 |
| 7. | THE ‘ANGEL’ PROMISES A SON – SAMSON | Judges 13:1-25 |
| 8. | THE ‘ANGEL’ APPEARS TO KING DAVID | 2 Sam 24; 1 Chr 21 |
| 9. | THE ‘ANGEL’ VISITS ELIJAH THREE TIMES | 1 Kings 19; 2 Ks 1 |
| 10. | THE ‘ANGEL’ DESTROYS AN ASSYRIAN ARMY | 2 Kings 19; Isaiah 37 |
| 11. | THE ‘ANGEL’ APPEARS TO ZECHARIAH | Zechariah 3 and 12 |

WHO IS THIS MYSTERIOUS ‘ANGEL’?

This special ‘angel’ without a name is the most important angel in the whole Bible – yet is only found in the Old Testament. Because the ‘Angel of the Lord’ does not appear in the New Testament makes a good reason for believing that it is Jesus Christ. And because the ‘angel’ is identified with “Yahweh” (or “Jehovah”) suggests that he is intimately linked with the abiding presence of God with his people. When Jesus Christ in the New Testament said “I AM” (John 8:58) he was indicating that he was expressing his timelessness. His hearers knew that the only timeless one was God. They also knew that the God of the Old Testament was “I AM”. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was – I AM” meaning that he transcended Abraham and was his superior – and equal with God. All this points to the ‘Angel of the Lord’ as the Son of God. If the ‘Angel of the Lord’ is indeed the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, then Jesus became flesh to fulfil the promise God made to Abraham “in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Christ died on the cross, and rose again, to open the door to all for a personal relationship with God. From the beginning, that relationship has been based on simple trust in the faithfulness of a God who has always been, and always will be, faithful to his word.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:15

WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ APPEARED TO HAGAR

Reading: Genesis 16:1-16 THE ANGEL OF THE LORD COMFORTS HAGAR

(Verse 1) Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; (2) so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai said. (3) So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. (4) He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. (5) Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.” (6) “Your servant is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

*(7) The angel of the LORD [Yahweh] found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. (8) And he said, “**Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?**” “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered. (9) Then the angel of the LORD [Yahweh] told her, “**Go back to your mistress and submit to her.**” (10) The angel added, “**I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.**” (11) The angel of the LORD [Yahweh] also said to her: “**You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD [Yahweh] has heard of your misery.** (12) **He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.**” (13) She gave this name to the LORD [Yahweh] who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me.” (14) That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. (15) So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. (16) Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.*

A VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY

- Verse 1 Abram and Sarai had no children and they were both getting on in years. Perhaps Hagar had become Sarai’s maidservant while Abram and his wife were in Egypt (see 20:10-20).
- Verse 2 In Genesis 15:4 it says that the ‘word of the LORD’ came to Abram: “This man (a servant in your household v3) will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” This had been spoken to Abram ten years previously (16:3). With time, Abram and Sarai becoming quite elderly (16:16), and increasing disappointment in God, Abram and Sarai came up with a seeming suitable way to fulfill the prophecy. After all, God had said “...a son from your own body...”
- Verse 3 Abram was now 85 years old (see 12:4 and 16:16).
- Verse 4 This is a commentary on human relationships. God’s intention was that a husband and wife are intended to love and trust each other exclusively and within that bond of marriage love, both these characteristics should exist and flourish. Favouritism, or partiality, may bring a seeming successful short-term result but inevitably, love and trust are gone - to be replaced with jealousy and pride.
- Verse 5 *May the LORD judge between you and me.* Although Sarai acknowledged her part and

its result, she felt Abram was the primary person God should blame. Both were to blame. Sarai initiated the idea, Abram fell in with it (for whatever reasons), and the outcome caused domestic anguish because the idea was not of God.

- Verse 6 Hagar was mistreated and fled. We all know the wrath of a woman despised! We are not told what Sarai did but we can be sure it wasn't a stern talking to.
- Verse 7 *The angel of the Lord found Hagar*. What a lovely verse of Scripture. In our extremity, the Lord finds and draws close to us even though we often do not notice this. Notice particularly the way the 'Angel of the LORD' speaks:
- Verse 8 **"Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"** In distress, Hagar does not answer the two questions – only the first. "I am running away from my mistress."
- Verse 9 **"Go back to your mistress and submit to her."** The Angel of the Lord gave two directions. They were: "Go back to your mistress." And "Submit to her." Why was this? Hagar needed to work on her attitude towards Sarai, no matter how justified it might have been. We know that God was working in Sarai's heart too, because she accepted Hagar back. Perhaps with some misgiving, but accept her back she did. She knew Abram would have no further intention of seeking a child that way. So, little by little, God was re-arranging the family and its attitudes.
- Verse 10 **"I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."** Up until now the 'Angel' has asked straight questions and given straight directions. Now, the 'Angel' claims the responsibility for increasing Hagar's descendants and for being responsible for their numerical proportions. At this point it is hard to accept that this is an ordinary angel, giving a message on God's behalf.
- Verse 11 **"You are now with child...and you will have a son...You shall name him Ishmael...for the Lord has heard your misery..."** The first three of these statements are authoritative but could have been given by an angel (messenger) of the Lord God. The fourth statement says "the Lord has heard" as if the Angel delivering the message is speaking on behalf of God. Yet this could be so. If the 'Angel of the Lord' is Jesus, then he is referring to the 'Father' who is God. And we need to remember that in the Old Testament, there was no clear revelation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three distinct personalities within the oneness of God. Again I like the compassion expressed: "The Lord has heard your misery." And miserable Hagar was.
- Verse 12 **"He will be a wild donkey of a man...his hand will be against everyone...and everyone's hand against him...and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers."** I like the 'wild donkey' expression. This is an apt expression of the unpredictable Ishmaelic races. And while there is ethnic loyalties to a degree, there is a lot of inter-group hostilities also.
- Verse 13 Hagar recognises that she has seen the 'LORD' with her responses: "You are the God who sees me." And "I have now seen the One who sees me."
- Verse 14 Beer Lahai Roi means 'The well of the One who sees me and who lives'.
- Verse 15 Hagar bore Abram a son – it is recorded. And Abram gave his son the name 'Ishmael'. Abram accepted his responsibilities. 'Ishmael' means 'God hears'.

KEY LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE

- Hagar was an Egyptian slave in the household of a family God had made special (covenant) promises to. She was not a member of that family and not entitled to any blessings God was going to give to the Hebrew people. Yet God still cared for the lost and lonely Egyptian mother. Furthermore, she was going to receive a blessing too. God cares for all people whether they are in the 'faith' or not. So we do not act in pride but earnestly seek to bring about God's blessings to any that do not know him.
- The 'Angel of the Lord' spoke words of comfort, guidance and direction to Hagar – and she received them. God is never indifferent to the needs of any human being. God is present and has words of comfort, guidance and sound direction if we listen.

THE 'ANGEL OF THE LORD' REVEALS THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

- The 'Angel of the Lord' first appeared to an Egyptian slave woman who did not belong to the family of promise. Jesus came down to earth to open up the family of Israel to those outside the promise – the Gentiles – and with love and compassion.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. How do you think Abram and Sarai originally came into contact with Hagar and how did they obtain her services?
2. Try to put yourself in Sarai's 'shoes' and explain why Sarai offered Hagar to Abram. Do you think Sarai thought through the possible consequences?
3. What do you think went through Abram's mind as Sarai put the proposal to have a child through him?
4. What do you think went through Hagar's mind at the time?
5. What does this whole sad incident tell us about love, family life and God's views on relationships?
6. Assuming the 'Angel of the Lord' is, indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ in pre-incarnate form, can you add anything about his nature to what this study has said?

WHAT HAPPENED TO HAGAR?

Reading: Genesis 21:1-21 ISAAC IS BORN: HAGAR IS SENT AWAY

Then the Lord did exactly as he had promised. (2) Sarah became pregnant, and she gave a son to Abraham in his old age. It all happened at the time God said it would. (3) And Abraham named his son Isaac. (4) Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. (5) Abraham was one hundred years old at the time. (6) And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter! All who hear about this

will laugh with me. (7) For who would have dreamed that I would ever have a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!”

(8) As time went by and Isaac grew and was weaned, Abraham gave a big party to celebrate the happy occasion. (9) But Sarah saw Ishmael – the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar – making fun of Isaac. (10) So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that servant and her son. He is not going to share the family inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!”

*(11) This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. (12) But God told Abraham, “Do not be upset over the boy and your servant wife. Do just as Sarah says, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. (13) But I will make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he also is your son.” (14) So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food for the journey, and strapped a container of water to Hagar’s shoulders. He sent her away with their son, and she walked out into the wilderness of Beersheba, wandering aimlessly. (15) When the water was gone, she left the boy in the shade of a bush. (16) Then she went and sat down by herself about a bowshot away. “I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said as she burst into tears. (17) **Then God heard the boy’s cries, and the angel of God called to Hagar from the sky, “Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy’s cries from the place where you laid him. (18) Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.”** Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well. She immediately filled her water container and gave the boy a drink. (20) And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness of Paran. He became an expert archer, (21) and his mother arranged a marriage for him with a young woman from Egypt. NLT*

So we are not told much of Hagar apart from her obtaining a wife for her son from Egypt.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD’S VISIT TO HAGAR

- **“God heard the boy’s cries and the angel of God called to Hagar...”** There are two matters here: 1. God responded to the boy’s anguish. 2. Notice that while God heard, the ‘angel of God’ called to Hagar. There is both distinction and oneness here.
- **“Comfort him (Hagar).” “I will make a great nation...”** Again two points. 1. God is love, answers cries of anguish and is compassionate. God expects us, likewise, to love, and to be responsive and compassionate. 2. God will make the Ishmaelic nation.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ISHMAEL?

What happened to Ishmael? Ishmael became the ruler of a large tribe or nation. The Ishmaelites were nomads living in the wilderness of Sinai and Paran, south of Israel and east of Egypt. The “history of the descendants of Ishmael” (NLT) are given in Genesis 25:12-18. The twelve sons, whose names are recorded, became the “founders of twelve tribes that bore their name” (NLT). Now isn’t that interesting! The twelve tribes of Ishmael were immediately established. The tribes of Israel came a generation later. Isaac had Esau and Jacob and through his son Jacob came the twelve Hebrew tribes. One of Ishmael’s daughters married Esau, Ishmael’s nephew (Genesis 28:9). Ishmael died aged 137. Asaph in his psalm (83:5-6) pictures the Ishmaelites as hostile to Israel and to God.

WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ CALLS TO ABRAHAM

Reading: Genesis 22:1-10 ISAAC IS READIED FOR SACRIFICE

Later on God tested Abraham’s faith and obedience. “Abraham!” God called. “Yes,” he replied. “Here I am.” (2) “Take your son, your only son – yes, Isaac, whom you love so much – and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will point out to you.” (3) The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son Isaac. Then he chopped wood to build a fire for the burnt offering and set out for the place where God had told him to go. (4) On the third day of the journey, Abraham saw the place in the distance. (5) “Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the young men. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.”

(6) Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the knife and the fire. As the two of them went together, (7) Isaac said, “Father?” “Yes, my son,” Abraham replied. “We have the wood and the fire,” said the boy, “but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” (8) “God will provide a lamb, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both went on together. (9) When they arrived at the place God had told Abraham to go, he built an altar and placed the wood on it. Then he tied Isaac up and laid him on the altar over the wood. (10) And Abraham took the knife and lifted it up to kill his son as a sacrifice to the LORD.

Reading: Genesis 22:11-14 THE ANGEL SHOUTS FROM HEAVEN

(11) At that moment the angel of the Lord shouted to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Yes,” he answered. “I’m listening.” (12) “Lay down the knife,” the angel said. “Do not hurt the boy in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld even your beloved son from me.” (13) Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering on the altar in place of his son. (14) Abraham named the place “The LORD will provide” (Yahweh Yir’eh). This name has now become a proverb: “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

Reading: Genesis 22:15-18 THE ANGEL CALLS OUT A SECOND TIME

(15) Then the angel of the LORD called again to Abraham from heaven, “This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your beloved son, I swear by my own self that (17) I will bless you richly. I will multiply your descendants into countless millions, like the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore. They will conquer their enemies, (18) and through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed – all because you have obeyed me.”

A VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY OF GENESIS 22:1-10

- Verse 1 “Later on” (NLT) or “Some time later” (NIV) indicating that Isaac had grown into adolescence or young manhood. If Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5) he would be no match for a strong teenager had Isaac decided to avoid being tied up and laid on the altar.
- Verse 2 In the Hebrew “Isaac” follows “your son, your only son” in order to emphasize the statement. “Your son, your only son – Isaac”. “Go to where Moriah is situated.” 2 Chronicles 3:1 reveals to us that “Mount Moriah” is that high spot in Jerusalem where the temple was to be built. Notice the amazing significance of the direction God gave that Isaac be sacrificed on the ‘mountain’ in Moriah, the later site of the temple. Today “Mount Moriah” is occupied by the Muslim Dome of the Rock. A large outcrop of rock inside the dome is given as the intended site of the sacrifice of Isaac.
- Verse 3 Once God had spoken, Abraham obeyed promptly (“Abraham got up early.”)
- Verse 4 “*On the third day of the journey.*” Three days would be required to walk from Beersheba (see v19) to Mt Moriah (Jerusalem). Note the significance of ‘three days’. If the intended sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows Jesus Christ, then the ‘three days’ foreshadows the three days Jesus spent between death and resurrection.
- Verse 5 “*We will worship there, and then we will come right back.*” I cannot imagine Abraham telling a lie. Did he believe that God would raise Isaac from the dead? The writer to the Hebrews believes so (Hebrews 11:19). And in a sense he did too!
- Verse 6 “*Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders while he himself carried the knife and the fire.*” Jesus carried the wooden cross on his shoulders to the place of sacrifice. This is the parallel. The knife carried by the Father pictures, for me, the fact that God the Father sent his only Son to earth to die for us. But what about the fire? The fire Abraham carried went with them to the altar and beyond the moment Isaac was placed there and released – after which the ram took his place. The Bible often links fire with the Holy Spirit – so the fire speaks to me as being a picture of the accompanying Holy Spirit. Two biblical examples of fire and the Holy Spirit are: Luke 3:16 which says, “He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Acts 2:3, which speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost appearing like tongues of fire that alighted on each one of the followers.
- Verse 7 “*Where is the lamb for the sacrifice.*” Isaac, unlike the Lord Jesus when he went to the cross, did not know at this point that he was intended by Abraham to be the lamb. He soon discovered so – but obviously was compliant with his father’s will.
- Verse 8 “*God will provide a lamb, my son.*” And God did. The ram caught by its horns foreshadowed the true “Lamb of God John (1:29) writes about in his gospel.
- Verse 9 “*Then he tied Isaac up and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.*” This is a prefiguration of human hands taking Jesus and nailing him to the cross. “He tied Isaac up” parallels the capture of Jesus in the Garden. “Laid him” points to the cross.
- Verse 10 “*Abraham took the knife and lifted it up to kill his son...*” Abraham was at his most crucial pinnacle of faith. The man who had waited so many years for his promised son, exulted in his birth, watched him for perhaps 12-20 years and now was prepared to follow God’s instruction to kill that longed-for and long-promised son and heir. Abraham’s faith clearly rested upon the God who could raise from the dead.

A VERSE-BY VERSE STUDY OF GENESIS 22:11-14

- Verse 11 “At that moment the angel of the Lord shouted from heaven “**ABRAHAM! ABRAHAM!**” Two things: (1) The angel of the Lord shouted. And because he shouted Abraham’s name twice it was a call of extreme urgency and importance. (Ge 46:2; Ex 3:4; 1 Sa 3:10; Ac 9:4). (2) It was a shout from heaven. This is the only Old Testament passage in which the angel of the Lord makes his voice known from heaven. Why is this? Let me tell you why I think it is. The sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, on the altar of the cross was the central event in all history – of all time and eternity. And at that central event there was a central moment when the sin of the world – past, present and future – was laid upon Jesus. That moment caused a brief estrangement between the Father and the Son (“My God, my god, why have you abandoned me?” Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34) I believe the sight of Abraham lifting the knife in readiness to kill a precious son – who willingly, and trustingly, had allowed himself to be placed on the altar of sacrifice deeply moved the heart of God the Father and of the Angel of the Lord. It was a graphic and alarming preview of what Father and Son would have to go through in the near future not far from that very spot. So a loud, an anguished and an urgent call came from the Angel of the Lord – the one who would be there in the place of Isaac – the one who would suffer for you and me.
- Verse 12 “***You have not withheld your son, your only son.***” (NIV) The angel continues from heaven. He acknowledges that Abraham has passed the highest test (see James 2:21-22). Abraham’s devotion is a preview of God’s wonderful love to us as expressed in John 3:16 and Romans 8:32 that may have had this faith-act in mind.
- Verse 13 “Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. So he took the ram and sacrificed it on the altar in place of his son.” This is the first mention in the Bible of the sacrifice of one life for another. As the ram died in Isaac’s place, so also did Jesus give his life as a ransom “for” (which also means “instead of” or “in the place of”) many (Mark 10:45).
- Verse 14 “*On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.*” This phrase became common amongst the Hebrew people as can be seen by referring to Psalm 24:3; Isaiah 2:3; Isaiah 30:29; Zechariah 8:3. The mountain was where the temple sat.

A VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY OF GENESIS 22:15-18

- Verse 15 “*Then the angel of the Lord called again (a second time) from heaven.*” The first time was an urgent shout. The second time was an unconditional promise.
- Verse 16 ***This is what the LORD says: ‘Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your beloved son, I swear by my own self that***
- Verse 17 ***I will bless you richly. I will multiply your descendants into countless millions, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. They will conquer their enemies***
- Verse 18 ***and through your descendants, all the nations of the earth will be blessed – all because you have obeyed me.***” What an amazing promise. I would like you to notice, first of all, that the angel of the Lord did not give his own words. He said, “This is what the LORD says: In other words, the Father – Jehovah. Why? Because the Father did not withhold his son Jesus – so the LORD Jehovah the Father

commends Abraham for not withholding his son Isaac. But there's more! Secondly, the Angel of the Lord (Jesus) agrees with his Father and conveys the promise to Abraham exactly as the LORD gave it - in complete harmony with God his Father. So thirdly, we have the wonderful promise that has been fulfilled with the Jews despite persecutions, dispersions, holocausts and ridicule down the ages against them.

KEY LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE

- Abraham sought to make one of the greatest acts of obedience in recorded history. Through his lifetime he had learned many tough lessons about the importance of obeying God. But this act of walking 50 miles (80 kilometres) to obey what he believed was the clear instruction of God prompt and diligent. Obeying God is an intense struggle when we have been asked to give away something or someone we really love. Fortunately, God rarely asks us to give our much-love ones up. But he does often ask us to give up things that he knows are a hindrance to something he desires to do through us. In the case of Abraham, God desired to stretch his faith, refine his living and develop his character. It was a tough call – but Abraham met it, survived, and was able to witness a most wonderful deliverance. The lesson for us is obvious. We will be stretched; God will permit severe tests of all kinds to come into our life. But the purpose is to make us refined to live more godly lives on earth and to prepare us for an ever-deepening fellowship through this life and into the next.
- God blessed Abraham by giving him grandchildren and descendants. God desired those descendants to honour him and be a witness to the world. God gives blessings to one in order that they will, in turn, bless many more. So we need to look upon the trials that lead to blessings as God's way of blessing others through our own personal experience with him.

THE CENTRAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

- The single and central reason why God tested Abraham so severely was that the “father of the Hebrew people” would experience in part, and foreshadow, the greatest event in all history – the crucifixion, the sacrifice, of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

7. We cannot imagine doing what Abraham was asked to do. If I were asked to sacrifice my son I would not entertain the thought. So, how can we give an answer from Abraham's point of view? Discuss why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his precious son, and why it was necessary for Abraham to obey God.
8. Express how Isaac felt before he knew he was to be the sacrifice, and how he might have thought and felt once he knew he was to die.
9. This point requires multiple answers. List the many positive lessons or benefits that came to Abraham and his family following the Mount Moriah experience.

WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ SPEAKS TO MOSES

GOD’S ANGEL REVEALED

Reading: Exodus 3:1-6 THE ANGEL APPEARS AS A BLAZING FIRE

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro the priest of Midian, and he went deep into the wilderness near Sinai*, the mountain of God. 2. Suddenly, the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush. Moses was amazed because the bush was engulfed in flames, but it didn’t burn up. 3. “Amazing!” Moses said to himself. “Why isn’t that bush burning up? I must go over to see this.” 4. When the LORD saw that he had caught Moses’ attention, God called to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!” “Here I am!” Moses replied. “Do not come any closer,” God told him. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. 6. Then he said, “I am the God of your ancestors – the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob.” When Moses heard this, he hid his hands in his face because he was afraid to look at God. Exodus 3:1-6 NLT [* Jethro had another name ‘Reuel’. Sinai was also called ‘Horeb’.]*

GOD WAS PREPARING MOSES FOR LEADERSHIP

When Moses was the ‘Prince of Egypt’ he was the famous son of an Egyptian princess. Now he was the humble Midianite shepherd living as an unknown foreigner in a foreign land. In fact, although Moses was given Zipporah to be his wife, when they had a little baby boy he was called Gershom – which means ‘a stranger here’. So Moses still felt that he was a stranger in a foreign land. But God was preparing him for leadership. Being a prince in Egypt had given him the education and understanding of governing and caring for a large number of people. Living the life of a shepherd and a nomad was adding to his Egyptian experience by learning about the ways of the people he would be leading out of Egypt. Also, he was learning about life in the wilderness and deserts. If only he could have foreseen that God was getting him ready to free Israel from Pharaoh’s grasp.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

- 2 Suddenly, **the angel of the LORD** appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush.
- 4 When **the LORD** saw that he had caught Moses’ attention, **GOD** called to him from the bush.
- 5 “Do not come any closer,” **God** told him.

The ANGEL (*malak*) of the Lord (*YHWH* – a name of GOD) appeared.
 The LORD (*YHWH* – a name of GOD) saw that he had Moses’ attention.
 GOD (*lohiym* – another name of GOD) called from the bush.
 GOD (*lohiym* – another name of GOD) told Moses not to come any closer.

I believe we have clear evidence here that the angel is both separate from God yet is God. The angel of the Lord (God) appeared as flame in the bush. Then God (also God) called from the bush and told Moses not to come any further. Two personalities yet one God.

At the angel of the Lord's command, Moses removed his sandals and covered his face. Taking off his shoes was an act of reverence. Immediately recognising that he was suddenly face-to-face with a mighty, awesome God, he covered his face.

DISCUSSION POINTS

10. How does this revelation of God to Moses teach us about the way that we should approach God in worship?
11. What does this event tell us about when we should worship God?

GOD'S MISSION REVEALED

Reading: Exodus 3:7-12 GOD: "I HAVE COME TO RESCUE MY PEOPLE."

Then the LORD told him, You can be sure I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their sufferings. 8. So I have come to rescue them from the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own good and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey – the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live. 9. The cries of the people of Israel have reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks. 10. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11. "But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?" Moses asked God. "How can you expect me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12. Then God told him, "I will be with you. And this will serve as proof that I have sent you: When you have brought the Israelites out of Egypt, you will return here to worship God at this very mountain."

GOD'S COMPASSION EXPRESSED THREE WAYS

- I have seen the misery of my people.
- I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers.
- (I have understood) The cries of the people of Israel have reached me and I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks.

GOD'S FOUR POINT PLAN INVOLVING MOSES

- So I have come to rescue them; and lead them out God's part
- Into their own good and spacious land God's part
- I am sending you – you will lead my people Moses' part
- I will be with you Moses' part

GOD'S THREEFOLD PROVISION

- A good and spacious land
- A land flowing with milk (refreshing liquid)
- And honey (energising and tasty food)

DISCUSSION POINTS

12. God wasn't asking Moses to work alone. What were God's expectations of Moses?
13. Moses felt so inadequate. What did Moses need to believe and feel if he was to undertake the daunting task that God was setting before him?

GOD'S NAME AND NATURE REVEALED

Reading: Exodus 3:13-15 GOD: "I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS."

But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they won't believe me. They will ask, 'Which god are you talking about? What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14. God replied, "I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS. Just tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you'" 15. God also said, "Tell them, 'The Lord (Yaweh – Jehovah) the God of your ancestors – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.' This will be my name forever; it has always been my name, and it will be used throughout all generations.*

[* Or **I AM WHO I AM** or **I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.**]

It is appropriate that I quote the very fine 'Life Application' note in my New Living Translation Bible:

The Egyptians had many gods by many different names. Moses wanted to know God's name so the Hebrew people would know exactly who had sent him to them. God called himself I AM, a name describing his eternal power and unchangeable character. In a world where values, morals, and laws change constantly, we can find stability and security in our unchanging God. The God who appeared to Moses is the same God who can live in us today. Hebrews 13:8 says God is the same 'yesterday, today, and forever.' Because God's nature is stable and trustworthy, we are free to follow and enjoy him rather than spend our time trying to figure him out.

DISCUSSION POINTS

14. Our names rarely describe our nature or character. Philip means 'lover of horses'. Rachel means 'female sheep'. Both these names were very complimentary but they do not necessarily mean those so named love horses or are like a sheep. Further, our parents generally choose our names. God, however, chose a name that reflects who God is. What does **I AM WHO I AM** mean to you?
15. What do you think, would mean to the Egyptians when they were told that **I AM WHO I AM** was the name of Moses' God.

WHEN THE ‘ANGEL’ CONFRONTS BALAAM

Reading: Numbers 22:1-6 BALAAM WAS A PAGAN PROPHET

Then the people of Israel travelled to the plains of Moab and camped east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. 2 Balak son of Zippor, the Moabite king, knew what the Israelites had done to the Amorites. 3 And when they saw how many Israelites there were, he and his people were terrified. 4 The king of Moab said to the leaders of Midian, “This mob will devour everything in sight, like an ox devours grass!” So Balak, king of Moab, 5 sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor, who was living in his native land of Pethor near the Euphrates River. He sent this message to request that Balaam come to help him:

“A vast horde of people has arrived from Egypt. They cover the face of the earth and are threatening me. 6 Please come and curse them for me because they are so numerous. Then perhaps I will be able to conquer them and drive them from the land. I know that blessings fall on the people you bless. I also know that the people you curse are doomed.” Numbers 22:1-6 NLT

Balaam was a pagan prophet. As Israel travelled from Egypt towards the Promised Land, they needed to pass through territory controlled by king Balak. A frightened Balak sent a message to a pagan prophet called Balaam. Though a pagan prophet, he had a reputation for successes in the supernatural area of foretelling. Strangely, he did acknowledge that Yahweh (the LORD) was a powerful “god” but did not accept God as the one true God.

Reading: Numbers 22:7-19 GOD VISITS AND TALKS WITH BALAAM

*Balak’s messengers, officials of both Moab and Midian, set out and took money with them to pay Balaam to curse Israel. They went to Balaam and urgently explained to him what Balak wanted. 8 “Stay here overnight,” Balaam said. “In the morning I will tell you whatever the LORD (Yahweh) directs me to say.” So the officials from Moab stayed there with Balaam. 9 That night God came to Balaam and asked him **“Who are these men with you?”** 10 So Balaam said to God, “Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent me this message: 11 ‘A vast horde of people has come from Egypt and has spread out over the whole land. Come at once to curse them. Perhaps then I will be able to conquer them and drive them, from the land.’” 12 **“Do not go with them,”** God told Balaam. **“You are not to curse these people for I have blessed them!”** 13 The next morning Balaam got up and told Balak’s officials, “Go on home! The LORD will not let me go with you.” 14 So the Moabite officials returned to King Balak and reported, “Balaam refused to come with us.” 15 Then Balak tried again. This time he sent a larger number of even more distinguished officials than those he had sent the first time. 16 They went to Balaam and gave him this message: “This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Please don’t let anything stop you from coming. 17 I will pay you well and do anything you ask of me. Just come and curse these people for me!” 18 But Balaam answered them, “Even if Balak were to give me a palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the LORD (Yahweh) my God (Elohim). 19 But stay here one more night to see if the LORD has anything else to say to me.”*

Balaam is a mixture. He is a false, pagan prophet yet can say: “Even if Balak were to give me a palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the LORD my God.” In the above two verses (18 and 19), Balaam first makes a true and godly statement. Then he expresses a second statement that is certainly not an expression of faith. “...stay here one more night and let us see if the LORD has anything else to say.” Why would God want to speak through a false prophet anyway? God wanted to give a message to Moab that Israel was especially blessed of God. The Moabites, through their king, had already chosen Balaam so Balaam was available for God to use, much as he used the wicked pharaoh to accomplish his will in Egypt (Exodus 10:1).

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD HINDERS BALAAM AND HIS DONKEY

Reading: Numbers 22:20-33 A SECOND TIME GOD VISITS BALAAM

*20 That night **God** came to Balaam and told him, “Since these men have come for you, get up and go with them. But be sure to do only what I tell you to do.” 21 So the next morning Balaam saddled his donkey and started off with the Moabite officials. 22 But God was furious that Balaam was going, so he sent **the Angel of the LORD** to stand in the road and block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, 23 Balaam’s donkey suddenly saw **the Angel of the LORD** standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road. 24 Then **the Angel of the LORD** stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. 25 When the donkey saw **the Angel of the LORD** standing there, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam’s foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again. 26 Then **the Angel of the LORD** moved farther down the road and stood in a place so narrow that the donkey could not get by at all. 27 This time when the donkey saw **the Angel**, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat it again with his staff. 28 Then **the LORD** caused the donkey to speak. “What have I done to you that deserves your beating me these three times?” it asked Balaam. 29 “Because you have made me look like a fool!” Balaam shouted. “If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!” 30 “But I am the same donkey you always ride on,” the donkey answered. “Have I ever done anything like this before?” “No,” he admitted. 31 Then **the LORD** opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw **the Angel of the LORD** standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam fell face down on the ground before him. 32 “**Why did you beat your donkey those three times?**” **the angel of the LORD** demanded. “**I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me.** 33 **Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise I would certainly have killed you now and spared the donkey.**”*

What a most remarkable passage! Did you notice how many times the ‘LORD’ or ‘the angel of the LORD’ appears.

