

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM:

A biblical study of the identity and ways
of the One who appeared to Abraham

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I. INTRODUCTION

As a Christian I believe that the God of Abraham is our God. He is the one we worship as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This conviction lies at the heart of any Christian approach to theological study of the Hebrew Scriptures, such as the one attempted in this paper. One of the most important questions of life, perhaps the most important one, is the question of whom or what one worships. In A. W. Tozer's memorable words, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us" (Tozer 11). If "*the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*" (Pro. 9:10), and if the greatest commandment is to love this Holy One "*with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might*" (Deu. 6:5), then nothing can be more important than knowing him as he really is. As a Christian living among a huge majority of Muslims I keenly feel the importance and sensitivity of this question. Muslims, Christians and Jews all claim to worship the God of Abraham, but our understandings of the nature of that God differ drastically. Just as I must be sure that the God of Abraham is really my God (that I am known by him), so also I must be sure that my God is really the God of Abraham (that I really know him). During the course of this study my convictions in this area have been strengthened, for which I am grateful.

A. Idea for studying "the God of Abraham"

The impetus for this study comes from years of Christian work in Turkey, both in presenting the gospel to non-Christians and in grounding new believers in the Scriptures. While teaching from the Old Testament (OT) toward the New Testament (NT), I have often seen that the rough outlines of many NT Christian truths regarding the nature of the living God are present in the OT record. For example the OT affirms that the covenant-making God graciously came near and "appeared" to Abraham and various other individuals, who "saw" him. It repeatedly speaks of appearances of a unique "messenger" or "angel" of Yahweh¹ who often seems be Yahweh himself, or at least to be uniquely identified with him. These and other related truths point to a very different concept of God than the abstract, transcendent, starkly unitary god of power whom Muslims reverence as Allah, one that is however in harmony with the God of the NT. My desire is to write a book that will help Muslim friends to know God as he has revealed himself beginning in the simple, profound patriarchal narratives of the book of Genesis, and perhaps pave the way for new understanding of God's final

¹ Note: I have used "Yahweh" for the divine name, rather than "the LORD," even in quotations from the NASB (from which all Bible quotations are made unless otherwise specified) in order to make the link with usage of Yahweh, YHWH or Yhwh in the sources. I have used "Lord" for other references to God or Christ, in accord with general usage.

self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Additionally, Muslims believe that Islam was the religion of Abraham, so approaching the subject by asking ‘who was the God of Abraham?’ and ‘how and why did he reveal himself?’ may prove helpful for understanding difficult Christian beliefs, especially the Incarnation. This paper is preparation for such a book.

B. Purpose of study

This study fits within one of the central concerns of Old Testament theology as formulated by Walter Moberly: “The issue is whether one can make the affirmation of faith that the God of whom the biblical text speaks is the one God whom Christians know and worship today through Jesus Christ” (Moberly 1999, 462). The purpose of this paper is to trace and develop the theological theme of “the God of Abraham” through the OT literature, with special attention to the Pentateuch, and to sketch the major areas of continuity with the NT. By the theological theme of the God of Abraham is meant the study and presentation of the evidence concerning the identity and nature of the God who appeared to Abraham (as well as the other patriarchs and individuals within the nation of Israel) as it develops throughout the whole Biblical record.

I hope to show briefly that the God of Abraham, who is both transcendent (majestic) and immanent (personal), differs on the one hand from the all-too-human pagan gods worshipped in the ancient Near East, and on the other hand from the all-too-distant² god of absolute force worshipped by Islamic orthodoxy as Allah. But primarily I hope to demonstrate that the NT revelation of Jesus as the “*image of the invisible God*” (Col. 1:15) and the “*exact representation of His nature*” (Heb. 1:3) is not only compatible with but follows naturally and progressively from OT revelation. The same Lord who appeared to Abraham and Moses, and whose coming was prophesied by the prophets, has now truly and finally “*come in the flesh*” (1Jo. 4:2). Careful study of the Scriptures seems to me to support the straightforward interpretation of Malachi 3:1: The one referred to in these familiar words both as “*the Lord, whom you seek*” and as “*the messenger/angel of the covenant, in whom you delight*,” is the one whose way was prepared by John the Baptist, Jesus Christ our Lord. That he has come is nothing less than the gospel of God.

Many of the conclusions I have reached have been presented ably and fully by Dr. James A. Borland, in his *Christ in the Old Testament: Old Testament Appearances of Christ in Human form*. However, I reached my conclusions and did much of this research before reading his book. It was encouraging to find confirmation by both Dr. Borland and many of the theologians he cites.

² Islamic mystics speak of Allah as “closer than the jugular vein”, but this is a totally non-specific immanence that is nearly pantheistic.

II. METHODOLOGY

In a perceptive essay on contemporary approaches to the “Historiography of the Old Testament,” V. Philips Long, after showing that there is more than one modern world view, and that secular materialism is hardly the only one, makes the following helpful points:

I would argue that a way forward in discussions of the historiography of the Old Testament might begin by framing the discussion not in terms of a ‘primitive’ versus a ‘modern’ world view but rather in terms of a ‘theistic’ versus an ‘a-’ or ‘nontheistic’ world view... I would also stress the importance of scholars’ offering some indication in their writings of their core beliefs about Reality... Finally, I would contend that scholars should take some care to insure that harmony exists between the world view that they themselves embrace and the world view underlying the methods they employ. (Long 168)

A. Personal presuppositions

Let me first offer an indication of my “core beliefs about Reality.” I am approaching this study as a Christian incarnationist, with personal faith commitment to the one God who has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the holy Trinity. I believe this God has inspired all of the canonical Scriptures received today by the confessing Christian community as the Holy Bible, and that these sacred writings accurately record those events to which they refer.

Inevitably and unashamedly I bring this two-fold understanding to my reading and study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Can such an approach constitute genuine “research”? I believe so. In fact all research involves investigation of data to confirm a preconceived hypothesis in order to predict other instances of the same principle. Long quotes a remarkable self-appraisal by J.M. Miller:

Historical-critical methodology would collapse altogether if the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of God’s dynamic involvement in human history were even taken as a possibility. What this means is that we modern critical historians, while depending on the Bible for almost all of our direct information about ancient Israel, constantly reconceptualize what the Bible reports so as to bring its historical claims into line with our own late twentieth century notions of historical reality. (Long 156)

Since I gladly affirm God’s “dynamic involvement in human history,” my approach will be to focus on and exegete the relevant canonical Scriptures (in particular sixty-five OT passages regarding appearances of the Lord or his messenger), to analyze and synthesize the accumulated data and finally to draw some conclusions on how they relate to Christian faith.

Jesus said of Moses, “*he wrote of me*” (Joh.5:46). Likewise his apostles maintained that they were “*stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place*” (Act.26:22) and that the “gospel of God” was precisely what he had “*promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures*”, thus being “*witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*” (Rom.1:2; 3:21). So I

come to the OT expecting to find evidence supporting the Christian understanding of God. An understanding that revelation is progressive³ warns me that the evidence will not be of such clarity as that found in the New Testament, but nevertheless if inspired by the same God it should be consistent with it. I think this is in line with the general argument set out by Brevard Childs:

I would argue that the Old Testament functions within Christian scripture as a witness to Jesus Christ precisely in its pre-Christian form. The task of Old Testament theology is, therefore, not to Christianize the Old Testament by identifying it with the New Testament witness, but to hear its own theological testimony to the God of Israel... whom the church confesses also to worship... the God and Father of Jesus Christ. (Childs 9)

While believing that Jesus Christ, whom Christians worship as Lord, was/is one with the God of Abraham, it is not the best methodology to simply read the doctrine of the Trinity, as developed in the NT, back into the OT text or (especially) try to identify the person of the godhead in various events. I don't propose to do exactly that. The issue is more subtle and consists of an accumulation of many pieces of evidence. The overall picture built up through the OT canon, of the living God who draws near and appears to his people, and whose climactic "coming" is repeatedly promised, prepares the way convincingly for the NT witness that Jesus Christ is that LORD, who has now truly *"been revealed in the flesh"* (1Ti.3:16).

Towards its conclusion this study will examine selected NT references to Abraham; for example John 8:52-58, where Jesus claims to be the object of Abraham's joyful faith and to pre-exist him, or Jesus' challenge to the Sadducees where he uses the Angel's appearance to Moses at the bush to prove the truth of resurrection. The reason the Jews wanted to stone him was that he claimed an absolutely unique relationship to Abraham, much as another time he claimed that as Messiah he was both David's son and David's Lord.

B. Proposed methodology

John Sailhamer points out that in doing OT theology we must decide "whether to find divine revelation in the text of Scripture or in the events to which the Scriptures refer" (Sailhamer 83). In this study I will be focusing on the text of Scripture, believing that in it God has given us his own inspired and purposeful representation of the event.⁴ Regarding the question of what form of the "text" will be studied, Sailhamer summarizes the issue helpfully:

³ God has chosen not to reveal everything at once. Instead, he has done so progressively, over many ages. Just as the education of a child proceeds from simple lessons to more complex, God's revelation begins with fundamental truth and gradually adds deeper insight to these basics.

⁴ 'Scripture' is more like a painting than a photograph (cf. Sailhamer 45-46). As a 'painting' it carries its author's impressions, emphases and purpose in its creative representation of the original event. In this case the divine Artist gives us a faithful but inspired and purposeful representation of His actions. Certain aspects of the 'scene' are highlighted, while other elements are left in the background. A photograph on the other hand simply represents every element as it

We can take the Scriptures at face value as we now have them (canon), or we can apply the various methods of biblical criticism to attempt to ‘reconstruct’ an earlier form of these texts (criticism)... Do we attempt to construct an OT theology on the basis of the text of the OT as we have it in its present canonical shape, or should we attempt to read the OT documents according to the form in which they were written at an earlier stage? (Sailhamer p. 86).

The best-known example of this type of attempted reconstruction of an earlier form of the text is the JEDP documentary hypothesis. But this questionable theory provides a very inadequate explanation of the phenomenon of the appearances of God and his angel, which runs through all the alleged sources, and contributes nothing meaningful to our discussion (see the investigation in Appendix 1). Therefore, since I will be reflecting only on the biblical text as we have it, my approach will be “canonical,” as Brevard Childs defines it: “It is a basic tenet of the canonical approach that one reflects theologically on the text as it has been received and shaped” (Childs 11). What Sailhamer calls a “confessional” (as opposed to “descriptive”) approach is grounded on the following additional conviction (which I share):

[The Old Testament] is a book or collection of books given to humanity by God. God’s hand, as it were, was directly in the process. To limit the use of the OT by a strictly historical, scientific method would be to overlook this important feature. The fact that it is a God-given book, however, is the very feature of the OT that makes it unique among all other books. But it is precisely this work of God which cannot be a part of a scientific method (Sailhamer 116).

