

The Angel of Yahweh

(The Angel of the LORD)

By James T. Bartsch, [WordExplain](#)

Introduction: There is a category of angel called the “angel of Yahweh” (angel of the LORD). This angel takes to himself the prerogatives of God, is called Yahweh, and acts as Yahweh. We say that this was a theophany, an appearance of God, or more precisely, a christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Messiah. Here are tasks of the Angel of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

A. Explicit Passages about the Identity of the Angel of

Yahweh. In this first category of passages referring to the Angel of Yahweh, the angel is explicitly stated as being Yahweh (or Elohim as the case may be).

1. **The Angel of Yahweh gave instructions and predictions to Hagar** ([Gen. 16:7-14](#)).
 - a. He instructed her to return and submit to her mistress, Sarai ([Gen. 16:7-9](#)).
 - b. He promised He would multiply her descendants beyond number ([Gen. 16:10](#)).
 - c. He told her she would bear a son, which she was to name Ishmael (“El Hears”) ([Gen. 16:11](#)).
 - d. He predicted her son would live a life of alienated discord ([Gen. 16:12](#)). (This has certainly been true. Arabs battle one another [Shiite vs. Sunni] except when they unite against a common enemy.)
 - e. Moses identified the angel as Yahweh; Hagar identified Him as Elohim (God) ([Gen. 16:13](#)).
2. **The Angel of God (Elohim) comforted Hagar and rescued Ishmael in the wilderness of Beersheba** ([Gen. 21:15-19](#)).
 - a. After Abraham, at the command of Elohim, expelled Hagar and Ishmael from his home, they wandered in the wilderness. When their provisions were used up she was distraught and left her son to die ([Gen. 21:9-16](#)).
 - b. Elohim heard the lad crying and the angel of Elohim called to Hagar from heaven. The angel told her that Elohim had heard her son ([Gen. 21:17](#)).
 - c. The angel then said, “Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him” ([Gen. 21:18](#)). The angel said he would do what only Yahweh could do. The angel thus identified Himself as Yahweh.
 - d. Elohim then opened her eyes and she saw a well of water and revived her son ([Gen. 21:19](#)).
3. **The Angel of Yahweh prevented Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, provided an alternative sacrifice, and renewed His covenant with Abraham** ([Gen. 22:11-18](#)).
 - a. Elohim tested Abraham, asking him to sacrifice his only, beloved son Isaac on a mountain in the land of Moriah ([Gen. 22:1-2](#)).
 - b. When Abraham was about to kill his son, the Angel of Yahweh called to

- Abraham from heaven and told him to stop ([Gen. 22:9-12a](#)).
- c. Abraham had proven he feared Elohim, “since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” ([Gen. 22:12b](#))! The Angel thus identified Himself as Elohim.
 - d. Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket and offered him in place of his son. He called the name of that place “Yahweh will provide” ([Gen. 22:13-14](#)).
 - e. The angel of Yahweh called a second time to Abraham from heaven ([Gen. 22:15](#)).
 - 1) He said, “By myself, declares Yahweh,” because you have not withheld your son, “I will greatly bless you,” ([Gen. 22:16-17](#)).
 - 2) “I will greatly multiply your seed...;” ([Gen. 22:17](#)).
 - 3) “your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.”
 - 4) “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed ...” ([Gen. 22:18](#)).
 - f. This was a reconfirmation of the initial promise Yahweh had made with Abraham ([Gen. 12:1-3](#)) and had confirmed by a unilateral covenant ([Gen. 15](#)).
 - g. The Angel of Yahweh is Yahweh.
- 4. The Angel of Elohim appeared to Jacob in a dream, identified Himself as the Elohim of Bethel, and ordered him to return to the land of his birth ([Gen. 31:11-13](#)).**
- a. When Jacob left Beersheba for Haran, he had dreamed one night. Angels were ascending and descending a ladder extending to heaven. Yahweh stood above the ladder and identified Himself as Yahweh, the God (Elohim) of his fathers Abraham and Isaac. He promised to Jacob and his descendants the land on which he was lying. He said that Jacob’s descendants would spread in all directions like the dust of the earth. In Jacob and his descendants all the earth would be blessed. Yahweh would be with Jacob and would bring him back to this land. Jacob named the place Bethel (House of El) ([Gen. 28:10-19](#)). In this dream, Yahweh conferred the Abrahamic blessing ([Gen. 12:1-3](#)) to Jacob.
 - b. About twenty years later, Jacob related to his wives a subsequent dream he had in Haran. He said that the Angel of Elohim called him by name ([Gen. 31:10-11](#)).
 - c. The Angel said he had watched Laban’s unfair treatment of Jacob ([Gen. 31:12](#)).
 - d. The Angel then identified Himself as the Elohim of Bethel. He ordered Jacob to return to the land of his birth ([Gen. 31:13](#)).
 - e. The Angel of God is none other than Elohim.
- 5. The Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses in a burning bush at Mount Horeb, instructing him to lead Israel out of Egypt ([Ex. 3:1-10](#)).**
- a. The Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses “in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush” ([Ex. 3:2](#)).