Notice these points:

- God (Elohim) came to Balaam – not the other way round. Balaam didn’t call on God.

- God at first had said, “Don’t go.” He permits a change on the grounds that the officials had come for Balaam. We call this ‘God’s permissive (not directive) will’. Nevertheless, there is a condition! “Be sure to do only what I tell you to do!” God had something in mind. God is never thwarted in his purpose.
- God (Elohim) sent the angel of the LORD (Yahweh) to block the donkey’s way.

There are two main names of God used in the Old Testament. ‘Yweh’ or ‘Yahweh’ which means ‘LORD’ – and is printed this way in most English translations. The second is ‘lohiym’ or ‘Elohim’ – generally printed as ‘God’ in our Bibles. I have a little theory that needs to be verified by going through all references to both these names and also by studying the context. It is this: That when the Hebrew word for ‘God’ is mentioned, it means the whole ‘trinity’ of personalities – one God. When it is ‘LORD’ it refers to the ‘Father’ aspect of the one God. So when it says ‘the angel of the LORD’ it means ‘the Jesus of the Father’. Let us test this theory out on what we have had so far in this book:

1. HAGAR Genesis 16:7-13 The passage has several references to ‘the angel of the Lord’ (the Jesus of the Father). Verse 13 has Hagar say, “You are the ‘God’ (one God) who sees me.” Hagar did not know of a triune-God. She did know of one God.
2. ABRAHAM Genesis 22:8-12 Verse 8 has Abraham saying, “God (Yweh) – the one true God – will provide a lamb my son. Abraham’s understanding, like that of Hagar, was that there was a one true God. Verse 10 is exciting! “And Abraham took the knife and lifted it up to kill his son as a sacrifice to the LORD (lohyim – or Father). The New Testament tells us that the Father sent the Son. Absolutely distinct entities. Genesis 22:10 tells us that the son Isaac (a picture of the Son Jesus) was to be sacrificed by Abraham to “**lohim**” not ‘**yweh**’ – to the ‘Father’ not God (all three).
3. MOSES Exodus 3:1-6 ‘God’ is mentioned in v1 (mountain of God), v4 (God called to him from the bush) and v6 (I am the God of your ancestors). All these refer to the one true God, known as a ‘trinity’ by Christians. ‘LORD’ is mentioned in v2 (the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a blazing fire) and v4 (when the Lord saw that he had caught Moses’ attention). It is appropriate that the ‘Father’ draws attention to the Son (‘this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’) as at Jesus’ baptism.
4. BALAAM Numbers 22:20-33 In v20, ‘God’ (the one but threefold God) comes to Balaam. The angel of the Lord has many references. But verse 28 is most significant. It says, “The LORD caused the donkey to speak. If the ‘Lord’ is the ‘Father’ aspect of our one true God, the Father is there present with ‘The Son’ who is the ‘Angel of the Lord’. So far the theory seems to fit!

Reading: Numbers 22:34-41 BALAAM CONFESSES HIS SIN

34 Then Balaam confessed to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned. I did not realise you were standing in the road to block my way. I will go back home if you are against my going.” 35 But the angel of the LORD told him, “Go with these men, but you may say only what I tell you to say.” So Balaam went on with Balak’s officials. 36 When King Balak heard that Balaam was on the way, he went out to meet him at a Moabite town on the Arnon River at the border of his land. 37 “Did I not send you an urgent invitation?

Why didn't you come right away?" Balak asked Balaam. "Didn't you believe me when I said I would reward you richly?" 38 Balaam replied, "I have come, but I have no power to say just anything. I will speak only the messages that God gives me." 39 Then Balak to Kiriath-huzoth, 40 where the king sacrificed cattle and sheep. He sent portions of the meat to Balaam and the officials who were with him. 41 The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see the people of Israel spread out below him.

It is commendable that Balaam recognised that he was sinning and so confessed his sin to the angel of the LORD. Chapters 23 and 24 contain the four prophecies that Balaam made over Israel. King Balak had brought Balaam to travel 400 miles (640 kilometres) to arrive in the area where Balak was facing Israel. After that, Balak took Balaam up to several vantagepoints around the area Northeast a little from the Dead Sea. From these high points (Bamoth-baal - the 'high place of Baal', Pisgah Peak, and Mount Peor) Balaam could look over the plains of Moab where the Israelites were camped. But to the king's dismay, Balaam blessed, not cursed, Israel. Numbers 23:5 has the LORD giving Balaam a message for King Balak. **"Go back to Balak and tell him what I told you."** Balaam's prophecy is verses 7-10. Balak was angry but Balaam restates that he cannot say anything except what the LORD tells him. So King Balak takes him to Pisgah Peak.

Again the LORD tells Balaam to give him a message which is found in Numbers 23:18-24. This time King Balak says, "If you aren't going to curse them, at least don't bless them." Again Balaam tells the king, "Didn't I tell you that I must do whatever the LORD tells me?" Once again, Balak takes Balaam to another place, Mount Peor. The opening verses reveal a change in Balaam:

By now Balaam realised that the LORD intended to bless Israel, so he did not resort to divinations as he often did. Instead, he turned and looked out towards the wilderness, 2 where he saw the people of Israel camped, tribe by tribe. Then the Spirit of God came upon him, 3 and this is the prophecy he delivered:

Reading: Numbers 24:3-9 BY THE SPIRIT, BALAAM BLESSES ISRAEL

DISCUSSION POINTS

16. Numbers 22:34 and 38 Comment on Balaam's confession and his reply (v38).
17. Balaam prophesied four times. Numbers 23:7-10 is the first from 24:1-13 contains the third – a mighty prophecy - when Balaam permitted the Spirit of God to come upon him. Read the passage of Scripture and comment upon the prophecy.

Unfortunately Balaam struggled to leave pagan ways and later (Numbers 31:16) encouraged the Israelites to worship idols. He was greedy for this world's wealth (Jude 11) and the risen, ascended Lord Jesus uses him as a bad example (Revelation 2:14).

The reason for the Angel of the LORD confronting Balaam was to announce that God will bless his covenant people, and that no curse against them will stand.

WHEN THE 'ANGEL' VISITED ISRAEL

Reading: Judges 2:1-7 THE 'ANGEL' VISITS SINFUL ISRAEL

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim with a message for the Israelites. He told them,

“I brought you out of Egypt into this land that I promised to give your ancestors, and I said I would never break my covenant with you. 2For your part, you were not to make any covenants with the people living in this land; instead, you were to destroy their altars. Why, then, have you disobeyed my command? 3 Since you have done this, I will no longer drive out the people living in your land. They will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a constant temptation to you.”

4When the angel of the LORD finished speaking, the Israelites wept loudly. 5So they called the place “weeping”(Heb. 'Bokim') and they offered sacrifices to the LORD. 6After Joshua sent the people away, each of the tribes left to take possession of the land allotted to them. 7And the Israelites served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him – those who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

Let us note a few things the 'Angel' says:

- He says, “ I BROUGHT you out of Egypt...”.
- He says, “ I PROMISED the land to your ancestors...”
- He says, “ I WOULD NEVER BREAK my covenant with you...”

In Genesis 17:1 the “LORD” (Yaweh) appeared to Abram. “I will continue this everlasting covenant between us, generation after generation.”

In Exodus 20:2 we read, “I am the LORD (Yaweh) your God (Elohim), who rescued you from slavery in Egypt.”

In Numbers 14:23 The LORD says that some will never see “the land I swore to give to their ancestors”. But verse 24 says, “...I will bring him (Caleb) into the land he explored. His descendants will receive their full share of that land.”

There are many references to the promised land but we have three references here that say that **THE LORD** (1) brought them out of Egypt, (2) promised the land to Israel's ancestors and (3) keep an everlasting covenant (or 'agreement'). The fascinating thought is that the “Angel” of the LORD claims these same three things.

Once again, we cannot escape the conclusion that this ‘Angel’ is God. And because the term ‘The ‘Angel’ of the ‘LORD’ has two personalities within it we can submit that ‘LORD’ is ‘God the Father’ and ‘Angel’ is ‘God the Son.’

BACKGROUND TO THE PASSAGE

God was truly supporting his people Israel. Their invasion of Canaan was successful. God had kept his promise of making a nation through Abraham; of delivering that nation from Egypt through Moses; of bringing them into their new homeland through Joshua.

However, God’s people had not kept their side of the bargain. They had not obeyed the Lord’s command to drive out all the peoples who had settled in the land, nor had they rooted out the pagan religions. The Angel of the LORD says:

- “You have made covenants with the people.”
- “You have not destroyed their altars.”

HOW HAD ISRAEL SINNED?

Judges chapter 1 is a very readable account of how the tribes tackled possessing the land. It gives an account of how each tribe fared, as they tackled various parts. Some tribes were successful – others not. Nevertheless, it seems that as the tribes did battle, they compromised and made various agreements with the inhabitants. These agreements were obviously not acceptable to God. The details of Israel’s sins are not recorded. Likewise, chapter 1 does not mention anything about altars being torn down. But the Angel of the LORD certainly draws attention to this sinful act of omission.

Why hadn’t the twelve tribes conquered the land? The Life Application notes of the New Living Translation of the Bible give four reasons:

- (1) “They had been fighting for a long time and were tired. Although the goal was in sight, they lacked the discipline and energy to reach it.
- (2) They were afraid the enemy was too strong – the iron chariots seemed invincible.
- (3) Since Joshua’s death, power and authority had been decentralised to the tribal leaders.
- (4) Spiritual decay had infected them from within. They thought they could handle the temptation and be more prosperous by doing business with the Canaanites.

We, too, often fail to drive sin from our lives. Often we know what to do but just don’t follow through. This results in a gradual deterioration of our relationship with God. In our battles, we may grow tired and want rest, but we need more than a break from our work. We need to know that God loves us and has given us a purpose for life. Victory comes from living according to his purpose.” FROM THE LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE – NLT

Again – why did Israel sin when it sought to conquer the land God had promised? And why did the Angel of the LORD reprimand Israel? The Life Application notes supply us with four reasons Israel sinned. Each one carries a spiritual principal that we can learn in our own lives. Let us look at these four reasons and discuss each.