I strongly support such a confessional approach: “Anselm’s dictum: *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) is, in our view, the ultimate grounds for a biblical theology”

(Sailhamer 117). My approach then will be textual, canonical and confessional, taking the Scriptures as we have them in our Bible and regarding them as divinely inspired. It will also be “synchronic” insofar as I will be dealing mainly with one subject traceable throughout the whole OT. But it will also be “diachronic” in that I am pursuing this theme as part of a developing scheme of progressively revealed truth about God. I will review in catalogue form all the references to Abraham and summarize what they suggest about the nature of the God who appeared to him and made himself known in a special “friendship” relationship. Then I will examine each of sixty-five OT passages recording “appearances” of God and/or his messenger. This exegesis will provide the support for analysis of aspects of the nature and character of God as revealed in these passages, especially in their relationship to incarnationalist Christian faith. Sailhamer makes a plea that is well-worth noting here: “We strongly urge the consideration of a return to the notion that the literal meaning of the OT may, in

appears to the eye in the light, with no interpretive emphasis. It is crucial to understand this distinctive quality of Scripture in order not to get hung up on trying to evaluate it as one would a strictly scientific document. Thus while the event presented by the biblical text is a real “historical” event, which happened in space and time, we are studying the text’s ‘artistic’ rendering of the event. I believe the Holy Spirit has ‘painted’ precisely what we need to understand about the events, and that true understanding requires the eye of faith.

fact, be linked to the messianic hope of the pre-Christian, Israelite prophets... an essentially messianic and eschatological focus of the biblical texts... the literal meaning may, in fact, be that very spiritual meaning which the NT writers saw in the OT” (Sailhamer 154). As my colleague Erich Weiger comments, “*literal* is the sure testimony to the highly spiritual and holy – and its what the ‘wise’ are embarrassed by, and could and would not see – the invasion of *literal* God.”

Before proceeding with this investigation of the biblical text, it will be useful to look briefly at both relevant Islamic beliefs regarding Abraham and his God and also relevant ancient Near Eastern religious beliefs about deity in order to focus our study further.

III. ABRAHAM IN ISLAM

The following quotation from an Islamic web site is representative of Muslim beliefs about Abraham, God and true religion:

Muslims believe that all of God's prophets, which include Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, brought the same message of Pure Monotheism. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad was not the founder of a new religion, as many people mistakenly think, but he was the Final Prophet of Islam. By revealing His final message to Muhammad, which is an eternal and universal message for all of mankind, God finally fulfilled the covenant that He made with Abraham, who was one of the earliest and greatest prophets. Suffice it to say that the way of Islam is the same as the way of the prophet Abraham, because both the Bible and the Qur'an portray Abraham as a towering example of someone who submitted himself completely to God and worshipped Him without intermediaries. Once this is realized, it should be clear that Islam has the most continuous and universal message of any religion, because all prophets and messengers were ‘Muslims,’ i.e. those who submitted to God's will, and they preached ‘Islam’, i.e. submission to the will of Almighty God.⁵

A. Abraham in the Quran

This belief that Islam is the religion of Abraham is derived directly from the Quran (or Koran), where Muhammad is reminded that the origins of the true faith are found in Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Ishmael. Muslims believe Abraham and Ishmael built (or restored) the house of prayer in Mecca, to which is made the annual pilgrimage and toward which the faithful bow in prayer five times a day. This is expressed in the following verses from the Quran:

Remember We made the House a place of assembly for men and a place of safety; and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of prayer; and We covenanted with Abraham and Isma'il, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer)... And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (With this prayer): “Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the All- Hearing, the All-knowing. Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of our progeny people Muslim, bowing to Thy (will); and show us our place for the celebration of (due) rites; and turn unto us (in Mercy); for Thou art the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful”... And who turns away from the reli-

⁵ By Abu Yusuf Daniel Masters, Abu Maryam Isma'il Kaka and Abu Iman Robert Squires. © Muslim Answers; thetruereligion.org

gion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly? Him We chose and rendered pure in this world: And he will be in the Hereafter in the ranks of the Righteous. Behold! His Lord said to him: "Bow (thy will to Me):" He said: "I bow (my will) to the Lord and Cherisher of the Universe." And this was the legacy that Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob; "Oh my sons! God hath chosen the Faith for you; then die not except in the Faith of Islam." (Koran: Sura 2:125, 127-128, 130-132, Yusuf Ali translation)

The Islamic perspective is that Islam is the pure "way" or "religion" of Abraham (Quran: 12:38; 16:123; 22:78). He is presented as the "father of the written revelation of God to mankind. He instituted 'the Book,' of which Muhammed stood in such awe" (Torrey 317) and which are called "*the Books of the earliest (Revelation), the Books of Abraham and Moses*" (Quran 87:18-19).

B. Abraham represented as anti-Trinitarian

Of particular importance for our study is the Arabic term "hanif" (true), repeatedly applied to those like Abraham, who refused to join other gods to the one God, unlike Christians who are suspected of committing this great sin: "*Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son.... They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God.*" (Quran 4:171; 5:73). Muhammed is warned: "*They say: 'Become Jews or Christians if ye would be guided (To salvation).' Say thou: 'Nay! (I would rather) the Religion of Abraham the True, and he joined not gods with God.'*" (2:135; also 3:95; 6:161).

In dialogue with Muslims we sometimes ask them to consider the identity of this one "Lord" to whom Abraham submitted himself. What can we say about this God? Given the competing claims of Jews, Muslims and Christians, who all look to Abraham as their "father" - either racially through his sons Isaac and Ishmael, or spiritually as "*the father of all who believe,*" it is worth thinking more deeply about the early narratives which record God's self-revelation to Abraham. As a Christian I believe the one eternal and living God is revealed in three eternal "persons" - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and that the eternal Son of God has partaken of flesh and blood, becoming through the virgin birth the man Jesus Christ. Is there conclusive evidence for this Christian belief in the OT record of Abraham's life (and beyond)? Is it compatible with the OT? Or did the NT revelation simply bring a completely new insight into God regarding plurality in the divine unity?

Upon careful study it is clear that the OT Scriptures reflect a far more complex (though natural and relational) theology of God's mysterious diversity within the framework of divine unity than does the Islamic picture. They also present him as far more intimately and actively involved in the lives of his people than does the Koran.

C. The God of Abraham and the God of Islam

Only a brief summary can be given of the extensive areas of difference between the Islamic concept of God and that found in the Old and New Testament. Commenting on the concept of God dominating the orthodox Wahabi Muslims, Arab lands traveler Palgrave wrote,

In this one sentence ‘La ilaha illa Allah’ [there is no god but Allah], is summed up a system which, for want of a better name, I may be permitted to call the Pantheism of Force, or of Act, thus exclusively assigned to God, who absorbs it all, exercises it all, and to Whom alone it can be ascribed, whether for preserving or for destroying, for relative evil or for equally relative good. I say relative because it is clear that in such a theology no place is left for absolute good or evil, reason or extravagance; all is abridged in the autocratical will of the one great Agent... Thus immeasurably and eternally exalted above and dissimilar from, all creatures which lie leveled before Him on one common plane of instrumentality and inertness, God is One in the totality of omnipotent and omnipresent action... He communicates nothing to his creatures; for their seeming power and act ever remain His alone. (Zwemer 65)

In relation to God’s unity, power, and various other attributes of deity, there is no fundamental conflict between the Bible and the Koran. Yet despite broad agreement concerning God as Creator, there is near total disagreement as to biblical truths related to God as Savior. If we examine the attributes describing what Allah is, even if taken in the highest possible meaning, they only describe a very great being. None go beyond what could be said of any supremely powerful and intelligent being. There is no moral aspect to any of them. We are clearly face to face with an omnipotent being. But there is no way to say that he will act this or that way. If he so wills he does this, if he so wills, he does that. In fact he is little different from an infinitely powerful ruler. “For Muslims the will of Allah is absolute, arbitrary, irresistible and inescapable... An angel, a thief and a fly all do the will of Allah completely every second of their lives” (Zwemer 99).

From a biblical point of view, the Quranic concept of God (Allah) is lacking in five areas:

1. The “Fatherhood” of God is absent.
2. The attribute of Love is almost entirely absent.
3. Allah is not absolutely and unchangeably just and righteous.
4. There is lack of harmony between Allah’s attributes.⁶
5. As seen above, the triunity of God is vigorously denied.

Therefore, while avoiding what John Walton calls an “aggressive attempt to read distinctives of Christian theology back into the Old Testament with an apologist’s agenda” (Walton, Genesis 466), it is necessary to look carefully at the cumulative picture. Only on this basis can an appropriate response be given to Islamic charges from the Scriptures, and a biblical doctrine of God be formed.

⁶ “In Islam’s theology, mercy and truth do not meet together; righteousness and peace have never kissed each other. The only way Allah pardons a sinner is by abrogating His law or passing over guilt without a penalty. There is no Substitute, no Mediator, no Atonement.” (Zwemer 115)

Unfortunately the issue is also clouded by more recent charges that the truths regarding the God of Abraham in the Bible have simply been borrowed from other ancient Near Eastern religious ideas. So before proceeding to look at the biblical record it is necessary to make some brief comments about this issue.

IV. THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AMONG OTHER GODS

It is suggested by some that the God of Abraham is to be identified to some extent with El, the chief Canaanite god in Ugartic and Phoenician literature, head of the Canaanite pantheon, and the god who provided fertility (Walton, *Genesis* 419, 456, 510). Others speculate, based on other writings of the ancient Near East (ANE), that Abraham knew God only as Shaddai. For example, Edwin C. Hostettler, in his sampling of recent developments in Palestinian epigraphy, comments on fragments of an eighth-century B.C. sanctuary inscription which identifies itself as the book of the seer Balaam, Beor's son:

Both the biblical and extra biblical stories employ the divine epithet 'Shaddai,' which English translations commonly render 'Almighty' (see, e.g. Num. 24:4, 16). The title 'Shaddai,' possibly meaning 'one of the mountain,' applied to the chief decision-making gods, probably because these ruling gods gathered in a mountain in Canaanite tradition much like the Olympians in Greek mythology. The patriarchs knew the Abrahamic deity as Shaddai prior to learning the name Yahweh (Exo. 6:3) (Chavalas 47).

This last comment reflects a questionable assumption, built largely on this one verse, that the widespread use of the name Yahweh in patriarchal narratives does not reflect historical reality about their knowledge of God as Yahweh. It requires that we dismiss all references to Yahweh in these narratives as all inserted by later "Yahwistic" authors/editors whose point was presumably to show that the god of Abraham was in fact Yahweh, even to the extent of putting this divine name in the mouths of the worshipping patriarchs, who were in fact (according to this theory) only calling on "Shaddai" (as in Gen.4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 22:14; 26:25). Other explanations, such as some of those summarized in Appendix 5, seem to me to do more justice to the text as we have it. What is new in the Exodus era is the dramatic public self-revelation of Yahweh in his powerful saving acts as he begins the process of fulfilling his ancient promises to the patriarchs. They had all died in faith, without ever seeing Yahweh's mighty intervention; as the author to the Hebrews puts it, "without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance" (Heb.11:13).

A. Overall issue of the OT and writings of the Ancient Near East (ANE)

The question of the relationship of the God of Abraham to pagan gods in the ANE takes its place within the larger issue of the relationship of the Hebrew Scriptures to Sumerian writings.⁷ Secular experts such as the late Professor Samuel Noah Kramer⁸ and Turkish Sumerologist Muazzez Hilmiye Çiğ who followed him, argue that Genesis is a late example of an existing genre in the ancient Near East. The Sumerian accounts of creation and the flood are at least 1500 years older than the Hebrew; therefore, goes the argument, Genesis has simply borrowed or built on earlier accounts. It is not, as Jews, Christians and Muslims (who believe a book called the Tavrāt was revealed to Moses) confess, a divinely revealed account of the real story of origins.

