

The Trinity in the OT, the Faith of OT Believers, the Angel of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. Today is my last episode before I'm away for a few days. It's going to be fairly brief, but the question today is, a number of years ago there was a lot of debate in certain circles in the UK revolving around these topics.

The degree to which Christ, the Trinity, is explicitly present in the Old Testament. The nature of the angel of the Lord. Relatedly, the object of believers' faith in the Old Testament. Did Old Testament saints trust consciously and explicitly in the Son?

The degree to which Revelation is progressive from the Old Testament to the New Testament. A lot of these threads were explored in the Blackham-Goldsworthy debates. What are your views on these topics? Some more specific questions might be, does the Old Testament, read on its own terms, clearly present a unipersonal God or a binitarian, trinitarian God?

Or does it mercily present the latter? Second, how were Old Testament believers saved? First question, does the Old Testament, read on its own terms, clearly present a unipersonal God or a binitarian, trinitarian God?

Or does it mercily present the latter? First of all, when we're talking about the language of personality in reference to God, we need to be aware of thinking that God, when we talk about God in three persons, that person is being used there in the same way that we use that language of human beings, as a centre of consciousness, that sort of thing.

[1 : 29] It's more complicated than that in trinitarian theology. I've done videos on that before. But do we have some inkling of the Trinity? Yes, I think we do.

I think if we get to passages such as Isaiah 63, in Isaiah 63 we have statements that represent a plurality in God of some kind.

Isaiah 63, verse 7 following, I will mention the love and kindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel, which he has bestowed on them according to his mercies, according to the multitude of his love and kindnesses.

For he said, Surely they are my people, children who will not lie. So he became their saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and in his mercy he redeemed them, and he bore them and carried them all the days of old.

But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit, so he turned against them as an enemy, and he fought against them. That's one example, but there are a great many different examples in Scripture where we see some sort of plurality, whether that's in reference to the angel of the Lord, the angel of the Lord who can speak of the Lord, and yet also be spoken of as the Lord.

[2 : 49] And then the Spirit of God that seems to exercise an independent or a distinct agency of its own on occasions. So I think there are inklings of a plurality in God, even though it's clear also that God is singular, that there is a monotheistic viewpoint.

Now if you read some of the passages of the Old Testament in the light of New Testament revelation, I think you will see some of these fundamental Trinitarian structures emerging. So for instance, if you look at the story of creation, there are three forms of creation.

There's the authoritative speech, the one who proclaims the word and causes things to be as a transcendent act. Then there's the fashioning of things, the forming of things, like the making of the firmament, or the fashioning of humankind out of the clay.

And then there's the indwelling presence that gives life and power and that generates things. So when God says, let the earth bring forth living creatures, etc., there is the divine word.

There's something that has been fashioned, but there's also the earth being indwelt and bringing forth from itself new life. So I think that even within those sorts of contexts, you see an incipiently Trinitarian framework emerging.

[4 : 17] The Father is the one who speaks out his word. The word is the one through whom all things are created. And the Spirit is the one who is the breath that gives life and that carries that word.

Now, as you look throughout the rest of the Old Testament, you'll also see a number of appearances of the angel of the Lord. And I'll get into that in the answer to the third question, as that also relates to this issue.

Second question, how were Old Testament believers saved? Through explicit faith in the Son or through other means? I don't believe that for the most part, it was through explicit faith in the Son. Rather, I believe that there were objects of faith held forth to them, that we see God revealing himself in a particular way in the structure of the sacrificial system, in the events of things like the Exodus, things like that.

But one of the things that I've tried to argue with in my work is that these things are types that represent in a fundamental shape.

They're the silhouette of what is to come. And so you see this silhouette and you put faith in the God of the Exodus. And that Exodus is not just a past event, but it's an anticipation of future events.

[5 : 34] You put faith in the angel of the Lord. You put faith in all these things that we see within the Old Testament narrative that we later find out anticipate the one who was to come.

Now, when Paul talks about the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness, he talks about them having an experience of Christ. They're baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

That baptism that we experience is related to the baptism that they experience. Likewise, they all participated in Christ as they drank the same spiritual drink and ate the spiritual food of the manna.

So in these sorts of cases, what we have is Paul arguing, in effect, that they participated in Christ in a way that was perhaps incognito.