DISCUSSION POINTS

18. The people of Israel had been fighting for a long time and were tired. The individual life of each believer can be very tiring as we face and fight the “world, the flesh and the devil.” What should we be watchful for as we face and do battle with life’s temptations? What resources in God should we call upon?
19. Israel was afraid of the enemy. Let’s be honest here: Can you, as a believer, say what you are afraid of as you seek to be obedient to God and express the life of Jesus (who lives in you) to the world?
20. After Joshua’s death, power had been decentralised to the tribal leaders. This reason suggests that as God’s chosen and anointed leader, he was effective under God. But in the change to leaders of each tribe, something was lost. What was lost? Can you see a parallel here with the body of Christ on earth today and the effectiveness of that body? Is decentralisation always a bad thing?
21. Israel thought it could do better by doing business with the Canaanites. So “spiritual decay” set in. What do you think they did wrong? This raises the vexed question of a Christian going into partnership with a non-Christian. This can be in business or marriage. What are your thoughts on these matters.

WHY DID ISRAEL WANT TO WORSHIP IDOLS? Let’s look at a comparison:

Worshipping God

long-range benefits
gratification postponed
morality required
high ethical standards demanded
neighbour’s sins disapproved
unseen GOD worshipped
unselfishness expected
business relations hindered
changed life demanded
concern for others taught and practised

Worshipping idols

short-range benefits
self-gratification immediate
sensuality approved
low ethical standards tolerated
neighbour’s sins approved
visible idols worshipped
selfishness condoned
business relations improved
changed life not demanded
no concern for others expected

The temptation to follow false gods because of short-term benefits, good feelings, easy “rules,” or convenience was always present. But the benefits were deceptive because the gods were false.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ANGEL OF THE LORD VISITING ISRAEL?

This appearance of the Angel of the Lord reminded the Israelites that any generation of Abraham’s descendants would be blessed **if they remained faithful to God**. Sin can rob any given generation, or individual, of blessing. When Israel groaned under oppression, God had not abandoned his people. Israel then, when the Angel of the Lord visited, is a picture of the whole body of believers today. **God is totally committed to us**. If we obey, follow and worship God, we will be blessed. If we do not, God will not forsake us but allows the consequences to affect us. Either way, God will never leave or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5). Are there any other significant reasons?

WHEN THE 'ANGEL' APPEARED TO GIDEON

Reading: Judges 6:1-22 THE 'ANGEL' VISITS A HUMBLE FARMER

(6:1-6) *Again the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. So the LORD handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. ²The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites fled to the mountains, where they made hiding places for themselves in caves and dens. ³Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek and the people of the east would attack Israel, ⁴camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, oxen and donkeys. ⁵These enemy hordes, coming with their cattle and tents as thick as locusts, arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. ⁶So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then Israel cried out to the LORD for help.*

THE MEANING OF THIS VISITATION

I am going to say right now, in advance, that this visitation by the 'Angel' of the LORD is a very clear picture of the victory on the cross by the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason the Angel of the LORD visits Gideon is that Gideon will be like Jesus, and do what Jesus did. Jesus had humble beginnings. He was largely hidden in obscurity from his birth to the age of thirty. His occupation, first of all, was as the son of a carpenter. Working in wood to make furniture was a fairly ordinary task but a very necessary one. But when the time was right acted on the behalf of God's chosen and precious people. He taught God's people and demonstrated God's power in a miraculous way. Finally, he obtained victory over death, the devil and sin, by dying on the cross.

Gideon was a humble, inconspicuous farmer. He kept himself hidden from the Midianites so, in a sense, he was quietly performing his daily occupation in obscurity. But there was coming a time when he would act on behalf of God's chosen and precious people. He would obtain victory by defeating the Midianite army. Gideon would be a forerunner of the victorious Jesus to come – and this is the precise reason Jesus as the 'Angel' of the LORD visits Gideon and encourages him.

THE MIDIANITES

The Midianites were desert people descended from Abraham's second wife, Keturah. Abraham married Keturah after his first wife, Sarah, died. Keturah bore him six sons of whom Midian was the fourth. Midian had five sons. (See Genesis 25:1-4) So from these beginnings the Midianite nation grew. It was always in conflict with Israel. Years earlier the Israelites, while still wandering in the wilderness, they battled the Midianites and almost totally destroyed them (Numbers 31:1-20). Because of their failure to completely destroy them, however, the tribe repopulated. Here they are once again oppressing Israel.

The Midianites are a picture of the warring world, a picture of the evil forces that strive against the people of the one true God. Consider verses 4-6 where the activity of the Midianites where they blanketed the land causing widespread destruction of crops (food), took animals and food away, stripping the land of all sustenance. This is exactly what the devil does in a spiritual sense. He seeks to strip all goodness from our world and its people and, furthermore, strip believers of any spiritual blessing that can be prized away.

GOD ANSWERED WHEN ISRAEL CRIED OUT TO HIM IN THEIR DISTRESS

My first thought was: “Why didn’t God answer them during the 400 years of distress in Egypt?” I do not know. In Egypt God seemingly remained silent for a long time and then answered them. I wonder whether it was because he was preparing a people. Numerically, they were also increasing at a rapid rate. Eventually the nation that entered the Promised Land numbered over a million – some Bible scholars say three million. On this occasion, when Israel is again deeply distressed, God hears and sends a prophet to convey the reason why the nation is experiencing distress.

(Reading: Judges 6:7- 10 GOD SENDS A PROPHET) *7 When they cried out to the LORD because of Midian, 8 The LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites. He said “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt 9 and rescued you from the Egyptians and from all who oppressed you. I drove out your enemies and gave you their land. 10 I told you, ‘I am the LORD your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.’ But you have not listened to me.”*

The way God answered, at first, was to send a ‘prophet’. We do not know who he is, but we do know he was a genuine mouthpiece of Almighty God. The prophet reminded the people of the six key instructions God gave them. The seventh was a statement of fact. :

1. “I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt.”
2. “I rescued you from the Egyptians and others who oppressed you.”
3. “I drove out your enemies...”
4. and I gave you their land.”
5. “I also told you I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.”
6. “(So) you must not worship the gods of the Amorites (but you have done so).”
7. “But you have not listened to me.”

THE ‘ANGEL’ OF THE LORD APPEARS SITTING UNDER THE OAK TREE

I think this is a rather warm part of the story. The ‘Son of God’ arrives quietly, without fanfare, and very naturally sits in the shade under an oak tree. Other visitations of the Angel of the LORD have been more startling. A voice and appearance from a burning bush; a shout from the heaven when Abraham raised the knife over Isaac; a person with a drawn sword preventing Balaam and his donkey from proceeding. But to Gideon, the Angel of the LORD arrives and makes himself comfortable in the shade and looks down at the winepress where Gideon is threshing away. And from his resting-place under the tree, begins to speak to Gideon.

11 Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the oak tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash had been threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, **“Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!”** 13 “Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The LORD brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.” 14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, **“Go with the strength you have and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”** 15 “But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!” 16 The LORD said to him, **“I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”** 17 Gideon replied, “If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it really is the LORD speaking to me. 18 Don’t go away until I come back and bring my offering to you.” The LORD answered, **“I will stay here until you return.”** 19 Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with half a bushel (18 litres) of flour baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the oak tree. 20 The angel of God said to him, **“Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it.”** And Gideon did as he was told. 21 Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and bread with the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. 22 When Gideon realised that it was the angel of the LORD, he cried out, “Sovereign LORD, I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!”

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD’S STATEMENTS AND GIDEON’S RESPONSES

- **“Mighty hero, the LORD is with you.”** “The LORD has abandoned us.”
- **“Go with the strength you have.”**
- **“I am sending you.”** “Manasseh is the weakest clan and I am the least in my family.”
- **“I will be with you. You will destroy the Midianites.”**
 (With faith rising) “Show me a ‘sign’ that God is really speaking to me.”
 (And with increasing faith as he recognises that the messenger is from God.)
 “Don’t go away until I bring my offering to you.”
- **“I will stay here until you return.”**
- **“Place the meat and bread on this rock and pour the broth over it.”**

The Angel of the LORD had a long walking staff. This was not unusual in those days but the mention of the staff in the story reminds me that when the Son of God came and lived on earth he was subject to the ‘human’ aspect and well as the ‘divine’. I see in this staff, a picture of the Son of God having a relationship with both earth and heaven. The fact of having a walking help is earthly. But to use it for the miracle of the flames devouring the offering is heavenly.

This was no ordinary angel. This ‘angel’ was of both earth and heaven. This angel did not simply act as a prophet while a worshipper offered to God. This angel created – miraculously – an acceptance of the offering made to God. By the action of consuming it before Gideon’s eyes, this angel conveyed to Gideon that the offering was received by the angel as if he were God.

And this was not lost on Gideon – even though he became a little confused. For he cried out in wonder, “Sovereign LORD, I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face.”

The Israelites believed that no one could see God and live (see God’s words to Moses in Exodus 33:20). I cannot accept that Gideon thought this applied to angels. I believe Gideon had a wonderful moment of illumination where he recognised the Angel of the LORD as being more than an angel. Perhaps not exactly God, because he addresses the ‘Sovereign LORD, but certainly someone very close to the Sovereign LORD.

I am intrigued by the part of verse 19 that says, “He (Gideon) brought them out and presented them to the angel who was under the oak tree.” The Angel of the LORD had not even moved! He kept his promise, despite the probably hour or several hours it took to cook a young goat, to bake bread, and to prepare the broth. The angel stayed there. God’s promises are irrevocable. “I will stay here until you return.” This is what the visitor said. I wonder how far Gideon had to go to prepare the offering and whether he could still keep the heavenly messenger in his sight. Did he peep out from the kitchen from time to time to see whether the stranger was still there?

DISCUSSION POINTS

22. There seems to be a problem with the fact that God waited 400 years before rescuing Israel from Egypt. And yet when the Midianites distressed Israel the answer was quicker. Discuss this dilemma.
23. Gideon’s faith obviously grew during the comparatively short time the Angel of the LORD visited him. Describe this growth of faith and change of attitude.