In fact, the Sumerian creation stories which begin with *chaos*⁹ are very different from the Genesis account, which begins with *God*. As for the flood, the big story of the flood is similar, and dissimilar in details. But the huge difference is ethical, regarding the nature of the gods/God, in areas such as the reason for sending the flood (men are too noisy) and for ending it (the gods grow hungry and end it so men can get back to feeding them by offering sacrifices, for which they were created). In contrast, the author of Genesis knew the God of the Bible, whose character is in contrast with this ANE understanding of their gods' characters. Whatever the actual process of compiling and using previous sources in the inspired composition may have been (compare Luke 1:1-4), the end result (in the canonical book of Genesis) is a direct critique of ANE ideas.

B. Is “El” the God of Abraham?

For this study the most significant area of overlap between the Scriptures and ANE literature is the use of the name El for the (chief) deity. Yet when carefully studied this too seems to be an example of how Genesis is a God-given correction and rebuke of the prevailing idolatrous misconceptions about God.

“‘El’ is a very ancient Semitic term. It is also the most widely distributed name among Semitic-speaking peoples for the deity, occurring in some form in every Semitic language except Ethiopic. Pope, in his study of ‘El’ in the Ugaritic, notes that it is the most frequently occurring name for the deity in proper names throughout the ancient Semitic world (Marvin Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*)” (Harris, Archer and Waltke 42). “Frequently names were sentences making a statement about a dei-

⁷ The following discussion was enhanced significantly by an interview with Dr. Margaret Payne, a long time resident of Turkey and a Bible teacher whose doctoral expertise is in ancient languages and literature, particularly Ugaritic.

⁸ For whom Bar-Ilan University in Israel named its Institute of Assyriology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies.

⁹ In these mythical ANE accounts Chaos refers to the sea or the sea monster(s), which the gods are continually fighting. There is no “chaos” in Genesis; God *created* the sea creatures and they, too, were “good.” Genesis 1:2 does not describe “chaos” but a formless (uncultivated) and empty (uninhabited) condition (Interview with Dr. Payne).

ty” (Walton, Genesis 458), thus the theophoric personal names used in Genesis point to common recognition of El as the deity worshipped from earliest times. Examples are Cain’s grandson *Mehuja-el* (smitten of El) and great grandson *Methusha-el* (man of El), Shem’s great grandson *Mahalalel* (praise of El), and significantly for the patriarchal era, *Ishma-el* (El hears) and *Isra-el* (God strives). Names given to places also show this general tendency. Examples are *Peni-el* (face of El) and *Beth-el* (House of El). *Yahweh-yireh* (Yahweh will provide) is a significant exception where Yahweh is used, as Abraham calls the place in Moriah where Isaac is spared (Gen.22:14). John Walton’s general conclusion from this data is that “it must be acknowledged that the absence of Yahweh in the names argues against the belief that the patriarchs considered Yahweh to be the primary name of the God they served” (Walton, Genesis 459). He discusses this question (“Who is the God of Abraham?”) in light of the apparent contradiction between the frequent use of Yahweh in Genesis and the famous statement in Exodus 6: 3: “...by My name, Yahweh, I did not make Myself known to them.” He studies three categories of names for deity in the book of Genesis, “The El titles,” “the God of the fathers,” and “Yahweh,” and concludes with T. McComiskey that “there is good evidence for regarding the God of the patriarchs as El, who manifested various aspects of his nature in the epithets by which he is known in the Pentateuchal sources. It is he with whom the name Yahweh is identified” (Walton, Genesis 455-461). He goes on to argue from Exodus 6:3 that “El Shaddai was the epithet most appropriately connected with how God interacted with the patriarchs and with what he accomplished for them. They did not experience firsthand the significance of the epithet Yahweh. It is Moses’ generation who will come to know God as Yahweh” (Walton, Genesis 459). G. Wenham reaches a similar conclusion, explaining almost all the uses of Yahweh in Genesis as 1) being found largely in the “narrative framework” rather than the supposedly older “dialogue” sections of the text, or 2) added by the editor(s) in the dialogues to “show the identity of the older name [El] with the new name [Yahweh]. He concludes that “there are in fact only four passages in the patriarchal narratives where Yahweh speaks and uses this name on its own to describe himself [Gen.18:14, 19 twice, and 15:7]” and then explains 15:7 as an editorial substitution linking Abraham’s call from Ur with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (Wenham 191–92).¹⁰ The general thrust of all of these efforts is to argue that there is a striking contrast between the religion of the patriarchs and later Israelite practice,¹¹ perhaps most notably in “the use of the term El instead of Yahweh in divine revelation. From

¹⁰ I believe he omits another clear example in 28:13: “Yahweh stood above it and said, ‘I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac...’” which is not so easily explained away.

¹¹ Moberley argues that patriarchal religion is more or less consistently presented as quite different from Mosaic Yahwism. He lists the following characteristics of patriarchal religion: non-centralized, non-legal, non-mediatorial (non-

Mosaic times onward Yahweh was the characteristic self-designation of God. But in Genesis God usually reveals himself as El” (Wenham 194).

But it is important to balance this with the overall unity between these distinct eras. At significant points in the Genesis narrative we are specifically told that the patriarchs “*called on the name of Yahweh*” (Gen.4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33). Allen Ross presents a survey of Abraham’s “Yahwistic” faith and worship that shows significant continuity with that of the Mosaic era which followed (Ross 729-35).¹² It is also important to remember that both names (Elohim and Yahweh) are used widely throughout the entire OT canon, including Genesis¹³ (see table of usage of the names of God in Appendix 2). One could speculate about the fact that Elohim is used more than twice as often in Ezra-Nehemiah as is Yahweh¹⁴, but drawing the conclusion that Elohim was more prominent in Israel’s thinking in that era would surely be unwarranted. It is clear that God is progressively revealing himself, and that the Mosaic era is the “mountain-top” of the process from which point onward the name Yahweh is in the forefront, but we should be careful not to make too strong a division between eras or to assert any identification of Abraham’s God with the chief Canaanite deity El.

If I may make a personal aside, I find it somewhat frustrating to see in these studies continual references to the so-called “Yahwistic editor of Genesis” with no balancing written recognition of the divine authorship or editorship of the Law of the Lord (of which Genesis is the foundation) which is affirmed by both testaments (Psa. 19:7-11; 2Ti. 3:16; 2Pe.1:19-21; etc). Childs makes strides toward this in his “canonical approach” as he says, “lying at the heart of the canonical proposal is the conviction that the divine revelation of the Old Testament cannot be abstracted or removed from the form of the witness which the historical community of Israel gave it” (Childs 12). But in the light of Christian faith it is most helpful for readers if scholars will go further and openly say on occasion that it was the Spirit of God who gave it this form, whatever compositional processes he may have employed. Both Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch are together the inspired Law of God. In my opinion it is important for scholars to state this lest the impression be given that the NT apostolic faith is built upon nothing more than the collective convictions of Israel’s community of faith. But that issue is beyond the scope of this short paper.

priestly, sacrificial), non-exclusive, non aggressively monotheistic, no emphasis on ‘holiness’ or morality (Moberley 1992, 74-104).

¹² Ross’ survey of the nature of the God in whom Abraham believed is quoted at length in Appendix 3. He also includes the following in his survey of Abraham’s worship: Sacrifice, Proclamation of the name of Yahweh, Prayer and Intercession, Praise and Worship, Tithes, Oaths, Circumcision, and Ethical Conduct of obedience, righteousness and integrity (Ross 733-35).

¹³ Elohim 221 times, Yahweh 165 times in Genesis.

¹⁴ Elohim is found 125 times in 108 verses as opposed to 54 times in 43 verses for Yahweh.

C. Contrasts between Abraham's God and all others

This discussion so far has made no strong distinction between the God of Scripture and the deity so widely referred to in Semitic literature as El. But in fact the contrasts far outweigh the similarities. At least three arguments point away from any simple identification of the God of Abraham with the Canaanite god El:

1. Not just *El*.

The name El is never used without some sort of qualifier in Genesis. The following combinations are used in "El titles" in the patriarchal narratives:

El Elyon - God Most High (Gen.14:18)

El Roi - God who sees (Gen.16:13)

El Shaddai - God Almighty (Gen.17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3)

El Olam - God the Enduring (Gen.21:33)

El Bethel - God of Bethel (Gen.31:13)

El Hannireh (from *raah*) - God who appeared (Gen.35:1)

El Haoneh (from *anah*) - God who answered (Gen.35:3)

El Aviha - God of your father (Gen.46:3; 49:25)

Study of the word El as used in Scripture indicates that it is generally qualified by words or descriptions which further define the word, and thus we should be alerted to a deliberate argument against the deities worshipped in the ANE at the time of Abraham. A.B. Davidson concludes that these qualifications both elevate the concept of El and distinguish the term as used biblically from others who might be so named (A.B. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 61; referred to in Harris, et al. 42).

2. The plural *Elohim*.

Rather than the singular *El*, the plural *Elohim* dominates the names used for deity in Genesis (221 times in 189 verses), and throughout the Scriptures. Jack B. Scott comments,

This word, which is generally viewed as the plural of *eloah*, is found far more frequently than either *El* or *eloah* for the true God. The plural ending is usually described as a plural of majesty and not intended as a true plural when used of God. This is seen in the fact that the noun *elohim* is consistently used with singular verb forms and with adjectives and pronouns in the singular. (Harris, et al. 44)

While some find nothing significant in this unusual usage, it is worth asking why it might be chosen as the name for deity in a strongly monotheistic faith. Like many Christian scholars, Scott argues that the plural *elohim* meets...

the necessity of a term conveying both the unity of the one God and yet allowing for a plurality of persons (Gen.1:2, 26). This is further borne out by the fact that the form *elohim* occurs only in Hebrew and in no other Semitic language, not even in Biblical Aramaic (Gustav F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 88). When indicating the true God, *elohim* functions as the subject of all divine activity revealed to man and as the object of all true reverence and fear from men. (Harris, et al. 44)

Elohim is often used in combination with Yahweh (e.g. Gen. 2-3; 24), thus adding specificity to this inherent plurality. That is, this Elohim is Yahweh, or Yahweh is this Elohim.¹⁵ I believe this may be at least part of the point of Deuteronomy 6:4, “*Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our Elohim, Yahweh is one!*” Kalland comments, “To the Jews v.4 is not only an assertion of monotheism, it is also an assertion of the numerical oneness of God contradictory to the Christian view of the Trinity of the Godhead. This kind of oneness, however, runs contrary to the use of *ehad* in the sense of a unity made up of several parts. In Exodus 26:6, 11, the fifty gold clasps are used to hold the curtains together so that the tent would be a unit (*ehad*)” (Kalland 65). Another example is Genesis 2:24 where the two are one (*ehad*) flesh, yet distinct. The point of this argument is that the characteristic use of the name Elohim for the solitary, sovereign creator of the cosmos in the Hebrew Scriptures helps to distinguish him from the gods of the ancient Near East.