- b. The angel who appeared to Moses is identified as Yahweh and as Elohim. When Yahweh “saw that he turned aside to look,” Elohim “called to him from the midst of the bush” ([Ex. 3:4](#)).
- c. The angel identifies Himself as the Elohim of Moses’ forefathers, and Moses is afraid to look at Elohim: “ 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” ([Ex. 3:6](#)).
- d. The angel commissions Moses to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land ([Ex. 3:7-10](#)).

6. The Angel of Yahweh commissioned Gideon to deliver Israel from enslavement to Midian ([Judges 6:11-27](#)).

- a. Israel did evil against Yahweh, so He delivered them into oppression by Midian. The sons of Israel cried out to Yahweh, so he sent them a prophet to tell them they were suffering because of disobedience ([Judges 6:1-10](#)).
- b. The Angel of Yahweh appeared to Gideon and sat under an oak ([Judges 6:11](#)).
- c. The Angel of Elohim / Yahweh ([Judges 6:20-21](#)) is identified as Yahweh. He commands Gideon to deliver Israel from Midian ([Judges 6:14, 16](#)).
- d. When Gideon prepared an offering for the Angel, He accepted it. No mere angel would accept worship ([Judges 6:18-21](#)).
- e. When fire sprang up from the rock to consume the sacrifice and the angel vanished, Gideon was appalled. He said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the LORD face to face” ([Judges 6:22](#)).
- f. Yahweh responded to Gideon, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die” ([Judges 6:23](#)).
- g. On the same night Yahweh told Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal and the Asherah that belonged to his father, and to build an altar to Yahweh with the wood of the Asherah, and to offer an offering to Yahweh on the new altar. Gideon obeyed. ([Judges 6:25-27](#)).
- h. Clearly the Angel of Yahweh is none other than a physical appearance of Yahweh Himself.

7. The angel of the LORD appeared to the barren wife of Manoah, predicting to her that she would bear a son ([Judges 13:2-3](#)). He instructed her that her son was to be a Nazirite to Elohim from the womb, and that he would begin to deliver Israel. His hair was never to be cut. Because of his special mission in life she herself therefore was to remain ceremonially pure in her own life, and not to drink wine or strong drink or eat any unclean thing ([Judges 13:4-5](#)).

- a. This angel is identified as “the angel of the LORD” (the angel of Yahweh) ([Judges 13:3, 13, 16-18, 20-21](#)). The woman describes this being as appearing “like the angel of God” (the angel of Elohim) – “very awesome” ([Judges 13:6](#)). The writer also identifies the being as “the angel of God” (the angel of Elohim) ([Judges 13:9](#)).
- b. We are told what the Angel of Yahweh looked like in this passage.

