

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

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also seen in the Gospels speaking in terms which go beyond those expected of a merely created being.

When asked by his son Isaac what was actually going to be sacrificed, Abraham responded with, *Elohim yireh-lo ha'seh l'olah* (אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה), “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8, NJPS). At the moment when Abraham was ready to slaughter his son Isaac, the figure of “the messenger/angel of the LORD” cried out, from Heaven, for him to stop: *v'yiqra eilav malakh YHWH min-ha'shamayim* (וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם), “But YHWH’s messenger called to him from heaven” (Genesis 22:11, Fox). At this point in the record, there is no reason for readers to conclude that the *malakh YHWH* or “messenger/angel of the LORD” has to be anything other than a supernatural agent sent forth from the Lord, to communicate with Abraham.

By his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, Abraham demonstrated that he indeed had faith and trust in the Lord, obeying Him (cf. Hebrews 11:17-19). The figure of “the messenger/angel of the LORD” first speaks of God in the third person, describing the actions of Abraham: *ki-yerei Elohim* (כִּי-יִרֵא אֱלֹהִים), “that you fear God” (Genesis 22:12). After sacrificing the ram, in place of Isaac (Genesis 22:13), the narrative records, *v'yiqra Avraham shem-ha'maqom ha'hu YHWH yireh* (וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה יִרְאֶה), “Avraham called the name of that place: YHWH Sees” (Genesis 22:14, Fox). The verb of interest in Genesis 22:14 is *ra'ah* (רָאָה), which in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), normally means “see” (*CHALOT*).²⁶ Thus far, all of the actions which have been witnessed, including the Lord seeing or providing for the sacrifice, could just involve the Lord using a created messenger or angel as a supernatural intermediary.

The dialogue which follows, after the designation of the place of sacrifice as *YHWH yireh*, begs some significant questions as to whether “the messenger/angel of the LORD” seen here, is just a standard, supernatural intermediary. The narrative states, *v'yiqra malakh YHWH el-Avraham* (וַיִּקְרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם), “Now YHWH’s messenger called to Avraham” (Genesis 22:15, Fox). In speaking to the Patriarch Abraham, this “messenger/angel of the LORD” notably does not speak in the third person, on God’s behalf, but speaks in the first person as the LORD or YHWH: *bi nishba'ti neum-YHWH* (בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם-יְהוָה), “By myself I swear—YHWH’s utterance” (Genesis 22:16, Fox).

The “messenger/angel of the LORD” is not only witnessed speaking in the first person as the LORD or YHWH, but perhaps more importantly, this figure speaks in the first person as the LORD or YHWH, swearing to be the guarantor of multiplication for Abraham’s descendants, including the famed word about Abraham’s seed or progeny blessing the entire world (Genesis 22:17-18). It is to be legitimately asked whether a supernatural messenger or angel—a created being—would be expected to see that Abraham’s descendants would multiply and bless the entire planet. Or, is this an action that only God can perform? The entity could have said in Genesis 22:16, in the third person, “The LORD swears by Himself...,” meaning that this figure was only and exclusively communicating a message on God’s behalf. But this is not what is recorded. The “messenger/angel of the LORD” speaks in the first person as the LORD or YHWH, and swears to perform actions in future history, which we would only expect an Eternal God to be able to accomplish.

²⁶ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 328.