3. Character traits of God.

Much more importantly, the character traits attributed to the living God in the Scriptures (whether called Elohim or Yahweh) stand in stark contrast with those of the gods of the ANE. When Yahweh says “*I will be God to you*” the phrase is full of meaning (see comments on page 43). All that he is and does, he is and does for those who belong to him! The character of God as revealed in the OT Scriptures is frequently described by verb phrases, because his character is understood as much by what he does as by what he says about himself. For example, He is both the loving God who creates man in his own image and the holy God who is grieved and full of wrath as a result of man’s self-destructive actions. He is the self-disclosing God who appears to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the faithful God who makes promises and binds himself by oath to carry out his word, and befriends those who believe Him. He is the saving God who delivers and adopts them, and the fellowshiping God who comes to actually dwell among his people. His moral perfection and beauty is in stark contrast with all other conceptions of deity. In his commentary on Genesis Walton gives a very useful summary of key theological distinctions between Israel and her neighbors, based on his analysis of ANE mythology and personal and royal archives.¹⁶ I will list below those most relevant to this study:

“Ultimacy of deity

¹⁵ Alternatively, Yahweh was one of the epithets of El -- “El who creates or engenders relationship” (Walton, following Cross, p.458-59).

¹⁶ To my mind the term “Israel Ideal” implies that God is the conceptual product of Israel’s faith assertion, and I would prefer something like “Israel’s God”,

ISRAEL IDEAL: Yahweh is the ultimate power in the universe. He answers to no one, and there are no limitations on his jurisdiction.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: The gods have competing agendas and limited jurisdiction. Even as a corporate body they do not exercise ultimate sovereignty.

Manifestation of deity

ISRAEL IDEAL: Yahweh cannot be represented in material form or in the form of any natural phenomena.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: Deities were represented iconically, anthropomorphically, or in natural phenomena.

Disposition of deity

ISRAEL IDEAL: Yahweh is consistent in character and has bound himself by his attributes.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: Deity is not bound by any code of conduct. Inconsistent, unpredictable, and accountable only marginally to the divine assembly.

Creation of the cosmos

ISRAEL IDEAL: Yahweh undertook and sovereignly executed a cohesive plan of creation.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: Accomplished by procreation of the gods, with no directing influence and was organized and established through conflict between gods.

Human dignity

ISRAEL IDEAL: Derived from being created in the image of God and placed over creation. Yahweh creates for people and with people in mind.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: Since humans were a bother and an afterthought, created as slaves, dignity derived from the belief that they provided the needs of the gods.

Revelation

ISRAEL IDEAL: Yahweh's will, purposes, and nature were a matter of public record provided by Yahweh.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: The will, purposes, and nature of deity could only be inferred.

Divine intervention

ISRAEL IDEAL: Directed toward an established and consistent goal in keeping with Yahweh's intention of revealing himself and his attributes.

PAGAN POLYTHEISM: Directed toward maintaining a status quo or returning to a previous status quo and is primarily ad hoc." (Walton, Genesis 33–34)

This summary aligns well with the particular revelation of God that is communicated as he appears to the patriarchs and others in the nation of Israel from Moses onward. He appears in order to carry out a cohesive, covenant purpose of being rightly and deeply known by his people, just as intended from the beginning of creation. There is nothing inconsistent or unpredictable in his activities as he continues to make his will known to his people. His manifestations follow a clear pattern that runs throughout the whole canon, and are at once visible and yet far removed from representation in material, iconical form. The interesting question of how his visible manifestations in human/angelic form are consistent with his nature as the invisible God will be addressed later.

C. The importance of Genesis 1-11.

Genesis 1-11 is exceedingly important as a God-given corrective to the prevailing religious environment of the ANE as well as a prologue to the rest of the Bible. According to Walton, these foundational chapters make best sense when understood as “an introduction to God’s program of revelation.”

How did it come about that people needed a revelation of Yahweh? Why did he not just keep in contact from the start? Genesis tells the story of how God created humankind in fellowship with him, but also relates how that relationship was destroyed by the Fall. The destruction of all but Noah and his family in the flood gave humanity a second opportunity to maintain a relationship, but again sin interfered. The primeval history concludes with the important account of the Tower of Babel. Urbanization in Mesopotamia had provided fertile ground for the development of a new paganism aptly represented in the symbolism of the ziggurat. The Tower of Babel represented the definitive formulation of a brand of paganism that pervaded the ancient Near East in which mythologized deity was portrayed as having all the foibles of humanity. In so doing, humanity remade deity in its own image. The perception of God that swept the ancient world was incapable of providing a sound basis for a relationship with the one true God. The result was the need for God to vouchsafe an accurate revelation of himself. He therefore instituted a revelatory program by means of the covenant. In this way chapters 1-11 of Genesis show why there was a need for a revelatory program and lead into the details of how God embarked on that program using the mechanism of the covenant (Walton, Covenant 44–45).

The point then of the patriarchal narratives of God appearing in order to reveal himself to Abraham and his offspring is that the one true creator Elohim, Yahweh, is stepping in to reestablish contact with his estranged and beloved creatures. He comes to Abraham and begins a program that will eventually result in blessing for all mankind, even though they are now scattered across the earth as a result of his judgment.

D. Conclusion.

A related study would address the issue of how Islam’s Allah is to be compared with both the gods of the ANE and the God of the Bible. Perhaps it would be fair to say that Allah stands in stark contrast with the pagan deities with their human weaknesses, at least insofar as he is the absolute sovereign, sole creator and majesty -- he is transcendent. Allah also differs greatly from the God of the Scriptures in that as he is distant and non-relational -- he is not really immanent in a specific, personal way. While for many in the mystic traditions of Islam Allah is believed to be immanent – in fact “closer than the jugular vein” – the reality is that he is “immanent in an incredibly unspecific, unattainable permeation,” like the unknowable presence of pantheism. Yahweh on the other hand is both sovereign and intimately involved with his people, a reality that will come out as we examine the passages concerning his appearances. The God of Abraham in the Scriptures is present with

great “specificity of self-defined and self-revealed personality.”¹⁷ We must maintain both the majestic transcendence and the personal immanence of God. He not only “*counts the number of the stars [and] gives names to all of them*” but also “*heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*” (Psa. 147:3-4). This should become evident as we begin to cull evidence from the biblical text about the God of Abraham.

¹⁷ Erich Weiger, in his very helpful comments on this paper.

V. ABRAHAM AND HIS GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES

The next step in coming to grips with the foundational role of Abraham in God's program of self-revelation as recorded in the Scriptures is to look over all the references to him in the Old and New Testament canon. This will help provide the framework for looking at one striking phenomenon which begins in the life of Abraham, the appearances of God or the "theophanies."¹⁸ The name Abram or Abraham appears 335 times in the Bible (in a total of 277 verses), and in this brief study an exhaustive examination of these references is impossible. Instead I have gathered the references into some general categories and made some brief suggestions as to what each category reveals theologically about the God of Abraham. Many of the points summarized in this section can also be seen in the texts recording those appearances. Some NT references are included here for the sake of completeness, but the specific issue of Jesus and Abraham will be taken up in section VII.

A. The narrative record of Abraham's life (Genesis 11-25).

As would be expected, the majority of references to Abram/Abraham's name are found in the narrative record of his life.¹⁹ These begin with his ancestry in Genesis 11:26 and continue through his life story to the record of his burial in Gen.25:10. The story told in these chapters is as simple as it is significant. God appears to Abraham in Mesopotamia and calls him to move to a strange land in Palestine, promising to bless him greatly. In obedience to this call Abraham spends his life as a nomadic stranger in that land, living in a tent. His son Isaac and grandson Jacob follow in his ways, never owning more than a gravesite in the land (Gen.26-50). These events are narrated briefly in other parts of Scripture by Joshua, the chronicler, the martyr Stephen, and the author of Hebrews (Jos.24:2-3; 1Ch.1:27-34; Acts 7:2-8; Heb.11:8-19); and later generations are called to remember and celebrate the call of Abraham as the beginning of Israel's unique, privileged relationship with God (1Ch.16:8-22). Placed as it is in the context of the fall and its disastrous effects on mankind, as established by Genesis 1-11, the biblical story beginning with Abraham is one continuous meta-narrative of "*the restoration of all things*" (Act.3:19-26) which only reaches its conclusion in the creation of the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21-22.

The narrative also reveals much about the nature and attributes of the God to whom Abraham belonged, although this information is not presented so much by propositional statements about God as

¹⁸ Borland defines the appearances involved in this study as "christophanies" rather than theophanies (Borland 13-34). But this usage assumes that the conclusion has already been proven. I will refer to "appearances" instead of using either of these technical terms.

¹⁹ The name appears 181 times in Genesis 1:1 - 25:10 (in 168 verses) out of a total of 335 in the whole Bible.

by accounts of God's active, sovereign and intimate involvement in human history; by recording what he has done and said. Allen Ross provides a helpful systematic arrangement of the data concerning the nature of God from Genesis 12-25, under the heading "Abraham's Yahwistic faith," which is quoted at length in Appendix 3 (Ross 729-35). Such a summary is very useful in showing the continuity between the faith of Abraham and the faith of Israel as revealed in the rest of the books of Moses. Yet what is lost in any systematic treatment of this era is the natural simplicity of Abraham's life of faith and the understated greatness of the purposes of God set in motion through his call.

B. Abraham and his God in the rest of Scripture (Genesis 26 and following)

1. "The God of Abraham" in the patriarchal era and beyond.

The patriarchal narrative of Abraham's sons and grandsons, which focuses on Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (Gen.26-50), contains 27 references to the name Abraham. Some of these are simply historical notes, genealogical or otherwise, referring to Abraham's days, but the others begin to identify God as uniquely "*the God of Abraham*" (or similar words) and to refer back to his promises to Abraham (Gen.24:12, 27, 42, 48; 26:24; 28:13; 31:42, 53; 31:53; 32:9). Despite its brevity the patriarchal era was so important that from then on God identified himself as "*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*" (Exo.3:6, 15-16). This title continues to be used throughout the Scriptures to identify God (Exo.4:5; Jos.24:2; 1Ki.18:36; 1Ch.29:18; 2Ch.30:6; Psa.47:9; Mat.22:32; Mar.12:26; Luk.20:37; Act.3:13; 7:2, 32). Yet this particularity is never seen as conflicting with his universality as the God of all mankind (Num.16:22, 27:16; Job.12:10; Jer.32:27; Dan.5:23). In fact God's stated purpose in choosing Abraham and his offspring was so that all the nations of the earth might know Yahweh and receive his blessing (Gen.12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:3-4; Isa. 2:2; Jer.3:17). "As the future is spelled out in the biblical passages, an eschatological universalism is boldly set forth" (Von Gronigen 142). God blesses Israel precisely "*that all the ends of the earth may fear Him*" (Psa.67:7).