Manoah's wife described the angel as "a man of God" ([Judges 13:6](#)). The Hebrew word she uses is *ish*, which particularly references a male human being. Manoah picked up on his wife's description and prayed that God would send "the man (*ish*) of God" again ([Judges 13:8](#)). God listened to Manoah and sent "the angel of God" back to his wife ([Judges 13:9](#)). The woman ran quickly to her husband and asked him to come with her because "the man" (*ish*) who had appeared to her earlier had returned ([Judges 13:10](#)). When Manoah came to the man (*ish*) he asked him, "Are you the man (*ish*) who spoke to the woman?" – to which he replied, "I am" ([Judges 13:11](#)). Observe in [13:11](#) that not only does Manoah call the angel a man, but so also does the text. Note furthermore that, when asked if he were the man who had spoken to the woman earlier, the angel agreed!

- c. The Angel of Yahweh accepted the burnt offering from Manoah on condition that it was offered to Yahweh. No mere angel would have accepted an offering ([Judges 13:16](#)).
- d. After the angel of the LORD ascended up in the flame of the altar, Manoah and his wife fell on their faces ([Judges 13:20](#)). When he appeared no more, Manoah knew he was the angel of Yahweh (the LORD) ([Judges 13:21](#)).
- e. The text states furthermore that Manoah believed he and his wife had seen Elohim Himself, and that they would die because of it ([Judges 13:22](#)). They did not, of course, but the point is that Manoah believed he had seen God Himself.
- f. The implication is that the Angel of Yahweh is none other than Yahweh Himself who appeared at times as an angel (messenger) in the visible form of a man.

8. The Angel of Yahweh rebuked Satan, removed Joshua's sin, and promised Joshua a governing role ([Zechariah 3:1-7](#)).

- a. The prophet Zechariah wrote, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him" ([Zech. 3:1](#)). If the form of Zechariah holds firm, the person identified as "he" must be the [angel who speaks to him](#) throughout the book of Zechariah.
- b. Abruptly, Zechariah recorded, "The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire'" ([Zech. 3:2](#))? The best understanding of this intriguing passage is that, once again, the Angel of Yahweh is identified as Yahweh.
- c. Zechariah next observes that Joshua was standing before "the angel" (of Yahweh) with filthy garments ([Zech. 3:3](#)). The Angel of Yahweh instructs that Joshua's filthy clothes be removed. When this had been done, the Angel of Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes" ([Zech. 3:4](#)). Only God has

the authority to forgive the sins of His people. Here is a clear inference that the Angel of Yahweh is none other than Yahweh Himself, most likely a pre-incarnate appearance of God's Eternal Word ([John 1:1-3](#)) who would become permanently Jesus of Nazareth ([John 1:14-18](#)).

- d. Joshua was given clean clothes while the Angel of Yahweh was standing there ([Zech. 3:5](#)). Then the Angel of Yahweh "admonished Joshua, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house ..."' ([Zech. 3:6-7a](#)). Here, the Angel of Yahweh quotes Yahweh. The fact that the Angel of Yahweh is identified as Yahweh, exercises prerogatives belonging only to God (removing someone's sin), and yet is distinct from Yahweh coincides perfectly with the words of the Apostle John about the Word, Jesus. "The Word was with God" (distinction), and yet "the Word was being God" (identity) ([John 1:1](#), author's translation).

B. Inexplicit Passages about the Identity of the Angel of Yahweh.

In a second category of passages dealing with the Angel of Yahweh, He is not explicitly stated to be Yahweh. Nothing is inconsistent with the Angel being the second person of the Trinity, but the evidence is inconclusive.