Gideon’s story is told in Judges chapters 6 through 8. He is also mentioned in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews 11:32 as being a man of faith along with Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and “all” the prophets. Although a little slow to be convinced, when he was sure he acted unswervingly. He was Israel’s fifth judge. He was an able military strategist, expert in surprise. He defeated the Midian army. His life reveals to us that God calls us in the middle of our present obedience. As we are faithful, God gives us more responsibility. He shows us that God expands and uses the abilities he has already built into us. His story tells us that God uses us in spite of our limitations and failures.

THE 'ANGEL' PROMISES A SON - SAMSON

We are now going to read about one of the most amazing people in Bible history. His name was Samson and the feature about this man that we immediately think of when his name is mentioned is his strength. Yet hundreds of years after his death, when the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews lists past heroes of faith in chapter eleven, it does not mention Samson's physical strength or his dreadful weaknesses but says:

Well, how much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, **Samson**, and all the prophets. By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. Women received their loved ones back again from death. HEBREWS 13:32-35 NLT

There are five main features of the life of Samson:

- He was dedicated from birth as a Nazirite.
- The Holy Spirit of God empowered Samson from time to time.
- He was known for his feats of strength.
- He is listed in the hall of faith in the Book of Hebrews.
- He began to free Israel from the Philistine oppression.

Reading: Judges 13:1-7 AN UNNAMED WOMAN IS VISITED

Again the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD'S sight, so the LORD handed them over to the Philistines, who kept them in subjection for forty years. 2 In those days, a man named Manoah from the tribe of Dan lived in the town of Zorah. His wife was unable to become pregnant, and they had no children.

3 The angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "Even though you have been unable to have children, you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son. 4 You must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink or eat any forbidden food. 5 You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will rescue Israel from the Philistines."

The PHILISTINES lived along the seacoast of the Mediterranean on the western side of Canaan. They were a constant enemy of Israel from the time of Samson right through

until the time of King David. The Philistines were fierce warriors, more in number, and had discovered the secret of making weapons out of iron (1 Samuel 13:19-22).

A NAZIRITE was a person who took a vow to be set aside for God's service. A Nazirite vow was usually for a period in a person's life, in Samson's case it was to be from birth until death. A Nazirite could not cut his hair, drink alcohol or touch a dead body.

SAMSON'S BEGINNINGS AND LIFE A PICTURE OF THE JESUS TO COME

As I have emphasised in almost every study, the 'Angel of the Lord' appears in those Old Testament places to take part in a significant moment pointing to Jesus Christ to come. This is certainly the case, again, with the Angel of the Lord's visit to the mother of Samson. Let us compare the two situations:

SAMSON THE FORERUNNER

Mother: Unable to become pregnant
Samson: First-born son
Born: Zorah 15m (25k) SW of Jerusalem
The Angel of the Lord visits Manoah's w.
*"You will become pregnant
and give birth to a son
Your son will be dedicated to God
a Nazirite from birth to death*
Her husband Manoah was not with her
She ran and told her husband
Manoah asked, "What is your name?"
Manoah realised it was the Angel of the L.
When her son was born they named him S.
The Lord blessed him as he grew up.
The Spirit of the L began to work in him
"He will rescue Israel from the P."
(All the above found in Judges 13:1-25)

JESUS THE FULFILMENT

Mother: Had not been pregnant before
Jesus: First-born son
Born: Bethlehem 5m (8k) W of Jerusalem
An angel visits Mary (Luke 1:28 see 1:11)
*"You will become pregnant
and give birth to a son
He will be called the 'Son of the Most High
the holy one will be called the Son of God*
Joseph was not with Mary
No mention
Joseph was told: *"You will call him Jesus*
Joseph took Mary home as his wife
He was named Jesus (Lk 2:21)
Jesus grew with wisdom and grace (L2:40)
Jesus 'full of the Spirit' (Lk 4:1)
"He will save his people from their sins
(Matthew 1:21 and the rest in Luke.)

Reading: Judges 13:8-18

MANOAH MEETS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

*8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD. He said, "LORD, please let the man of God come back to us again and give us more instructions about this son who is to be born."
9 God answered his prayer, and the Angel of God appeared once again to his wife as she was sitting in the field. But her husband, Manoah, was not with her. 10 so she quickly ran and told her husband, "The man who appeared to me the other day is here again!"
11 Manoah ran back to his wife and asked, "Are you the man who talked to my wife the other day?"
"Yes," he replied, "I am."*

12 So Manoah asked him, “When your words come true, what kind of rules should govern the boy’s life and work?” 13 The Angel of the LORD replied, “**Be sure your wife follows the instructions I gave her.** 14 **She must not eat grapes or raisins, drink wine or any alcoholic drink, or eat any forbidden food.**” 15 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, “Please stay here until we can prepare a young goat for you to eat.”

16 “**I will stay,**” the angel of the LORD replied, **but I will not eat anything. However, you may prepare a burnt offering as a sacrifice to the LORD.**” (Manoah didn’t realise it was the Angel of the LORD.)

17 Then Manoah asked the Angel of the LORD, “What is your name? For when all this comes true we want to honour you.”

18 “**Why do you ask my name?**” the Angel of the LORD replied. “**You wouldn’t understand if I told you.**”

DISCUSSION POINTS

24. Manoah’s prayer was truly answered. The “man of God” did return – but appeared to his wife (who is not named in the Scriptures). Why do you think the Angel of the LORD returned to appear to Manoah’s wife?
25. What do you think is the reason for Manoah’s wife to remain unnamed? [You might like to look at the story of the two travellers on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-32 It is my personal opinion that the two travellers were married].
26. Manoah’s reply was a good one. “When your words come true, what kind of rules should govern the boy’s life and work?” Discuss the Angel of the LORD’s reply: “Be sure your wife follows the instructions I gave her.”
27. The fact that the Angel of the LORD says, “The instructions **I** gave her” is very important. No created angel could say this. Discuss the implications.
28. Discuss the fact that the Angel of the LORD was not forthcoming about his identity – and the comment Manoah would not understand in any case.

Reading: Judges 13:19-25 THE ANGEL ASCENDS IN THE FIRE

And now we come to a most incredible part of the story of the visit of the Angel of the LORD to Manoah and his wife. But first a word about the type of offering.

THE GRAIN OFFERING was grain; oil and flower made into a cake shape burnt on the altar with a burnt offering – a young goat. Described in Leviticus 2, the grain offering acknowledged that God was the author of their daily food and the presentation of the grain offering was an act of worship and thanks.

19 Then Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered it on a rock as a sacrifice to the LORD. And as Manoah and his wife watched, the LORD did an amazing thing. 20 As the flames from the altar shot up towards the sky, the angel of the LORD ascended in the fire. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell with their faces to the ground. 21 The angel did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Manoah finally realised it was the angel of the LORD, 22 and he said to his wife, "We will die, for we have seen God!" 23 But his wife said, "If the LORD were going to kill us he wouldn't have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering. He wouldn't have appeared to us and told us this wonderful thing and done these miracles." 24 When her son was born, they named him Samson. And the LORD blessed him as he grew up. 25 And in Mananeh-dan, which is located between the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol, the Spirit of the LORD began to take hold of him.

Again, we shall look at a comparison between the family of SAMSON and the appearance on earth, and work of JESUS CHRIST:

SAMSON THE FORERUNNER

- Manoah took a young goat
A male sheep or goat (Lev 4:10)
- Also took a grain offering
- Offered it on a rock
- Manoah and his wife watched
- The LORD did an amazing thing

- Flames from the altar shot upward
- The angel of the LORD ascended
- Manoah and his wife worshipped

JESUS CHRIST THE FULFILMENT

- “The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:2)
- “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:48)
- “He (Jesus) is the rock.” (1 Peter 2:8)
- “Joseph and Mary were amazed”(Luke 2:33)
- “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.”(Matt 27:51)
- “He is not here. He has risen.” (Luke 24:6)
- “He was taken up into heaven.”(Luke 24:51)
- “With great joy. In the temple.”(Luke 24:52)

In these final verses of chapter 13 – verses 19 through 25 – I believe we have a picture of the life of Jesus Christ from the beginning of his ministry through to his ascension into heaven. Leviticus 4:10 permits the Hebrew believer to sacrifice either a male goat or sheep. John said of Jesus at his baptism, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The grain offering reminds us that Jesus said that he was the “Bread of life.” The blood of the sacrificed goat and the bread reminds us of the two elements Jesus said to use as we remember his death – the bread and the wine. Manoah and his wife watched a miracle take place on a rock. The apostle Peter says that Jesus is the rock upon which the whole church is built – truly a miracle happening. The event before Manoah and his wife is described as an “amazing” thing. Surely, the parallel event when Jesus died was even more amazing. The altar flames shot upwards. Jesus rose from the dead. The angel of the Lord ascended. So did Jesus Christ. After the ascension, Manoah and his wife worshipped. After Christ’s ascension, the watchers rejoiced and worshipped.

THE 'ANGEL' APPEARS TO KING DAVID

Up until now, the Angel of the LORD has appeared in the early part of Hebrew history and in the period known as the 'JUDGES'. After the period of the judges came 'KINGS' because the Israel wanted a king like the other nations. So God permitted them to have a king who would rule over them. The greatest of Israel's kings was David, who united the tribes under a central government, unified worship, defeated Israel's enemies, and expanded the size of the territory occupied by the Israelites some ten times.

David was an extremely competent king and leader, and also was a deeply spiritual man. Nevertheless, he made mistakes – some serious. One of David's mistakes was when he decided to number Israel. In God's eyes perhaps, reliance was being placed on numbers rather than on the Lord God.

Reading: 2 Samuel 23:2-4 DAVID INSISTS ON TAKING A CENSUS

2 So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, "Take a census of all the people in the land – from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south – so that I may know how many people there are." 3 But Joab replied to the king, "May the LORD your God let you live until there are a hundred times as many people in your kingdom as there are now! But why do you want to do this?" 4 But the king insisted that they take a census, so Joab and his officers went out to count the people of Israel.

