

When God Was An Angel

The Bible speaks of the angel of the LORD. What does this phrase mean? Does it refer to a messenger from Jehovah, or the messenger which is Jehovah? Understanding the meanings of this phrase will help us better interpret and understand the Bible, and thus better understand God.

The Nature of Angels

The following is a quote taken from Vine's Expository Dictionary. While all commentaries should be used with caution, this is a helpful summary of angels and their unique features:

[Angels are] of an order of created beings, superior to man, Hebrews 2:7; Psalm 8:5, belonging to Heaven, Matthew 24:36; Mark 12:25, and to God, Luke 12:8, and engaged in His service, Psalm 103:20. "Angels" are spirits, Hebrews 1:14, i.e., they have not material bodies as men have; they are either human in form, or can assume the human form when necessary, cf. Luke 24:4, with v. 23, Acts 10:3 with v. 30.

Now, contrast the nature of angels with that of God:

1. Are angels deemed proper objects of worship in the Bible? Revelation 22:8-9, Colossians 2:16-19. What about men? Acts 10:25-26
2. Yet, in Judges 13 the angel of the LORD—appearing as a man, no less (vv6-11)--received a burnt offering and a grain offering (worship) from Samson's parents. He instructed them to make this offering to God (v16), but their encounter with this angel, what did Samson's father conclude in v22?

The Messenger From the LORD

3. The word "angel" denotes a messenger (it's translated this way in the Modern Literal Version and Young's Literal Translation). Zacharias was visited by "an angel of the Lord" in Luke 1:11. This same angel, Gabriel, was later sent to Mary. What does the phrase "of the Lord" mean based on what is said in Luke 1:26?
4. The term "angel" is sometimes used for men: Matthew 11:10, Galatians 4:14, 1 Timothy 3:16. But when Gabriel appeared to Daniel in 539 B.C. as a man (Daniel 9:21), how did he describe Daniel in 8:17?
5. It's appropriate to call the prophet Daniel an angel (messenger), but he was not an angel in the same sense that Gabriel is. Gabriel is superior to man and, as a spiritual being, belongs to heaven: he is not a "son of man." Daniel was told of another being like Gabriel, Michael "the archangel" (or "the chief messenger," as found in Young's Literal Translation of Jude 9). Michael, called a "prince" in Daniel 10:21, fought

against the “prince of Persia” (v20) who is thought to be a Satanic angel (demon) since mere men cannot withstand the power of angels (1 Chronicles 21). So then, the apostles and prophets were angels of the Lord, *fleshly messengers from the Lord*. Gabriel and Michael are angels of the Lord, *spiritual messengers from the Lord*.

6. But while Gabriel is superior to man, he is inferior to God. All Deity is spirit (John 4:24), but not all spirit is Deity. Angels are immortal, but they had a beginning. What is said of God in Psalm 90:2?

The Messenger Which is the LORD

7. What did the angel tell John to do in Revelation 22:8-9?
8. In Judges 16, Manoah intended to worship God, but the text makes a point of telling us that after the angel told him to make an offering to the LORD “Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD” (16:13). Yet Manoah and his wife already regarded the messenger as a “man of God” (Judges 13:6, 8), meaning a man from God, a prophet (1 Kings 17:18). They believed they were speaking to a messenger from God—they were wrong!
9. “Of” sometimes means “from”, but not always. What does it mean in John 2:21?
10. What did Manoah and his wife realize in v22?
11. Would Gabriel have received the offering to himself in v23?
12. Sometimes the angel of the LORD refers to a messenger from Jehovah; sometimes it refers to the messenger which is Jehovah. See Genesis 22:11-12, 14-18; Exodus 3:2-6

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We should listen when God sends any messenger, be he from heaven or from men; how much more so should we listen when God speaks for Himself? When God was an angel, when Deity was a messenger, He expected man to sit up and take notice (compare Mark 12:1-12 with Acts 7:51-52). The Divine Son of God is said to be The Better Messenger in Hebrews 1:1-2:18—yes, He’s better than the angels! Read the text to see why, and listen carefully: “*God has spoken to us in His Son...For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.*”