2. The God of specific, purposeful election.

Abraham has been "*chosen*" by God. "Genesis 18:19... makes it clear that singling out Abraham had such a purpose [choosing in order to use] behind it. Yhwh designates Abraham as someone to fulfill a task... the broader promise that Abraham is to become a great nation and that all the nations are to seek blessing by him" (Goldingay 217). This election is referred to by future generations as the root of their relationship to God (Neh.9:7; Psa.105:6; Isa.41:8). God has likewise "*called*" (Isa.51:2; Heb.11:8) and "*redeemed*" Abraham (Isa.29:22). The heart of this call is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3, where the Lord said to him, "*Go forth from your coun-*

try, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” All of God’s purposes for the nations find their roots in this initial call of Abraham. God reveals himself as the God of specific, purposeful election even in the provision of blessing for all of mankind.

3. **The living God who reveals himself personally.**

Abraham’s story is a fundamentally a record of God revealing himself directly to a man in unique ways other than general revelation or written scripture. In addition to the times when he “spoke” to Abram/Abraham (Gen.12:1, 4; 13:14; 15:1, 4, 13; 17:9, 15; 18:13; 21:12; 22:1), God also “appeared” to him (Gen.12:7; 17:1; 18:1; Exo.6:3; Act.7:2), as he later did to Isaac and Jacob after him. Abraham is seen as a “prophet” to whom the word of the Lord has come (Gen.20:7; 1Ch.16:22; Psa.105:15). The patriarchs were thus “men who had immediate access to the word and ear of the living God” (Kaiser, 1978, 84). While we read frequently that the God or the Lord “spoke/said” through Genesis 1-11, the first recorded “appearance” of God was to Abraham (12:7). The fact that God has not only spoken but has also appeared to men, beginning with Abraham, is crucial to this study and will be taken up in detail in the following major section.

4. **The faithful God who makes solemn and binding promises.**

God’s appearing is purposeful and generally linked to his making of covenant promises. God promised or “sworn an oath” to Abraham to bless him and give him numberless descendents and an eternal inheritance (Gen.22:16; 26:3; 50:24; Exo.6:8; 32:13; 33:1; Num.32:11; Deu.1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4; 1Ch.16:16; Psa.105:9; Mic.7:20; Luk.1:73; Act.7:17; Rom.4:13, 16; Gal.3:14, 18; Heb.6:13). Related to this, Abraham is mentioned as recipient of a “covenant” (Gen.17:9; Exo.2:24; Lev.26:42; 2Ki.13:23; 1Ch.16:16; Psa.105:9; Act.3:25; 7:8), and described as “the one who had the promises” (Heb.7:6). God thus reveals himself as the God who has made solemn and binding promises to Abraham and his offspring in terms that bind him to do all that he has committed himself to do. He will fulfill his promise, keeping his side of the covenant. The issue of whether this covenant is conditional or unconditional has been debated at length by scholars (Walton Covenant, 108–21). But what is clear is that the basis of true relationship with the true God is not some sort of employer-employee relationship, but a gracious promise to bless which is guaranteed by God’s faithfulness.

In future generations issues relating to the “land” are linked very strongly with God’s promise to Abraham: “*to you and to your descendents I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham*” (Gen.26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 50:24; Exo.6:8; 32:13; 33:1; Lev.26:42; Num.32:11; Deu.1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 30:20; 34:4; 2Ch.20:7). God swore an oath to give this land to Abraham’s descendents and the Israelites inherit it because of God’s faithfulness to his promise, not because of their own righteousness (Deu.9:5). Included in this category of the land should be the references to the burial site in the field of Machpeleh, which was the only piece of land purchased by Abraham (Gen.23) and which functions as a sort of patriarchal faith investment in their descendents’ future possession of the whole land (Gen.49:29-32; 50:13; Act.7:16). God is the faithful God whose word will certainly be fulfilled.

5. **The God of forgiveness and restoration.**

God’s covenant relationship with Abraham (and to a lesser degree with Isaac and Jacob) becomes the basis on which his rebellious descendents are forgiven and restored to God’s favor, especially when this covenant is pleaded by an intercessor (Exo.32:13; Lev.26:40-42; Deu.9:27; 2Ki.13:23; Neh.9:7; Jer.33:26). Help in situations of national crisis is asked for and granted on this basis (2Ch.20:7; 30:6). The latter prophets’ message of hope and restoration after God’s judgment is also established on this foundation: “*You will give truth to Jacob and unchanging love to Abraham, which You swore to our forefathers from the days of old*” (Mic.7:20). God is the God of restoration, whose grace is greater than the sinful obstinacy of humankind, and who works to bring back the lost for his own name’s sake.

6. **The God with a people.**

God’s promise to Abraham is the basis by which Israel became God’s special “*people*” and he became their God in a special way (Deu.29:13). They are prayed for on this basis to remain faithful to God (1Ch.29:18). Israel is addressed as “*the people of the God of Abraham*” (Psa.47:9) and as the “*seed*” or “*descendents*” of Abraham (Psa.105:6; Isa.41:8; Jer.33:26). Thus Abraham is described as Israel’s “*father*” (Jos.24:3; Isa 51:2; Mat.3:9; Luk.1:73; 3:34; 16:24, 30; Joh.8:53, 56; Act.7:2; Jas.2:21) as well as the father of a multitude of nations (Gen.17:5) and of “*all who believe*” (Rom.4:12, 16). God’s purpose is to take for Himself a people (from all nations) and to be their God, with all the riches that this includes. He is the God of a special people who carry his name.

The vision of one people in spite of all the diversities within humanity is for all to see. The kings and nations which Abraham and his seed are to serve, and the kings and nations issuing forth from him (Gen.17:6) are to be a united people of God. The unity of humanity revealed in Genesis 10-11 will become deeper, richer, and more intensive through the one singled out to

serve as a channel of blessing—a unifying factor, indeed. Then the one blessed people will be drawn from every clan, tribe, tongue, nation, and race. (Von Gronigen 142)

7. **The God of a royal line of blessing.**

God has chosen to bring his anointed ruler into the world through a particular line of descendants (Gen.49:10). T.D. Alexander shows that even the structure of Genesis deliberately draws attention to this lineage. “When Genesis is viewed as a whole it is very apparent that the genealogical structure and the concept of ‘seed’ are closely linked in order to highlight a single, distinctive, family lineage” (Alexander 105). The God to whom Abraham belongs is the God of a unique royal line in which his purposes for all mankind will be fulfilled. There is a particular “*blessing*” associated with Abraham, known as “*the blessing of Abraham*,” because God promised to bless not only Abraham, but also those people who bless him, and even all the nations on earth: “*I will bless you... and so you shall be a blessing... And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed*” (Gen.12:2-3; 18:18; 26:3, 24; 24:1; 25:11; 28:4; 48:16; Isa.51:2). “Talk about blessing indicates both a distinctive privilege and a concern for other peoples” (Goldingay 214). God is the God of blessing, who turns curses into blessings (Neh.13:2), and uses both the evil designs of wicked men and the suffering of the righteous to fulfill his inscrutable and gracious purposes. The key example in the patriarchal era is Joseph’s betrayal by his brothers as the means of salvation for them and the nations. Job’s sufferings as a key battleground in God’s victory over Satan, and Jesus’ betrayal and death on the cross as the ultimate source of blessing and salvation for all nations, are other biblical examples of this sovereign, unfathomable working of God behind the scenes.

C. **Summary of OT material on Abraham**

Abraham was (is) the “*friend of God*” (2Ch.20:7; Isa.41:8; Jas.2:23) and as such he was the beginning of the mysterious process God has chosen to bring blessing to a cursed world. He is the first link in the chain of actions by which the living God purposes to “*take hold of the seed of Abraham*,” the lost “*sheep*” of the world, through a descendent of Abraham: “*the shepherd, the man who stands next to me*” (Heb.2:16; Zec.13:7 ESV). Abraham is the rock from which they are to be hewn, and the quarry from which they are to be dug (Isa.51:2). God’s long-range program of self-revelation is tied to his purposeful appearances to Abraham and his descendants, which we will now look at in more detail.

VI. **THE GOD OF ABRAHAM APPEARS**

God, though sometimes referred to in Scripture as the “invisible” God, whom no human has ever seen nor can see (Exo.33:20; Deu.4:12; Joh.1:18; Joh.6:46; Col.1:15; 1Ti.1:17; 1Ti.6:16; 1Jo.4:12), is never-

theless also the God who “appears to” and is “seen by” men and women. As James Borland puts it, “The Scriptures obviously speak of certain individuals who met God face to face and lived to tell about it” (Borland 149). This seeming paradox is central to our study and will be traced throughout the OT in this and the following sections. References to Yahweh/God or the angel of Yahweh/God “appearing” visibly to human beings are found in many passages throughout the Old Testament. In addition to these are references to people “seeing” or beholding God and references to the Lord coming, going, standing, coming down, going up and similar descriptions hinting at a visible appearing. In his study of “Yahweh and Exodus 6:3,” Robert Dick Wilson notes that “the ‘appearing’ of God to men is described in several different ways in the Old Testament,”²⁰ but for this study the essential point is that in all of them God is “seen” in some way. Selected passages will be examined briefly below in canonical order (as found in our modern Christian Bible) in two separate groups or lists, those where God appears or is seen, and those where “the angel of God” appears. (These references are listed in Appendix 4 in one group.) In examining these (largely narrative) passages it will be important to remember that “in narrative texts the reader is given the privileged perspective of the author... For the evangelical, the privileged perspective of the reader does not so much rest in the fact that one has only the perspective of the author to go on... Rather, it lies more importantly in the theological fact that the text, which gives the privileged perspective, is inspired. It is the Word of God” (Sailhamer 72).

A. Yahweh himself appears

These passages include God’s direct “appearances” along with those in which people are said to “see” or “behold” him in some way that implies tangibility or visibility. They also include a few references to the “glory of the Lord” appearing. We will not discriminate between appearances of God (Elohim) and Yahweh, as the names seem to be used quite interchangeably in this area of study.

1. **Genesis 12:1-7.** Yahweh appears to and calls Abram to leave his people and go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, promising to bless him and make him and his offspring the channel of blessing for all nations. This foundational passage says little about how or in what form God appeared, but it is later emphasized that he appeared to Abram, and did not simply send his word to him (Exo.6:3). It may be that the initial appearance and call recorded in 12:1-3 occurred while the patriarch was still in Mesopotamia, as Stephen says in his message

²⁰ “a. The most usual expression is that found here in Exodus 6:3, where the Niphal of the verb ‘to see’ (*ra’ah*) is used. With the Deity as subject this verb occurs forty-three times... b. (1) man ‘saw’ the Deity, the Kal of the verb (*ra’ah*) being used... (2) The Hiphil of ‘to see’ (*ra’ah*) with the Deity as subject... (3) The verb *hazah* ‘to see’ is used in Exodus 24:11 with Elohim as object, in Job 19:26 with Eloah as object, and in Numbers 24:4, 16 with Shaddai as object. (4) of the words for ‘vision’ *mar’eh* is used in Genesis 15:1 in connection with Jehovah and *mahazeh* in Numbers 24:4, 16 with Shaddai. (5) The verb ‘to reveal’ (*galah*, Niphal form) is found in the Pentateuch only in Genesis 35:7...” (Wilson 33-34).

to the Sanhedrin: “*The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran*” (Act.7:2). It is clear enough that Abraham’s clan were worshippers of “*other gods*” until the time Yahweh appeared to Abraham (Jos.24:2-3). There appears to have been a transition during which Abram’s descendents continued to reverence other (household) gods (e.g. Gen.31:19, 30-32, 53), because when Jacob reaffirmed his commitment to the Lord who had appeared to him, a central element was a clear break with these gods (Gen.35:1-4). They buried their gods under the “*oak which was near Shechem*,” likely the same place where God appeared to Abram for the first time after arriving in the land, and where he built an altar “*to Yahweh who had appeared to him*” (Gen.12:6-7). The Lord’s appearance to establish his covenant with Abraham and his offspring is thus characterized by self-revelation. God appears so that he may be known by his people. The essential link between covenant and revelation is established by Walton in his study of “covenant as God’s program of revelation” (Walton, Covenant 24–46). His thesis is set forth as follows:

God has a plan in history that he is sovereignly executing. The goal of that plan is for him to be in relationship with the people whom he has created. It would be difficult for people to enter into a relationship with a God whom they do not know. If his nature were concealed, obscured, or distorted, an honest relationship would be impossible. In order to clear the way for this relationship, then, God has undertaken as a primary objective a program of self-revelation. He wants people to know him. The mechanism that drives this program is the covenant, and the instrument is Israel. The purpose of the covenant is to reveal God (Walton, Covenant 24).

