

Genesis 48:15-16

“Jacob Testifies That He Has Walked With God”

“He blessed Joseph, and said, ‘The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.’”

Genesis chs. 48-49 are often considered for the words spoken by the Patriarch Jacob in Egypt, as he has been reunited with his son Joseph, and as the twelve sons of Israel have significant prophecies issued to them regarding the future of their tribal descendants. It should not be surprising that in speaking important words to his sons, that Jacob testifies about the God who has been faithful to him throughout his life, who in turn will be faithful to His promises to his descendants. A significant claim about the nature of God, and how He can manifest Himself, is made when Jacob issues a special blessing to Joseph and to Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:8-20). Readers of Genesis 48:15-16 encounter three distinct statements about God:

1. *haElohim asher hithal’ku avotai l’fanayv Avraham v’Yitzchak* (אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכוּ אֲבוֹתַי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיִּצְחָק), “The God in whose presence my fathers walked, Abraham and Isaac” (Genesis 48:15a, Alter).
2. *haElohim ha’ro’eh oti mei’odi al-ha’yom ha’zeh* (הָאֱלֹהִים הָרֹעֶה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדִי עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה), “the God who has looked after me all my life till this day” (Genesis 48:15b, Alter).
3. *ha’malakh ha’goeil oti m’kol-ra yevareikh et-ha’ne’arim* (אֱתֵי מַלְאָכִי הַגּוֹעֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל-רָע יְבָרֵךְ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים), “the messenger rescuing me from all evil, may He bless the lads” (Genesis 48:16a, Alter).

The first two statements reference *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) or God proper. It is the third statement, speaking of this same subject, which employs the terminology *malakh* (מַלְאָךְ), which seems out of place. Lexically *malakh* typically involves “heavenly messengers, **angels**” (*HALOT*),³⁷ but with God proper as the subject of Genesis 48:15, this same subject continues in Genesis 48:16, only now to be designated as a *malakh*: “the messenger who has redeemed me from all ill-fortune” (Fox). In the estimation of Hartley, “In the accounts of Jacob, ‘angel’ and ‘God’ are used interchangeably (e.g., 31:3, 11, 13).”³⁸ Von Rad goes much further, though, concluding that this “angel” is not subordinate to God, and is instead to be properly viewed as God manifesting Himself on Earth in the experience of Ancient Israel:

“This God, the second statement continues, has ‘led’ him continually. God as the shepherd of his faithful is also an element of cultic language (cf. Ps. 23:1; 28:9). The third statement, however, is the most important theologically. When Jacob here no longer speaks of God but rather of ‘the angel,’ that does not mean that he is here speaking of a being subordinated to God; on the contrary, his speech now prepares for its final and most concentrated statement about God’s rule. The ‘angel of the Lord’ is of course God himself as he appears on earth; in him Israel experienced Yahweh’s special supporting and redeeming activity.”³⁹

The majority of places where the Hebrew *malakh* (מַלְאָךְ) or Greek *angelos* (ἄγγελος) are employed, readers naturally and correctly will conclude that a supernatural intermediary or human intermediary, authorized by God *and created*, is in view. But in Genesis 48:15-16, the Eternal God is stated to be Jacob’s *malakh* or “messenger/angel,” who has rescued him from evil

³⁷ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:585.

³⁸ Hartley, 352.

³⁹ Von Rad, 417.

throughout the course of his life. Surely, God being called “angel,” in a titular sense, seems out of place to many. A Jewish commentator like Sarna is conflicted as much, going as far as to say that in various texts there is no clear distinction between God and angels:

“[T]he parallelistic structure of verses 15-16 strongly suggests that ‘angel’ is here an epithet of God. No one in the Bible ever invokes an angel in prayer, nor in Jacob’s several encounters with angels is there any mention of one who delivers him from harm. When the patriarch feels himself to be in mortal danger, he prays directly to God, as in 32:10-13, and it is He who again and again is Jacob’s guardian and protector (28:15, 20; 31:3; 35:3). Admittedly, ‘Angel’ as an epithet for God is extraordinary, but since angels are often simply extensions of the divine personality, the distinction between God and angel in the biblical texts is frequently blurred (cf. Gen. 31:3, 11, 13; Exod. 3:2, 4).”⁴⁰

The NJPS uniquely renders Genesis 48:16 by capitalizing the title “Angel”:

“And he blessed Joseph, saying, ‘The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day—**The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—bless the lads.** In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth’” (Genesis 48:15-16, NJPS).

God proper actually being called “angel,” and manifesting Himself as a messenger/angel for distinct actions and purposes, provides a basis for later manifestations of a more permanent nature. While Messianic people who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God need to be reserved in their conclusions, regarding whether or not the *malalkh* or messenger/angel noted in Genesis 48:16 was a pre-Incarnate Yeshua—we can be assured that God specifically manifesting Himself as a messenger/angel, provides a Tanach foundation for God being born as a human being in the future Incarnation of Yeshua.

Exodus 3:1-16

“The Burning Bush and ‘I am who I am’”

“Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.’ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?’ And He said, ‘Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.’ Then Moses said to

⁴⁰ Sarna, *Genesis*, 328.