1. **The Angel of Yahweh opposed Balaam, and almost killed him. When He succeeded in gaining Balaam's attention, He warned Balaam to speak only the words He authorized ([Num. 22:21-35](#)).**
 - a. When Balaam was going to meet Balak, the king of Moab who wanted Israel cursed, Elohim was angry, and the angel of Yahweh stood against him as an adversary ([Num. 22:22](#)). The donkey saw the angel of Yahweh with drawn sword and turned aside into the field ([Num. 22:23](#)). Balaam beat his donkey.
 - b. Moments later, the angel of Yahweh blocked the passage in a narrow place between two vineyards. The donkey shied into a wall, and Balaam beat the donkey again ([Num. 22:24-25](#)).
 - c. Finally, the angel of Yahweh stood in a tight place where there was no room to turn either to the left or the right, so the donkey lay down, and again Balaam beat the donkey ([Num. 22:26-27](#)).
 - d. In a most humorous incident to us readers, Yahweh opened the donkey's mouth to speak to Balaam. She asked Balaam what she had done that deserved three beatings. Balaam replied that she had made a mockery of him three times and he would have killed her if he had a sword! The donkey noted her faithful treatment of Balaam for years. Had she ever been uncooperative like this before? Balaam agreed that she had not been ([Num. 22:28-30](#)).
 - e. The angel of Yahweh opened Balaam's eyes so he too could see the angel of Yahweh standing in the way with drawn sword. Balaam bowed low to the ground. The angel of Yahweh asked Balaam why he had struck his

donkey three times. He had come as an adversary to Balaam because his way was contrary. Had the donkey not turned aside three times, the angel would have killed Balaam and let the donkey live ([Num. 22:31-33](#))!

f. Balaam said he had sinned. He did not know the angel was standing there. He would turn back if it was displeasing. The angel of Yahweh gave him permission to go, but warned him to speak only the words he would give him ([Num. 22:34-35](#)).

g. Though the Angel of Yahweh is not here identified as Yahweh Himself, from other explicit passages, we deduce that He is the second person of the Godhead, appearing as an angel before His incarnation as Jesus. It is my belief that this is the same angel that went before Israel on her journey from Egypt to Canaan ([Ex. 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2; Num. 20:14-16](#)).

2. The Angel of Yahweh punished the sons of Israel for disobeying Him ([Judges 2:1-5](#)).

a. The Angel of Yahweh came from Gilgal to Bochim ([Judges 2:1](#)).

b. The angel reminded Israel that He had brought them out of Egypt into the promised land. He reminded them that He had made an inviolable covenant with them. He reminded them of their responsibility to make no covenant with the people of the land, but to break down their altars. He charged them with disobedience ([Judges 2:1-2](#)).

c. As a consequence He refused to drive out (completely) the inhabitants of the land. These would become thorns in their sides, and their gods would be a snare to them ([Judges 2:3](#)).

d. When the Angel of Yahweh had completed his speech, the people wept and sacrificed to Yahweh ([Judges 2:4-5](#)).

e. Though the text never explicitly identifies the Angel of Yahweh as being Yahweh, the implication is there. It was Yahweh who had led Israel out of Egypt, and it was Yahweh who had required the ethnic and spiritual cleansing of the land which Israel had neglected.

3. The Angel of Yahweh uttered a curse upon the inhabitants of Meroz because they did not come to the aid of Yahweh in battle against the Canaanites ([Judges 5:23](#)).

a. Yahweh used Deborah and Barak to rescue Israel from the oppression of Jabin, king of Canaan ([Judges 4](#)).

b. Deborah and Barak sang a song commemorating the glorious victory ([Judges 5](#)).

c. In their song they state that the Angel of Yahweh commanded a curse upon Meroz and its inhabitants for not aiding Yahweh in His battle against the Canaanites ([Judges 5:23](#)).

d. The angel is not explicitly identified in this passage as Yahweh, but nothing therein mitigates against that view.

4. The Angel of Yahweh put to death 70,000 males from Dan to Beersheba by means of a pestilence because the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel ([2 Sam. 24:1-16](#)).