Our study of Yahweh’s appearances, which begin with his appearances to Abram, will show that they are an integral part of this “overarching plan of God’s revealing his character, his will and his plan... [as he] provides a foundation for relationship with him” (Walton, Covenant 29).

2. **Genesis 15:1-21.** In a vision Yahweh appears to Abram and focuses his purposes in a promise to multiply his offspring. He then makes a covenant with Abram to give his offspring a specific land. A straightforward reading of the text shows a visible, localized appearing of the Lord. Phrases like “*He took him outside*”, “*he brought all these to Him*” and “*behold, a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces*” point to this conclusion that God is not above coming to his people in a tangible, visible form so that they might know him and believe his promises. Yahweh shows himself as the God who befriends those to whom he reckons their faith in his word as righteousness, or “justifies” them (15:6; cf. Rom.4:22; Gal.3:6; Jas.2:23).
3. **Genesis 17:1-22.** Yahweh appears again to Abram, introducing himself as “*God Almighty*” (*el Shaddai*), and expands on the covenant he has established with him. He changes Abram’s name to Abraham and promises to make him exceedingly fruitful, to make him into nations

from which kings shall come, and to make an eternal covenant with his offspring. After setting out the requirement of circumcision as the sign of this covenant, he changes Sarai's name to Sarah and promises to give Abraham a son by her; the covenant will be established through her son who is to be named Isaac. At the end of this word of promise, we read that "*when he had finished talking with him, God **went up from** Abraham*" (17:22), suggesting a "bodily" presence and subsequent departure. This phenomenon is repeated in a number of appearance passages (Gen.18:33; 35:13; Jdg.6:21;13:20).

4. **Genesis 26:2-5, 23-25.** Yahweh "appears to" Isaac and establishes his covenant with him as Abraham's heir (26:2-5). The words of this promise are a summary of those given to Abraham in several stages. Following repeated conflict with the local king's men over use of the land, in which Isaac repeatedly gives way to them to maintain peace, he is again visited by Yahweh (26:23-25). We find a repeated pattern developing in that the appearances of Yahweh were closely linked with covenant establishment. In fact all the covenants were established by the Lord who appeared.
 5. **Genesis 28:11-17.** In Jacob's famous dream he sees Yahweh "*standing above*" the ladder or stairway set up between heaven and earth. This seems to indicate Yahweh appeared in a human form. Jacob commits himself to have Yahweh be his God, who has repeated the great covenant promises to him as Abraham's heir.
 6. **Genesis 35:1-15.** Following Jacob's return to Canaan God says to him, "*Arise, go up to Beth-el and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.*" It is notable that God speaking in first person nonetheless speaks of God in the third person as "*the God who appeared to you...*" It is not only the messenger of the Lord that speaks in this way, but the Lord himself. This shows that little weight can be put upon such changes of speech to prove that the angel is only speaking for the Lord and cannot be identified with him as deity (see argument on page 59). Secondly it is confirmed that Yahweh, who appeared to Jacob in chapter 28, is God. It is important for Jacob to remember this time when God appeared to him; it was not a regular event! In fact, each of the five occasions when the patriarchs were designated to be a blessing for all nations (Abraham in 12:3; 18:18; 22:17-18; Isaac in 26:3-4; and Jacob in 28:13-14) was accompanied by the personal appearance of the Lord or the Angel of the Lord.
- In 35:9-13, God appears to Jacob a second time ("*again*" refers to chapter 28), blesses him and confirms the changing of his name to Israel (see 32:28). He introduces himself as "*God Almighty*" as he had to Abraham in 17:1. This appearance seems to be different from the earlier

one which was in a dream, and is ended by God's departure: "*Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him*" (35:13; as in 17:22 and 18:33) again drawing attention to the localized, visible form of the appearance.

7. **Exodus 6:1-8.** In a very important passage, which links the coming deliverance and birth of Israel as a nation to the past age of patriarchal promise, Yahweh re-commissions Moses. As he had done at the burning bush, he declares his name and rehearses his appearances to the patriarchs to establish his covenant: "*I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them... and I have remembered My covenant*" (6:2-5). Then in a seven-fold "I will" statement, God commands Moses to declare again his unchanged purpose:

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

"I will rescue you from their bondage.

"I will redeem you with mighty power and with great judgments.

"I will take you as My people.

"I will be your God.

"I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"I will give it to you as a heritage. I AM YAHWEH!"

Much scholarly effort has been devoted to reconciling the statement about the name Yahweh not having been made known to the patriarchs with the widespread use of Yahweh throughout the book of Genesis²¹, perhaps most strikingly in Genesis 4:26; 15:7; and 28:13, 21 (see Appendix 5). Whatever the answer to this question, the significant point for this study is that Yahweh states clearly that he was the Almighty God who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that on the basis of this covenant relationship with them he was now moving forward to carry out his unchangeable purpose through their offspring. It has been argued that the name El Shaddai is linked more closely with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's *descendants*, the *seed* aspect of God's promise that begins to be fulfilled in their lifetime through their acceptance of the covenant, and the name Yahweh with the long-term fulfillment of the *land* aspect of the promise, for which Moses is the mediator (Walton, Genesis 460). I suggest that the name Yahweh is rather to be linked with His powerful acts of wrath and redemption by which he redeems for himself a special people, and begins the process of making them into a holy, priestly nation among whom he will dwell. The name Yahweh is tied with his saving work and self-revelation as the Holy One of Israel.

8. **Exodus 16:10.** In Exodus 16 we meet the phrase "*the glory of Yahweh*" for the first time. This "*glory*" seems to refer to the fiery aura or brilliant light which radiated visibly from God's pres-

²¹ According to the "E-sword" search engine a total of 165 times in 143 verses.

ence when he revealed himself (cf. Exo.24:17). The Lord's glory is specifically said to "*appear*" (as a verb) only a few times (Exo.16:10; Lev.9:6, 23; Num.14:10; 16:19; 16:42; 20:6), but every OT reference to this full phrase implies visibility and often movement, as shown by the vocabulary used: *rest on*, *fill* (usually the tabernacle or temple), *reveal*, *see*, *rise*, *stand*, *pass by*, *enter*, *depart*, *go up*, *come into*, *shine*, *behold*. This radiance emanating from the Lord's personal presence is part of the overall picture of God repeatedly permitting himself to be seen. God's honor, name or reputation is also expressed by this term, and in the NT the idea of beholding God's moral glory in visible form becomes linked with Jesus Christ in a striking way.²²

9. **Exodus 19:16-25.** Yahweh's blazing descent on Sinai is in one sense his central appearance in the OT. These epochal events are called the "old covenant" or "first covenant" in relation to the "new covenant" (Jer.31:31-34; 2Co.3:14; Heb.8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18). John Sailhamer argues concerning the narrative strategy of Exodus 19-31 that "the author of the Pentateuch seems intent on showing that Israel's immediate fall into idolatry with the golden calf brought with it a fundamental shift in the nature of the Sinai covenant. At the outset of the covenant, the text portrays the nature of the covenant in much the same light as that of the religion of the patriarchs" (Sailhamer 288). He thinks that the Decalogue was given in response to the people's fear, and that other laws were added in response to further failures like sin of the golden calf. I find this argument quite unconvincing; it is hard to believe that giving the Law and the Tabernacle was not part of God's original intention when he brought Israel to Sinai. It is likewise hard to accept that the detailed sacrifice laws of Leviticus 1-7 are not an integral part of the tabernacle plan, but part of his adding severity due to the golden calf incident.

In fact the fiery theophany of Sinai is central to the whole giving of the Law, and displays vividly the contrast with the patriarchal era where the appearances of God are not terrifying (except perhaps the night vision in Gen.15:12) but relational, personal and full of promise. The NT clearly says that this terrible sight, shown to the whole nation, was the expression of the Commandment being introduced in all its consuming majesty and inflexible severity, and sets it in contrast with the Lord's coming in the gospel (Heb.12:18-24). The whole scene warns of death and terrifying holiness that will consume any adversary. By contrast most of the appearances I am studying were to individuals, and the fear provoked by them was that which came from realizing that they had seen the Lord. There is no consuming fire, thunder or earthquake, but a

²² For example "*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (Joh.1:14; see also Luk.9:32; Joh. 2:11; 12:41; Act.7:55; 2Co.4:4, 6). He is declared to be "*the radiance of God's glory*" (Heb.1:3) and his disciples are those in whose "*hearts God has shone to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*" (2Co.4:6).

“man” or “messenger” speaking words of promise and grace. On the other hand the repeated appearances of the glory of Yahweh during the wilderness journey also reveal the holy wrath of God against the violation of his now-present law.²³ Thus this whole introduction of the Law displays a strong element of discontinuity with the preceding era, but one that is part of God’s purpose to clarify the darkness of sinful human nature before fulfilling the covenant promises given to Abraham for all nations (see further discussion on page 73).

It is worth mentioning here that the law of God, the “constitution” of which is delivered in Exodus 20, stands out as unique in the context of ancient Near Eastern belief systems in that God’s will is knowable (see page 14). Yahweh’s people can know what he expects of them; there is no guesswork involved. By contrast pagan gods were capricious and unpredictable – one could not know where he or she stood. The devotee could not even be sure what sins he or she might have committed to bring misfortune upon him or herself. But Yahweh is a God who speaks, who draws near in order to make his will and character known, and even puts it in writing.²⁴

In the future Israel will be warned to remember that: “*Yahweh spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form--only a voice*” (Deu. 4:11-12, 15, 33; 5:22-26). This creates an interesting comparison with the next passage.

