

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

“Did the Lord cease to be God in heaven? Certainly not. Did he cease to be a spirit? Obviously not. But did this infinite Spirit walk among us in fleshly form for a season? Absolutely yes! And did he allow himself to be seen by various people at certain times, although not in his full glory? Without a doubt—if we believe the Jewish Scriptures.”²³

Regardless of any limitations anyone may place upon Him, our God can appear, and has appeared, in human form to people. An evangelical Christian resource like the *Archaeological Study Bible* has no problem with asserting that in a scene like Genesis 18, the Patriarch Abraham was not only likely encountering God Himself, but more particularly a pre-incarnate manifestation of Yeshua the Messiah:

“In the early days of humanity, before people had the written Word, before the incarnation and before the Holy Spirit had come to make his abode in human hearts, God sometimes appeared and talked with people. One of the loveliest and most instructive of the theophanies (visible appearances of God) is found in Genesis 18...There is good reason to believe that theophanies before the incarnation of Christ were visible manifestations of the pre-incarnate Son of God.”²⁴

Genesis 21:17-21

“Hagar Encounters the Angel of the Lord”

“God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him. Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.’”

Previously in Genesis 16:7-13, the figure of “the messenger/angel of the LORD” or *malakh YHWH* assured Hagar that her son Ishmael would become a great nation (Genesis 16:10), and Hagar herself had identified the entity speaking to her as the LORD or God proper (Genesis 16:13). Further on, it is witnessed in the record of Genesis 21:9-16 that the Matriarch Sarah has Hagar and her son Ishmael expelled from the camp of Abraham, especially given how the child of promise was supposed to be Isaac (Genesis 21:12). Hagar leaves as far as the wilderness of Beersheba, and she prepares to leave her boy Ishmael in the bushes, as their water runs out (Genesis 21:15-16). Crying about what she must think is an inevitable death, God hears her cries. The text states how a *malakh Elohim* (מַלְאָךְ אֱלֹהִים), “messenger/angel of God,” speaks to her: “But God heard the voice of the lad, God’s messenger [*malakh Elohim*] called to Hagar from heaven and said to her: What ails you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is” (Genesis 21:17, Fox).

On first glance, one might assume that this *malakh Elohim* or “messenger/angel of God,” is just a supernatural intermediary sent by God to communicate an encouraging word to Hagar. But the encouraging word is, “Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him” (Genesis 21:18, NJPS), *ki-l'goy gadol asimennu* (כִּי-לְגוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימֶנּוּ) employing the first person singular “I” for “God”: “for into-nation great I-will-make-him” (Kohlenberger).²⁵

²³ Michael L. Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus: Revealing the Mysteries of the Hidden Messiah* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2012), 129.

²⁴ Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 29.

²⁵ John R. Kohlenberger III, trans., *The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1:49.

If this *malakh Elohim* were just an ordinary, created angel, would it be appropriate for such a created being to provide first person, “I” assurance, for Ishmael’s progeny to be great? It would make far more sense for such a figure to say in the third person, “for God will make a great nation of him.” Further on, God proper is noted to be the One performing the actions, as their water is replenished (Genesis 21:19), and God is the One who oversees Ishmael’s future.

Some might immediately conclude that a figure known as *malakh Elohim* or “messenger/angel of God,” which is sent from God, but then communicates in the first person “I” as God, and then looks over the lives of mortals—could actually be a pre-Incarnate Yeshua the Messiah. More basic is the principle of what Bible readers are to do when God communicates to people via some kind of a supernatural agent sent from Heaven, which from one side is to be differentiated from God, but then on the other side speaks as God in the first person, when it would certainly be appropriate to see third person dialogue along the lines of “God says...” Further investigation into the entity labeled as either *malakh YHWH* or *malakh Elohim* is necessary, in order to weigh whether just a created supernatural agent is being depicted, or whether we are dealing with a God who is a unity in plurality, making Himself known to human beings.

Genesis 22:6-18

“Abraham Offers Up Isaac to be Sacrificed”

“Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ And he said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ Abraham said, ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’ Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, ‘In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.’ Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, ‘By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.’”

The binding of Isaac, or the *Aqedah* (עֲקֵדָה), is an important scene very much tied to providing a typological foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah. The Patriarch Abraham was asked by the Lord to willingly offer up, in sacrifice, his child of promise, Isaac. At the moment when he is ready to slay his son, the figure of “the messenger/angel of the LORD” calls out to him, and instead a ram caught in the nearby thicket is offered as the sacrifice. Important dialogue takes place between Abraham and this entity, which does raise some questions as to whether this “messenger/angel of the LORD” is just a supernatural intermediary, who was sent by God to communicate an important message to Abraham—or whether this entity is being depicted as sent by God, but obviously has to be more than just a supernatural agent, speaking in the first person “I” as God. This, to be sure, has significant ramifications for Bible readers considering the supernatural agency of Yeshua the Messiah, who was sent from Heaven by the Father, but who is