And I think that helps us to understand a bit of what's going on here. That the root, as Peter Lighthouse has put it this way, which I find it very helpful thinking of it this way, that this is a conjugation of a root.

[6 : 39] And the root in the Old Testament is conjugated in a different way as we find it in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it's in order of shadows and anticipation. In the New Testament, things are more clearly revealed.

And so there are ways in which we can have faith in something that is anticipatory, that looks forward, that doesn't yet know how it will fully be revealed. But yet, we are trusting in something that is revealed in silhouette form or in some other way that is anticipatory of a greater revelation.

So for instance, if you're talking about one of the examples that has been given of being in a situation where you hear footsteps approaching, you don't know whose footsteps they are.

But you know that those footsteps, you may have been told that those footsteps will bring you some special thing you've been waiting for. And in the same way, in the Old Testament, there is this ringing of approaching footsteps.

And people can trust in that. And there's an object of faith set forth. But that is often set forth in type and shadow. It's a real object of faith.

[7 : 49] And Christ is genuinely present in these things. Christ is genuinely present in delivering Israel from Egypt. Christ is genuinely present in the things in the wilderness. Christ is genuinely present in the context of the tabernacle worship and the temple worship.

Christ is genuinely anticipated in his son, David. And so in all these different types and shadows, what we're having is a silhouette of the approaching one. And so I believe that that is the object of faith.

Or that is the way in which the faith of the Old Testament saints was guided. Not in an explicit faith in the one who was to come. Although they did have certain senses of that one, whether through the promise of the seed that will crush the serpent's head.

But that's a broader promise than just about Christ. It's about Christ and his people. It could also be seen in relationship to the servant of Isaiah. But again, that relates to the people and to the Messiah in different ways.

And it could also be seen in figures like the angel of the Lord, the Davidic figure that's promised. It could be seen in a number of different things like this.

[8 : 59] It's the temple structure or the Lord coming to his temple. All of these themes are developed within the Old Testament and provide an anticipatory structure within which Christ takes up flesh.

And as he takes up flesh, he's not just creating a body from nothing. Rather, this is the body of Israel's expectations. This is the body of their worship, of their history.

It's the body of David. It's the body of Moses. It's the body of the prophets. And Christ takes that up. And he comes into these shoes of these figures that have come before.

And I think that helps us to understand that when we're reading these stories in the Old Testament, we are reading things that direct our attention towards Christ. And this is something that I've tried to argue with Andrew Wilson in *Echoes of Exodus*, that within that book we're trying to show that there is a continual, consistent and unified storyline within the whole Old Testament and New Testament that anticipates the greater salvation that Christ brings in the New Testament.

In all these different events of Exodus that are cumulative, that build upon each other and then lead up to and anticipate this great deliverance.

[10 : 17] And so when Christ comes, we are surprised, but we recognise him because we've seen these things.

And so when the Old Testament was opened up to the disciples, they recognised Christ because Christ is recognised from the Old Testament. It's the illustration, one illustration I like that is given by Louis-Marie Chauvet is of two spies, both of which have half of a note.

And then they meet and they join together those notes. And it's a moment of recognition, mutual recognition. And in the same way, the Old Testament is one half, as it were, of that note, the New Testament another.

And when they meet up, there is illumination. The Old Testament suddenly makes sense and the New Testament, Christ, is revealed for who he really is. So putting all this together, I don't believe that there is an explicit faith in the Son, for the most part.

There are anticipations and there are ways in which there is some sort of glimpses of what the Son would be when he came, but not much.

[11 : 27] I think they'd have fairly limited knowledge on that front. But I do believe that their faith was in the Son. But their faith was in the Son in a way that was less direct, less explicit.

It was more implicitly in the Son and directed towards the Son in the many different symbols and types and storylines of Israel's history. The final question, who is the angel of the Lord?

I think the angel of the Lord is, in most of the occurrences of that expression, it refers to Christ. I think it's the pre-incarnate Christ who delivers the people of Israel.

And I'd argue that because the angel of the Lord, on a number of occasions, is spoken of as, we could only speak of one who is divine. And not just divine in a secondary sense, but God himself.

And so the angel of the Lord, for instance, there are three angels that visit Abraham. And then two angels go on to Sodom. One angel remains.