- 10. Exodus 24:9-11.** Following the inauguration of the first covenant by the sprinkling of blood, 70 representatives of Israel were called to ascend Mount Sinai, where they “*saw the God of Israel.*” That this was an extraordinary occasion is stressed by the words: “*Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.*” The normal expectation was that one who saw God would die (Exo.33:20; Jdg.13:22), but this was an exception. The description given of the Lord is consistent with that of other such appearances: “*under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself*” (cf. Dan.7:9-10; Eze.1:22-28; Rev.4:6). As Christians we are compelled to ask what it means that they “*saw God*” when John 1:18 (consistent with Exo.33:20 and Deu.4:12) says clearly that “*no one has seen God at any time.*” In light of the covenant context of this event, it is hardly far-fetched to suggest that God was seen in the form of his unique messenger, “*the an-*

²³ This change under the law is also suggested by the fact that Israel’s grumbling on the way to Sinai meets with no punishment while their grumbling on the journey from Sinai to Canaan is met with instant, severe punishment by God. This punishment is delivered in part by *consuming fire* (e.g. Num.11:1; 16:35), and *earthquake* (Num.16:29-33), the very elements of the Sinai theophany.

²⁴ The ten commandments claim all of life as his domain. The first three prescribe his people’s devotion and set out clearly the *object* (Yahweh, who delivered them from Egypt), *means* (no images) and *attitude* (no meaningless use of his name) of true, acceptable worship. These of course stand in direct contrast to all the polytheistic pagan worship which pervaded the region. These thoughts were suggested by Dr. Ralph Davis in a message entitled “*the God of the Hill,*” April 2002, Proclamation Trust Tape Ministry, 140-148 Borough High Street, London, UK SE1 1LB.

gel of the covenant,” who is the same one we learn later comes in flesh as Jesus Christ (see note on page 59). That these elders “*ate and drank*” unharmed before the Lord points to God’s great purpose to have fellowship his people; this event was a small foretaste of the lavish banquet he will prepare for all peoples (cf. Deu.12:7; Isa.25:6-9; Luk.13:28-29; 15:23-24).

11. **Exodus 24:15-18.** During Moses’ 40-day stay on the mountain, “*the glory of Yahweh rested on Mount Sinai...to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of Yahweh was like a consuming fire*” (Exo.24:16-17). The appearance as a consuming fire is particularly emphasized, in keeping with the giving of the Law. It may be a sort of magnification of the burning bush and a fulfillment of the sign given to Moses: “*you shall worship God at this mountain*” (Exo.3:12).²⁵ For this and other references to the glory of the Lord appearing (for example Lev.9:4, 6, 24; Num.14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6) see notes on Exodus 16:10 and 19:16-25).
12. **Exodus 33:9-11.** Whenever Moses entered the tent of meeting that he set up outside the camp, “*the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent*” and (literally the same subject: the cloud) would speak with Moses. We are told that in some way significantly different from the way he spoke to other prophets, Yahweh would speak to Moses “*face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend*” (Num.12:6-8). “These words indicate, therefore, a familiar conversation, just as much as if it had been said, that God appeared to Moses in some peculiar form of manifestation.”²⁶ This cloud represented the presence of Yahweh himself, and is closely associated with his glory (Exo.16:10; 24:16; 40:34-35; Num.16:42; 1Ki.8:11; 2Ch.5:14; Isa.4:5; Eze.10:4). A comparison of the passages about “*the cloud of Yahweh*” which accompanied Israel through the desert suggests that the cloud veiled the radiant glory of Yahweh, which occasionally blazed out fully. For example, when Aaron informed the people that the Lord had heard their grumbling, they looked toward the wilderness and “*the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud*” (Exo.16:10). It showed visibly that God was really there, with his people, dwelling among them. The presence of the glory cloud throughout Israel’s wilderness journey testified that Yahweh is not only the transcendent Lawgiver but also the immanent Shepherd who leads, feeds and protects his people (Exo. 40:36-38; Num. 9:15-22; 10:11, 34-36).
13. **Exodus 33:17 – 34:7.** Interceding to make atonement for the gross sin of the Israelites in the incidents surrounding the golden calf, Moses finally asks the Lord to show him his glory. He is longing for a greater sight of God’s majesty than he had received so far. The Lord responds: “I

²⁵ Suggested by Erich Weiger in his review of this paper.

²⁶ Calvin, quoted by Keil and Delitzsch on Exo.33:7-11.

Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of Yahweh before you” (33:19). He further explains that in doing so his “*glory*” will be “*passing by*” (33:22), and in the fulfillment of this promise recorded in chapter 34, we are told that “*Yahweh passed by in front of him*” (34:6). So while Moses was still in what the NT refers to as the untransformed “*body of our humble state*” (Phi.3:21), he could not see the essential glory of God’s being; yet he was given a privileged sight of God’s “back” or (perhaps) the “aftereffects” of God’s glory (33:23). “The back, as contrasted with the face, signifies the reflection of the glory of God that had just passed by.” (Keil & Delitzsch)

The Lord makes it clear that all such divine self-revelation is only from his sovereign grace and mercy, freely granted to whomever he chooses (33:19). Yet God wants to be known in all his goodness; in fact his glory is his goodness, and his goodness is his glory! Moses was given both a visual and a verbal presentation of God’s glory.²⁷ In the proclamation of his name, his glory is revealed in propositional truths about his character (34:6-7). Yahweh’s name represents his character revealed. He is first of all *compassionate*, having deep, inward feelings of tenderness, especially toward helpless people. He is *gracious* or favorably inclined toward those who have no claim on him. His grace is free, undeserved, and easily approachable. He does become angry, but is *slow to anger*, though he cares intensely and is grieved and angered by wickedness. He is abundant in *loyal loving kindness (hesed)*, the active, covenant love which commits him to eternal faithfulness; and abundant in *truth (emeth)*, the quality of reliability, dependability or trustworthiness. He *maintains love to thousands*, not only beginning but seeing through, guarding and completing his relationship with them. He watches over them and does not forget them. The picture that emerges is of God’s large-heartedness! He *forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin*, by lifting up and carrying it away, but *will by no means clear the guilty*, meaning that he will by no means call guilt innocence nor overlook iniquity, but demands (and provides) payment for sin and cleansing for defilement.

- 14. Leviticus 9:4, 23.** At the end of the week-long ordination ceremony for Aaron and his sons, Moses commands his brother to offer sacrifices for himself and for the people as they began their priestly duties. Aaron was to announce to the people that “*today Yahweh will appear to you*” (9:4). This promise was fulfilled as soon the final sacrifice was offered, “*When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came*

²⁷ A number of the thoughts which follow in this paragraph were suggested by John Hymus during a series of lectures on the character of God in Beşiktaş, Istanbul, June 2005. Dr. Hymus runs the Conwy House Training Centre, Rhyl, Wales.

out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar” (9:23). God reveals himself to his people by manifesting his glory, and in this case it is linked specifically with the establishing of the sacerdotal priestly system, upon which the covenant of Sinai was based. He accepts the sacrifice by consuming it with fire. Yahweh is the God of the altar and burnt offering, the God of atonement by the blood of sacrifice, and the God who is approached through a mediatorial priest. The tragic deaths of Aaron’s irreverent sons in the next chapter reveal that he is also a consuming fire to those who despise his offering: *“Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh... ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy’”* (10:2-3).

15. **Leviticus 16:2.** The Lord promised Moses that he would “*appear*” in the cloud, “*over the atonement cover*” of the ark of the covenant, later described as “*the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of Yahweh of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim.*” (2Sa.6:2; cf. Ps.80:1; Isa.37:16). The ark represented the throne of God and in prophetic visions this picture of the cloud between or over the cherubim merges with scenes in which the Lord himself is seen upon his throne (Isa.6:1-7; Eze.1:26-28; Rev.4:2-11). The purpose of God to dwell visibly among his people as their shepherd-king is seen ultimately fulfilled in the last chapter of the Bible: “*There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face*” (Rev.22:3-4).
16. **Numbers 11:25.** Apparently the cloud of Yahweh was normally above the tabernacle, but in order to help Moses by delegating some of his responsibility to the leading men of Israel, “*Yahweh came down in the cloud*” to where they were gathered around the tent of meeting “*and spoke to Moses; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders.*” This passage emphasizes the condescending intervention of Yahweh. We are informed that in addition to the visible presence of the glory-veiling cloud, the invisible presence of the empowering Spirit of God is upon Moses, and then upon the seventy elders. Yahweh’s presence is distinct from his Spirit’s presence, yet they are one in essence. This reality of God’s nature is hinted at in the first two verses of Genesis, as the creator God and the Spirit of God are referred to separately. While it is true that the emphasis in the OT is on the oneness of God, passing references such as these alert us to the fact that this unity is not a simple singularity, but within the divine unity Scripture can also speak of the Angel of God and the Spirit of God as God.
17. **Numbers 12:5-8.** To pass judgment on Moses’ brother and sister for their malicious criticism of him, Yahweh called them out of the camp. He then came down in the pillar of cloud, “*stood at the doorway of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam.*” In quite amazing words he elevated

Moses above all other prophets, to whom his revelations were limited to visions and dreams. Of Moses he said, *“With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of Yahweh.”* What precisely is meant by beholding the “temunah” (likeness or form) of Yahweh is difficult to pin down. Keil and Delitzsch describe it as follows:

a form which manifested the invisible God to the eye of man in a clearly discernible mode, and which was essentially different, not only from the visionary sight of God in the form of a man (Eze.1:26; Dan.7:9 and 13), but also from the appearances of God in the outward world of the senses, in the person and form of the angel of Jehovah, and stood in the same relation to these two forms of revelation, so far as directness and clearness were concerned, as the sight of a person in a dream to that of the actual figure of the person himself. God talked with Moses without figure, in the clear distinctness of a spiritual communication, whereas to the prophets He only revealed Himself through the medium of ecstasy or dream.

18. **Numbers 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6.** As the angry Lord pronounces judgment on his grumbling people at various points in their wilderness wanderings, the *“glory of the Lord”* appears in or above the tent of meeting. “That is to say, the majesty of God flashed out before the eyes of the people in a light which suddenly burst forth from the tabernacle.” (Keil and Delitzsch) These passages, linked as they are to the newly-given Law, emphasize that the glory of the Lord also displays his character as a consuming fire.
19. **Numbers 14:13-19.** Moses intercedes for guilty Israel, urging the Lord to consider his reputation among the surrounding nations and to remember his merciful character that had been revealed at Sinai (Exo.34:6-7). As is later celebrated in the psalms, *“Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying them”* (Psa.106:23). In doing so Moses pleads that these nations have heard that the Lord is visibly present among his special people, protecting and leading them: *“You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night”* (14:14). “Eye to eye” indicates great closeness and intimacy, once again pointing to the Lord’s desire for intimate relationship or friendship with his people.
20. **Numbers 22:9, 20; 23:4-5, 16.** At the request of the king of Moab’s representatives, renowned diviner Balaam (see page 9) seeks Yahweh to see whether he should curse Israel for Balak, and we read that Elohim *“came to him”* at night two times. Both here and in chapter 23:4-5, 16 there is a natural expression of movement and encounter that sounds quite local and clearly related to Balaam’s physical position:

“God came to Balaam” (Num.22:9, 20)

“‘Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps Yahweh will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you.’ So he went to a bare hill. Now God met Balaam...”
(Num.23:3-4)

“‘Stand here beside your burnt offering while I myself meet Yahweh over there.’ Then Yahweh met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, ‘Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak.’” (Num 23:16)

Yahweh’s message is simple: you shall not curse these people, for they are blessed! Again the purpose of his appearances is covenant-related; he is revealing his commitment to this particular people to whose ancestors he has made irrevocable promises. Further comments on this event are made on page 44 under the discussion of appearances of the angel of the Lord.