What was wrong with taking a census? A census was ordered in Numbers to prepare an army for conquering the Promised Land (Numbers 1:2, 26:2) But the Promised Land was now at peace, so there was no need to count people and enlist troops. Israel had extended its borders and become a powerful nation. It seems David was guilty of pride and further ambition. Whatever the reason, David sinned in counting the people.

Reading: 2 Samuel 23:9-11 DAVID'S CONSCIENCE : GOD'S CHOICES

*9 Joab reported the number of people to the king. There were 800,000 men of military age in Israel and 500,000 in Judah.
10 But after he had taken the census, David's conscience began to bother him. And he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly and shouldn't have taken the census. Please forgive me, LORD, for doing this foolish thing".*

We have to admire David for his readiness to follow his conscience, confess his sin, and seek forgiveness. God loves a sensitive conscience – one born of seeking to walk with God. God also loves the response of any believer who is ready to confess for forgiveness.

Reading: 2 Samuel 24:11-15 THE LORD GIVES THREE CHOICES

11 The next morning the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, who was David's seer. This was the message: 12 "Go and say to David, 'This is what the LORD says: I will give you three choices. Choose one of these punishments, and I will do it.'" 13 So Gad came to David and asked him, "Will you choose three years of famine throughout the land, three months of fleeing from your enemies, or three days of severe plague throughout your land? Think this over and let me know what answer to give to the LORD."

14 "This is a desperate situation!" David replied to Gad. "But let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great. Do not let me fall into human hands." 15 So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel that morning, and it lasted for three days. Seventy thousand people died throughout the nation.

God gave David three choices. Each was a form of punishment God had told the people they could expect if they disobeyed his laws. (1) Famine – Deuteronomy 28:23-24, (2) War – Deuteronomy 28:25-26 and (3) Disease – Deuteronomy 28:20-22.

David wisely chose the form of punishment that came more directly from God. He knew how brutal and harsh how men in war could be. He also knew that God was a merciful God and to be punished by God is far better than to take your chances without him.

Reading: 2 Samuel 24:15-25 THE ANGEL OF THE LORD INTERVENES

*15 So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel that morning, and it lasted for three days. Seventy thousand people died throughout the nation. 16 But as the death angel was preparing to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented and said to the angel, "Stop! That is enough!" **At that moment the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.** 17 When David saw the angel, he said to the LORD, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are innocent – what have they done? Let your anger fall against me and my family." 2 Samuel 24:15-25 NLT*

Reading: 1 Chronicles 21:14-17 -A PARALLEL PASSAGE TO THE ABOVE

[21:14 So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel, and seventy thousand people died as a result. 15 And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But just as the angel was preparing to destroy it, the LORD relented and said to the death angel, "Stop! That is enough!" **At that moment the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.** 16 **David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth with his sword drawn, stretched out over Jerusalem.** So David and the leaders of Israel put on sackcloth to show their distress and fell down with their faces to the ground. 17 And David said to God, "I am the one who called for the census! I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are innocent – what have they done? O LORD my God, let your anger fall against me and my family, but do not destroy your people." 1 Chronicles 21:14-17 NLT]

Note the similarities as we compare these two passages – and the differences.

- God sent a plague
- God sent a (death) angel to destroy Jerusalem
- God relented (“Stop! That is enough!”)
- **The angel of the LORD** appeared by the threshing floor [1 Chronicles adds that **the angel of the LORD stood between heaven and earth with his sword drawn over Jerusalem.**]
- David was deeply repentant and expresses his sin [1 Chronicles says both David and Israel put on sackcloth and ashes and bowed down with their faces to the ground].

Reading: 2 Samuel 24:18-25

18 That day, [1 Chronicles 21:18 says ‘Then the angel of the LORD told Gad to instruct David] Gad came to David and said to him, “Go and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” 19 So David went to do what the LORD had commanded him. [1 Chronicles 21:20 says, ‘Araunah, who was busy threshing wheat at the time turned and saw the angel there. His four sons, who were with him, ran away and hid.] 20 When Araunah saw the king and his men coming toward him, he came forward and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. 21 “Why have you come, my lord?” Araunah asked. And David replied, “I have come to buy your threshing floor and to build an altar to the LORD there, so that the LORD will stop the plague.”” 22 “Take it my lord, and use it as you wish,” Araunah said to David. “Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and you can use the threshing tools and ox yokes for wood to build a fire on the altar. 23 I will give it all to you, and may the LORD your God accept your sacrifice.” 24 But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on buying it, for I cannot present burnt offerings to the LORD my God that have cost me nothing.” So David paid him fifty pieces of silver for the threshing floor and the oxen. 25 David built an altar there to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the LORD answered his prayer, and the plague was stopped. [1 Chronicles 21:26 says, ‘And when David prayed the LORD answered him by sending fire from heaven to burn up the offering’.]

THE MEANING OF THIS VISITATION

Let us review the meaning of the Angel of the LORD's visitation to David:

- David trusted in the world's method of winning – he counted his strength.
- However, his conscience caused him to repent and seek forgiveness of God.
- Nevertheless, God needed to punish his sin and gave him three choices.
- David chose the one in which he knew he was in God's hands.
- Jerusalem was about to be destroyed but God relented.
- David observed the Angel of the LORD standing by the threshing floor.
- David observed, also, that the Angel of the LORD was 'between heaven and earth'.
- The location of the threshing floor was 'purchased'.
- The price was fifty pieces of silver.
- David was instructed to build an altar on the place of the threshing floor.
- David prayed, the plague stopped.
- Fire from heaven came and burnt up the offering.

This is a picture of Jesus on the cross. And a picture of that historic moment when Jesus paid the price for our sins. Notice the part 'the angel of the LORD' takes in it.

THE INTERPRETATION

- We cannot trust in the world's method of success. Our strength is in Jesus Christ.
- We must come to God in repentance, seek forgiveness, and trust in God's Son.
- Because we are sinners, we should be the ones receiving the punishment.
- However, Jesus took our punishment from God the Father's own hands.
- Jerusalem, representative of all God's created people, was saved from destruction.
- Jesus stood in our place – at the threshing floor* - the place of sacrifice.
- Jesus bridged the gulf that previously existed between heaven and earth.
- Just as the threshing floor was purchased by silver, Jesus was betrayed with silver.
- The altar on the threshing floor pictures the place of Jesus' sacrifice for us.
- Jesus prayed "Father, forgive them." By his death, the plague of sin stopped.
- Like the fire 'from heaven' consuming the sacrifice, the Father accepted the Son's.

SPECIAL NOTE The threshing floor in Jerusalem was on the site of "Moriah" where Abraham intended to slay Isaac. The threshing floor later still, became the site of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. What a significant series of three places of sacrifice.

DISCUSSION POINTS

29. **1 Chronicles 21:16** says, "David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth with his sword drawn, stretched out over Jerusalem." Expand upon this vision and give your interpretation.
30. What is your understanding for the Angel of the LORD visiting David?

THE ‘ANGEL’ VISITS ELIJAH THREE TIMES

The prophet Elijah was a most amazing Old Testament prophet. He was known to have a real relationship with the Holy Spirit of God. King Ahab’s servant said of Elijah, “I don’t know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you.” (1 Kings 18:12). Elisha said to Elijah, “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.” (2 Kings 2:9).

Elijah was the most famous and dramatic of Israel’s prophets. In fact, his importance was recognised when Jesus was ‘transfigured’ before three of his disciples (Peter, John, and James) on Mount Hermon. The two Old Testament men who miraculously appeared and talked with Jesus were Moses and Elijah. (Mt 17:1-8, Mk 9:2-8, Lk 9:28-36).

MIRACLES ASSOCIATED WITH ELIJAH

- Elijah multiplied food for a widow who had little food to spare. (1 Kings 17:8-15)
- When the widow’s son died, Elijah raised him to life. (1 Kings 17:17-24)
- Elijah demonstrated the convincing power of God over false gods. (1 Kings 18:1-40).
- Elijah prayed for rain – and rain came. (1 Kings 18:41-46).
- Elijah called for fire to come from heaven – and it came. (2 Kings 1:9-14).
- Elijah struck the water with his cloak and the river divided. (2 Kings 2:6-8).
- Elijah experienced being supernaturally transported to heaven. (2 Kings 2:11-12).

Elijah ministered at a time when the nation of Israel were departing from the one true God, and were worshipping false gods. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were actively promoting the worship of Baal. Within this increasingly declining setting, Elijah stood, alone, against the rising tide of paganism that was engulfing Israel. And into this pool of paganism espoused by the people of God appeared the Angel of the LORD – three times.

The first time the Angel of the LORD appeared to Elijah was after his ‘scorching’ victory over the hundreds of prophets of Baal. [**Please read 1 Kings 18:1-40**] When God has a victory in our lives, it doesn’t take long for the forces of evil to react violently. When Jesus was baptised the River Jordan and was empowered by the Holy Spirit, Satan immediately tested Jesus. Elijah had demonstrated God’s power and the Israel, seeing this demonstration, had begun to turn to their one true God and Creator. This aroused the evil Ahab and Jezebel who planned to kill Elijah. Threatened by Queen Jezebel, Elijah fled for his life. Exhausted, he collapsed and fell asleep. The Angel of the LORD gently woke him and provided food and drink to strengthen him for his further retreat from danger.

Reading: 1 Kings 19:1-8 THE ANGEL OF THE LORD WAKES ELIJAH

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had slaughtered the prophets of Baal. 2 So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: “May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed.”

*Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. 4 Then he went on alone into the desert, travelling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" 6 He looked around and saw some bread baked on hot stones, and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 **Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, for there is a long journey ahead of you."** 8 So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai (Mt Horeb), the mountain of God. 8 There he came to a cave where he spent the night.*

Reading: 2 Kings 1:1-8 "IS THERE NO GOD IN ISRAEL?"

The second time the Angel of the LORD appeared to Elijah was when he told Elijah to pronounce God's sentence of death on King Ahaziah (Queen Jezebel's son). To confront a ruler who had, and exercised, power over life and death, was a brave thing for Elijah to do. Nevertheless, Elijah sent the message as he had been commanded.

Reading: 2 Kings 1:9-17 "DON'T BE AFRAID ELIJAH!"

The third time the Angel of the LORD appeared to Elijah was to tell Elijah not to be afraid of King Ahaziah, but to go and confront him. Elijah boldly restated God's message of judgment and King Ahaziah died.