[12 : 33] And then we read about Abraham having a conversation with the Lord. We have the encounter with the angel of the Lord in the burning bush. We have references to the angel of the Lord forgiving or not forgiving.

And that is something that only God alone can do. We have references to God's revelation of himself in the angel of the Lord. Now, this figure of the angel of the Lord is, appears in theophanies and also appears in other events and events that aren't as glorious as the great glorious theophanies that we see, for instance, in association with the Exodus, but more incognito, like when he visits Abraham at the Oak of Mamre.

And these are examples of the, what I went through in the discussion of Meredith Klein's book, Images of the Spirit, which is a superb book on these sorts of subjects.

And although it's not tackling the questions directly, really gets into the meat of some of these underlying issues. And so I believe the angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Christ.

I believe that the angel of the Lord is the one who appears in the theophanies. The angel of the Lord is the one who leads Israel out of Egypt. And when we get to the New Testament, I think we have things that confirm this.

[13 : 57] And so within the book of John, for instance, there are retellings of the stories of the theophanies. So for instance, full of goodness and truth is an allusion back to Exodus 33 and God's self-revelation to Moses, where Moses saw the back of the Lord.

Then we have things like the events of the temple being filled with God's presence, the robe filling the presence in the vision to Isaiah.

And in the New Testament, in John chapter 12, I think it is that John says that Isaiah said these things when he saw his glory, his in the context, meaning Christ's.

And so Christ is the one who is seen in this theophany. Later on in, in John chapter one, we also see a reference to angels ascending and descending upon the son of man.

And that refers back to the first great vision that we have in the story of Jacob. As Jacob leaves and leaves his homeland and goes towards the land of Laban, he spends the night at Luz and then later called Bethel, where he sees a vision of the Lord.

[15 : 12] And that vision of the ladder going to heaven and angels ascending and descending. Christ alludes to that in his speech to in speaking to Nathaniel. And so Christ is the angelic ladder that creates a communion between heaven and earth.

And these sorts of texts, I think, help us to understand that the one who appeared incognito in the Old Testament is revealed in his very face.

So we read the Old Testament accounts. It's the robe filling the temple. Or we read the account of Moses seeing the back of the Lord. Or we read the account of Ezekiel describing the trunk and the legs of the body.

And this human figure that never describes the face. And then Christ comes and we see the transfigured face of the glorified Christ. And he is the one who reveals in person who this figure incognito was in the past.

And so I think that helps us to understand. Also, when we go to places like Jude, there are verses that suggest that Christ was the one that led them out of Egypt. Christ was the angel of the Lord that led them forth and delivered them.

[16 : 24] And putting all of these things together, I think the angel of the Lord is a divine figure. I think the angel of the Lord is not a case of incarnation. And nor do I think it needs to detract from the incarnation.

Rather, we need to understand just how significant the incarnation is in its bodily aspect. Appearing in a human form is a very different thing from actually taking up human flesh in that deeper sense.

So, for instance, if you read the story of Christ, so much of it is a story about his body. Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, circumcised in the temple, baptised in the Jordan, transfigured on the mount.

He was crucified by Pontius Pilate and beaten and all these sorts of things. And then buried in the tomb, raised again on the third day, ascended into heaven, seated at God's right hand to return bodily on the last day.

Now, this is a story about Christ's body. We read the stories of the Theophanies of the Old Testament and the appearances in physical form of the angel of the Lord. And these aren't a matter of taking flesh in the way that the story of the incarnation is.

[17 : 35] So I think there is a big difference to be drawn there. I think we are dealing with something that's more akin to perhaps the appearance of the spirit in the form of a dove.

And then Christ is the image of God. Christ is the archetypal messenger of God. Christ is the messenger or the angel of the Lord.

He's the one who is the archetypal prophet who is associated with angels. This is something that Meredith Klein goes into. And I'll leave a link to that video that I discuss his book in below and also a link to the book because it's very helpful on these sorts of subjects.

Hope that this is useful and this helps to answer some of your questions. If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and future videos, please do so using my Patreon account.

I won't be back for a few weeks, but I hope there's plenty of material for you to look through if you're interested. And I hope that some of you will leave a number of questions while I'm away.

[18 : 37] I look forward to seeing many new questions, particularly for my bumper question and answer session for my hundredth video. Thank you very much for listening and Lord willing, I'll be back with you again soon.

God bless.