- a. Yahweh's anger "burned against Israel, and it incited David against them" to number the people ([2 Sam. 24:1](#)). Why He was angry with Israel is never stated. It may be because Israel had defied God's will by making Absalom king ([2 Sam. 15-18](#)) and by following the rebellious Sheba ([2 Sam. 20:1-22](#)). We learn in [1 Chronicles 21:1](#) that "Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel." Evidently God sovereignly moved Satan to tempt David in order to fulfill God's purpose in disciplining Israel.
- b. After David had numbered the people, the seer (prophet) Gad offered David three choices as a punishment – seven years of famine, three months of fleeing from his foes, or three days of pestilence in the land ([2 Sam. 24:11-13](#)), brought about by the destruction caused by the Angel of Yahweh ([1 Chron. 21:7](#)). David cast himself upon Yahweh's mercy ([2 Sam. 24:14](#)).
- c. 70,000 males of Israel were killed by the pestilence from Dan to Beersheba ([2 Sam. 24:15](#)).
- d. When the Angel of Yahweh, also called "the destroying angel" reached Jerusalem, he was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite ([1 Chron. 21:15](#)). Ornan is evidently a variant of the name Araunah ([2 Sam. 24:16](#)). Yahweh instructed the angel to stop killing ([2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15](#)).
- e. David looked upwards and saw him standing between earth and heaven with drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem ([1 Chron. 21:16](#)). David spoke to Elohim and blamed himself for the census and asked that he and his father's house should suffer, not the people of Israel ([2 Sam. 24:17; 1 Chron. 21:17](#)).
- f. At that point the Angel of Yahweh commanded Gad to tell David to build an altar to Yahweh on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite ([1 Chron. 21:18](#)), which David proceeded to do.
- g. Upon David's offering of sacrifices, Yahweh was propitiated, and He ordered the plague to be stopped ([2 Sam. 24:25; 1 Chron. 21:26-27](#)).
- h. Nowhere in this passage is the Angel of Yahweh explicitly stated to be Yahweh, as He is in other passages, but his actions are consistent with His being the second member of the Godhead.
 - 1) Yahweh speaks to the Angel, giving him instructions ([2 Sam. 24:17; 1 Chron. 21:15](#)), even as the Father instructs the Son ([John 14:10, 24, 31; 15:10, 15; 17:8](#)). The Word was with God, yet the Word was being God ([John 1:1](#)).
 - 2) David prayed to Yahweh ([2 Sam. 24:17; 1 Chron. 21:15](#)), and immediately the Angel of Yahweh responded with a command to the prophet Gad ([1 Chron. 21:18](#)).
- i. This incident marks a significant milestone, for the land that David purchased became the site of the temple, and Yahweh's presence then resided on the Temple Mount ([2 Chron. 3:1](#)).

5. **The Angel of Yahweh is seen in [Zechariah 1](#) as a man who provided information for Zechariah about those who patrol the earth on behalf of Yahweh.** He also queried Yahweh about compassion upon Judah and Jerusalem. Through an angel Yahweh revealed to Zechariah that He was about to resume His compassion and blessing upon Judah, Jerusalem, and Zion.
- a. At nighttime Zechariah saw a man astride a red horse standing among the myrtle trees. Behind him were red, sorrel and white horses ([Zech. 1:7-8](#)).
 - b. Zechariah asked an angel who was speaking with him the significance of the horses. The angel speaking with Zechariah responded that he would show him ([Zech. 1:9](#)).
 - c. Whereupon the man standing among the myrtle trees told Zechariah that the horses behind him were those whom Yahweh “has sent to patrol the earth” ([Zech. 1:10](#)).
 - d. The horses “answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees” that they had “patrolled the earth and found it peaceful and quiet” ([Zech. 1:11](#)).
 - e. The angel of Yahweh asked Yahweh of Troops how long he would withhold compassion from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, for He had been angry with them for seventy years ([Zech. 1:12](#)).
 - f. Yahweh replied to the angel speaking with Zechariah that He would again bestow compassion on Judah and Zion and Jerusalem ([Zech. 1:13-17](#)).
 - g. In [Zechariah 1](#), the person “standing among the myrtle trees” is twice described as a man ([Zech. 1:8, 10](#)) and once as “the angel of the LORD” ([Zech. 1:11](#)).
 - h. The angel of the LORD addresses the LORD of hosts with a question. Yahweh’s response is directed to Zechariah.
 - i. In this chapter, the angel of Yahweh looks like a man, and he is differentiated from Yahweh, for he addresses Yahweh. This is consistent with other descriptions of the Angel of Yahweh that do not explicitly state his Deity.
 - j. The Angel of Yahweh’s full identity is revealed in [Zechariah 3](#).

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