DISCUSSION POINTS

31. Why do you think that Moses and Elijah were chosen to 'appear' on earth with Jesus as Jesus was 'transfigured' before three of his disciples?
32. What does the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus tell us about heaven, hell, life after death and the nature of the body after death?
33. Why do you think the Angel of the LORD visited Elijah the first time?
34. Why do you think he visited Elijah the second time?
35. Why do you think he visited Elijah the third time?
36. Looking at all three together, what do you think is the purpose of the Angel's visit to Elijah at this time in Old Testament history?
37. And how does the Angel's visit foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ on earth?

THE 'ANGEL' DESTROYS AN ARMY

We are in a period of Hebrew history when the Hebrew people had been divided for 260 years into two rival kingdoms. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, in 975 BC had become the “southern” kingdom with Jerusalem as its base. The other ten tribes, called ‘Israel’, or the “northern” kingdom, had made the city of Samaria their centre. We take the story up from 715 BC Hoshea had been king of Israel for three years. Hezekiah had just begun.

Reading: 2 KINGS 18:1-8 GOOD KING HEZEKIAH OF JUDAH

King Hezekiah was a man of resolve and accomplishments who trusted in God. Yet he also had his weaknesses. He was a king of the lower kingdom of Judah who brought about impressive civil and religious reforms. He had a personal faith in God and a growing relationship with God. He was a man of prayer (19:1,14-19). He arranged to gather together many proverbs of Solomon (Proverbs 25:1). The Bible describes him as a king who had a close walk with God. Hezekiah boldly cleaned house. Altars, idols and pagan temples were destroyed. The temple in Jerusalem whose doors had been nailed shut by Hezekiah’s father was cleaned out and reopened. The Passover was reinstated and revival broke out in Judah. However, he rashly showed his wealth to messengers from Babylon and this act put Judah on the “to conquer” list of Babylon.

Reading: 2 KINGS 18:9-12 KING HOSHEA OF ISRAEL DEFEATED

In the year 725 BC Assyria began a siege on the city of Samaria in the north. Three years later (722) the nation of Israel fell. By the year 701 BC the powerful Assyrian nation had conquered the entire border cities and settlements of Judah – the southern kingdom. Jerusalem lay helpless before a mighty Assyrian army.

Reading: 2 KINGS 18:13-18 HEZEKIAH AND JUDAH THREATENED

This event occurred four years after a new king had come to the throne in Assyria. Sennacherib had seemed to be not as hostile as his father Sargon 2 who had taken many of Israel’s people into captivity. So Hezekiah stopped tribute money (annual protection money) going to the new ruler perhaps hoping that he wouldn’t notice. He did notice and eventually came to extract it.

Reading: 2 KINGS 18:19-25 A MESSAGE FROM THE ASSYRIAN KING

DISCUSSION POINT

38. We will pause here to consider and discuss the Assyrian message. (19-25) What do you think of the accusation (22) that God might be insulted by Hezekiah?

Reading: 2 KINGS 19:1-7 KING HEZEKIAH SENDS FOR ISAIAH

This Isaiah was the great prophet Isaiah who began his work in 740 BC (See Isaiah 6:1).

DISCUSSION POINTS

39. Realising he was in a very serious situation, Hezekiah goes into the Temple to pray. What was God's answer through the prophet Isaiah? What does this tell us about Hezekiah and about Isaiah?
40. Verses 8 to 13 tell us that King Sennacherib heard that the king of Ethiopia was marching on home base to attack him, so he rushed home. His parting shot to Hezekiah was, "Assyrians have crushed everyone in their way. We will be back for you." Discuss this threat and how you might react when faced with it.

Well, Sennacherib fulfilled his promise – he came back. The Assyrians treated captives with cruelty. They tortured them for entertainment by blinding them, cutting them or pulling off strips of their skin until they died. If they wished to make a captive their slave, they would often put a hook in his nose. God was saying (19:28) that the Assyrians would be treated the way they had treated others.

Reading: 2 KINGS 19:14-19 HEZEKIAH'S HEARTFELT PRAYER

This is where we see the depth of Hezekiah's intimate relationship with God. He came boldly to God in prayer, but not presumptuously or without humility. He acknowledged the might and majesty of the Creator and that the people of God were totally dependent upon God. He prayed that God would demonstrate his rescuing power for his own glory.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD INTERVENES

ISAIAH SPEAKS THE WORD OF THE LORD: (2 Kings 19:32-34) *2 And this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria: His armies will not enter Jerusalem to shoot their arrows. They will not march outside its gates with their shields and build banks of earth against its walls. 33 The king will return to his own country by the road on which he came. He will not enter this city says the LORD. 34 For my own honour and the sake of my servant David, I will defend it.*

35 That night the Angel of the Lord went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. 36 Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Niniveh and stayed there. 37 One day while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with their swords. They then escaped to the land of Ararat, and another son, Esarhaddon, became the next king of Assyria.

THE 'ANGEL' APPEARS TO ZECHARIAH

The Angel of the LORD appears in the Book of Zechariah three times. Each time it is within the context of a vision the prophet Zechariah experiences.

- In the first appearance (Ch 1), Zechariah sees a vision of a man sitting on a red horse among some trees. Behind him were other horses with riders on them. Also standing among the trees is the 'Angel' of the LORD to whom all riders report.
- In the second appearance (Ch. 3), the Angel of the LORD stands with Jeshua (Joshua) the high priest. Satan stands by accusing Jeshua. The Angel of the LORD replaces Jeshua's filthy clothes with new clothes and says, "See, I have taken away your sins."
- In the third appearance (Ch.12), the Angel of the LORD is part of a mighty "end-times" event where enemies are defeated, Jerusalem is the centre, the people of Jerusalem are secure, and a spirit of grace and prayer is poured out.

Although the whole of Zechariah is highly prophetic and mystical – like the Book of The Revelation – it reveals many pictures of Jesus Christ. **In the three appearances of the Angel of the LORD we have three specific and important moments of time prefigured.** In the first appearance, we see Jesus Christ awaiting his work, receiving information so he can plan his strategy and carry out effectively his work. In the second appearance we have the Angel preparing to die on a cross to take away the sins of the world. Satan is frantically busy accusing those who wish to be cleansed. But Jesus prevails on the cross and to those who receive him have their filthy garments of sin replaced with new clothes of righteousness. In the third appearance the end of human history is at hand. There is a New Jerusalem, God's enemies are defeated, and the Messiah is pouring out his blessings upon all of his blood-bought followers.

The message of Zechariah occurs during the time Jewish exiles had returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple. Zechariah encouraged the people to finish rebuilding the Temple. When we study the whole Book of Zechariah, we see details of Jesus Christ's life that were written 500 years before their fulfilment. When Zechariah sees a golden age coming with a Messiah – we can apply this to our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Reading: Zechariah 1:1-17 THIS IS WHAT THE ALMIGHTY SAYS

FIRST : THE TEMPLE WILL BE REBUILT – ISRAEL WILL BE PROSPEROUS

What did Zechariah have to say about the Temple?

The Jews were very discouraged. Although they were free from exile, the Temple was not finished. Zechariah encouraged them to rebuild it. Zechariah 6:12-13 is interesting! "...the LORD Almighty says: Here is the man called the Branch. He will branch out where he is and build the Temple. I see in this a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. John 15:5 says that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. [See Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15.]

What did Jesus say about the Temple?

When Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the earthly Temple the Jewish leaders challenged him. His response is recorded in John 2:19: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Of course, he meant the temple of himself. The first Temple was a structure made on earth inhabited by God. The last Temple is Jesus Christ (John 2:19) and, as branches, we are temples in which the Holy Spirit lives (1 Corinthians 6:19). Zechariah, with his encouragement to build the earthly Temple, was preparing for the day when the ‘heavenly’ Temple would visit earth and by his Holy Spirit inhabit us.

SECOND : THE ANGEL EXCHANGES FILTHY CLOTHES FOR CLEAN ONES

This is a most incredible vision with vital meaning. If the last vision covered the period of **preparation** by Jesus Christ, this covers his arrival on earth and that great transaction of **salvation** on the cross. There was no time in history when Satan was more active than during the earthly period of Jesus Christ.

Reading: Zechariah 3:10 “I WILL REMOVE YOUR SINS”

Note the following identifications with Jesus Christ’s time on earth and on the cross:

- The earthly Jeshua, the high priest, stood before (to honour) the Angel of the LORD.
- Satan was there at Jesus right hand (close, so he could frustrate and attack).
- The Lord tells Satan that he rejects the accusations and Jeshua is like a burning stick that has been snatched from the fire! (v2)
- Jeshua stood before the ‘Angel’ (Jesus) in his filthy clothes (his sinfulness). (v3)
- It was the “Angel’ who commanded that the clothes be taken off. (v4)
- The ‘Angel’ said, “See, I have taken away your sins.” (v4)
- The ‘Angel’ of the LORD stood there as the new clothes were put on Jeshua. (v5)
- Finally, the ‘Angel’ conveyed the teachings of the LORD Almighty. (v6-10)
- The sins of the land will be removed.(v9)
- The gospel and practise of believers will spread (v10).
- Revelation 1:6 Jesus has freed us from sin to serve his God and Father
- Revelation 2:27 The Father has given Jesus authority – to give us authority
- Revelation 3:5 Jesus will acknowledge us (those in white) before his Father
- Revelation 3:21 The overcomer will sit with Jesus, as Jesus sits with the Father
- Revelation 14:1 We will have the name of Jesus and the Father’s on our forehead

THIRD : THE PEOPLE OF DAVID WILL BE LIKE GOD – LIKE THE ‘ANGEL’

Reading: Zechariah 12:1-13:2 THE ‘ANGEL’ GOES BEFORE THEM

In this final mention of the Angel of the LORD he is said to ‘go before them.’ The ‘them’ are the people of Jerusalem – God’s chosen and precious people – who will be led by the Angel of the LORD. Although the prophet means the final ‘Day’ of history, when time will turn into eternity, we can equate it with the very special ‘day’ that Jesus died on the cross and led captivity captive. After the work on the cross came the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and in Zechariah 12:10 we read: “Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on all people of Jerusalem.”