21. **Deuteronomy 4:11-12, 15, 33; 5:22-26.** These verses are part of Moses’ retelling of the events of Sinai to the new generation. The emphasis is on the fact that during that awesome theophany the people Israel saw no shape as they stood at the foot of the burning mountain (Exo.19:17-18; 20:18). *“Yahweh spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form”* (Deu.4:12). This quality of invisibility is the basis of the stern warning against making any physical representation of God to worship. *“So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure”* (Deu.4:15-16). The people were amazed that they had even heard the great voice of the living God and yet remained alive (Deu.5:26). As pointed out in my comments on Exodus 19, the giving of the Law is characterized by threatening non-accessibility, for the commandment brings punishment and death for disobedience. The impossibility of seeing God is woven into the fabric of the Law, particularly in the tabernacle and priesthood instructions. The blessing of seeing God would never come through the righteousness of the Law. Yet even this passage encourages God’s people to rejoice in the nearness of the Lord dwelling among them (Deu.4:7)!
22. **Deuteronomy 31:15.** As in Numbers where the glory of the Lord appears near the tent, here we read, *“Yahweh appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.”* It is significant that this visible appearance of the Lord is seen at key intervals when the leadership and future of the nation is at stake. Here the Lord is laying out for Moses all that will come in the future as he surrenders leadership to Joshua and the future generations. He commands Moses to write a song by which Israel will be reminded of the Lord’s faithfulness in the face of their unfaithfulness and then commissions Joshua as Israel’s new leader. This is a repeated feature of God’s appearances; he appears to carry out his covenant purposes by moving them ahead another step, or by redirecting his people back onto the path. He does not simply send a prophet to do this often discouraging task; he comes himself!
23. **Deuteronomy 33:2.** The blessing of Moses begins with a poetic celebration of Yahweh’s appearance on Mount Sinai, *“Yahweh came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone*

forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.”

The three clauses... do not refer to different manifestations of God, but to the one appearance of God at Sinai. Like the sun when it rises, and fills the whole of the broad horizon with its beams, the glory of the Lord, when He appeared, was not confined to one single point, but shone upon the people of Israel from Sinai, and Seir, and the mountains of Paran, as they came from the west to Sinai... This manifestation of God formed the basis for all subsequent manifestations of the omnipotence and grace of the Lord for the salvation of his people. This explains the allusions to the description before us in the song of Deborah (Jdg.5:4) and in Hab.3:3. (Keil and Delitzsch)

Once again the miraculous, visible appearance of the Lord himself is stressed as the starting-point of his self-revelation and covenantal relationship with his people. This pattern should alert us to look for some astonishing appearance of the Lord when he brings complete fulfillment to his covenant purposes.

- 24. 1 Samuel 3:10, 21.** The expression “*the Lord came and stood*” points to something beyond a dream or some such communication. The Lord’s appearance to Samuel was objective and audible, even if not visible; that is, he was really there. But as Ronald Youngblood states, the phrase suggests “that Samuel could see him as well as hear him (cf. similarly Gen.18:22 and NIV margin)” (Youngblood 591). Once again the appearance of the Lord marks a new beginning and a new stage in his plan, for Samuel will bring in the theocracy and anoint the chosen royal line of David. The Lord’s actual word to young Samuel is a word of judgment on the corrupt priestly line of Eli, and that too is somewhat characteristic of these interventions by God. The summary of Samuel’s confirmation as a prophet in verses 19-21 concludes with the interesting phrase, “*Yahweh appeared again at Shiloh, because Yahweh revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of Yahweh.*” This sounds rather like a living word of Yahweh, a Communicative Being by which Yahweh repeatedly appeared to Samuel and entrusted his message to the young prophet.²⁸
- 25. 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:9; 1 Chronicles 1:7; 7:12.** Interestingly combining two divine names, the text recording the first appearance to Solomon reads “*Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and Elohim said, ‘Ask what you wish me to give you’*” (3:5). Yahweh’s second appearance is said to be “*as he had appeared to him at Gibeon*” (9:2), apparently meaning in a dream. This distinguishes these appearances from other more objective appearances. In both situations the Lord responds favorably to Solomon’s admirable requests but warns him that the blessing of his dynasty is dependent on Solomon’s loyalty to the Law. The heinousness of Sol-

²⁸ Suggested by Erich Weiger in his review of this paper.

omon's subsequent idolatrous behavior is compounded by the fact that God had "*appeared twice*" to him (11:9).

26. **1 Kings 19:9-14.** Everything about this event, from Elijah's forty days and nights in the wilderness, to the cave on "*Horeb, the mountain of God*" (19:8) recalls God's appearance to Moses at Sinai. "Elijah's perception of the situation implies he is afraid not merely for his own life but for the entire future of the people's relationship with Yhwh. He makes the monumental journey to the place where it all started, the place where Israel first met Yhwh after the exodus" (Goldingay 682). The expression "*Yahweh was passing by*" suggests a reenactment of Exodus 34:6-7 when "*Yahweh passed by in front of*" Moses and displayed his goodness by proclaiming his gracious name. God appears to Elijah differently than might have been expected on the very site where the Law was given with terrifying fire and earthquake, given that Israel was in gross violation of that Law. Nevertheless, he shows himself to him in "*the sound of a low whisper*" (ESV). Perhaps the reason was "to signify to the prophet that he did not work in His earthly kingdom with the destroying zeal of wrath, or with the pitiless severity of judgment. It was in a soft, gentle rustling that He revealed Himself to him" (Keil & Delitzsch). More likely it was a soft, gentle word to Elijah as the representative of the faithful remnant of Israel, for whom there was good hope, even as stern judgment is pronounced through the prophet to the nation as a whole (19:18; cf. Rom.11:4-5). In spite of Israel's desperate condition, God delighted to reveal his grace and remind Elijah that he was still in control of the situation. "Elijah is important, but everything does not rest on him" (Goldingay 682).
27. **1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Chronicles 18:18-22.** In an event containing visionary revelation similar to that given to Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the apostle John, the beleaguered prophet Micah sees "*Yahweh sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.*" There are formal similarities between this prophetic vision and the "divine assembly" motif in some ANE texts (Chavalas 47). But here is no council of gods, and no confusion between the creator God on his throne and the created spirits who serve him (cf. Isa. 6:1-3; Psa. 103:21-22). The ensuing scene shows the purpose of this graphic vision: to reveal to the true prophet that the pretenders were speaking lying words as a deliberate result the Lord's judgmental intervention: "*Behold, Yahweh has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets, for Yahweh has proclaimed disaster against you*" (2Ch.18:22).
28. **2 Chronicles 3:1.** This verse throws light on all of 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 - 22:5, which narrate the appearance of the judgmental plague carried out by the angel of the Lord with the drawn sword in his hand. The plague was ended after David offered a burnt offering to the

Lord at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. He then chose that site as the place for the future temple to be built (2Ch.22:1). In those passages we are only told that David saw and feared the angel of the Lord, but this verse adds the detail that “*Solomon began to build the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Yahweh [subject supplied] had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.*” This suggests that the appearance of the angel is to be understood once again as an appearance of Yahweh himself, because we are not told of any other appearance of Yahweh in those passages.

- 29. Job 19:25-27.** Job longed for a mediator to stand between him and God (Job 9:33), and in one of the greatest moments of faith and insight in all of Scripture, declared, ‘*As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last He will take His stand upon the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom my eyes shall see and not another!*’ (19:25-27). God's purpose included a then-living Redeemer who would one day stand on earth. Job was sure that a day of resurrection was coming. He maintained faith in the unchangeable purpose of God while enduring the deepest physical and spiritual trials. He is an example for all who believe God's promise.

Job believed fervently that “the Rescuer of his honor lives and will rise up as the last One, as one who holds out over everything, and therefore as one who will speak the final decisive word” (Keil & Delitzsch). “*Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh*” is certainly language appropriate for expressing hope in bodily resurrection, whatever the hesitations of some scholars may be. They declare Job's confidence that he will “see” (*chazah*) God with his own eyes in a future day (19:26-27), whom he cannot “see” now in his sufferings (23:9). “What is very clear is that Job expected to see God” (Smick 943). This expectation of seeing God is linked with the assurance that the “Redeemer”²⁹ will stand upon the earth. In that day “his own eyes would gaze on his Vindicator” (Smick 943). Thus God will be seen in the person of the Redeemer.

- 30. Psalm 102:13-16.** The long-awaited restoration of Jerusalem will have the effect of bringing the nations to fear the name of the Lord. The poetic celebration of this prophetic event assumes

²⁹ The Hebrew word “*goel*” or “*ga'al*” indicates redeeming or avenging through a sacrifice. This word appears repeatedly in Ruth in various forms, referring to the near relative charged with redeeming the inheritance of his dead relative (Rut.2:20; 3:9, 12-13; 4:1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 14). Gen.38; Deu. 25:5-10; Lev. 25:25, 35, 47-49; and Jer. 32:6-25 give examples of this practice. This same word is used of God Himself as the Redeemer (Ps. 19:14; 78:35; Isa.41:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16. Both Job 19:25-26 and Isaiah 59:20 seem to join in parallelism the coming of the Lord himself with the coming of the Redeemer. He is both the Lord and somehow distinguished from the Lord.

that the restoration of Jerusalem will take place simultaneously with the glorious “*appearing*” of Yahweh (102:16). The author of Hebrews’ use of this psalm, specifically in applying similar verses (24-27) to the eternal Son of God who carries out the restoration of all things (Heb.1:10-12), points to the fulfillment of this promised “appearing” of Yahweh in the coming of Jesus the Messiah. Dr. David Gooding, former professor of Old Testament Greek at Queen’s University, Belfast, summarizes the point in his comments on Hebrews 1:10-12,

There is no doubt about the writer’s argument: he explicitly claims that these words in Psalm 102, like the words he earlier quoted from Psalm 45, are spoken not by the psalmist to God, but by God to the Messiah... Psalmists... sometimes, having spoken themselves for several verses on end, suddenly and without warning, in the manner of a dramatist, introduce another speaker or speakers, speaking in direct, not reported, speech... He envisions a restoration of Zion so glorious that all the nations will be obliged to admit that it is the work of the Lord. And they will fear the name of the Lord, for the very good reason that “the Lord will appear in his glory” in order to rebuild Jerusalem... [this is] nothing less than the visible coming of the Lord, what the New Testament calls “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). (Gooding 67, 74n, 70)

- 31. Isaiah 6:1-13.** This passage comes in the middle of an extended oracle which Isaiah saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem (2:1 – 12:6). In a time of great national distress Yahweh is seen by the prophet “*on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.*” In place of king Uzziah, who has just died, the Yahweh himself is the sovereign Ruler. Yet the near context includes the “Immanuel” prophecies regarding the promised king from the “holy seed” (6:13), who will be born to Israel, the unique “son” who will be given to the nation, and whose “kingdom” will be forever: “*His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace*” (9:6-7).

It is hard as a Christian to ignore the apostle’s comment regarding this vision, from which he quotes verse 10: “*These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him*” (Joh.12:40-41). If, as some translations assume (e.g. NIV) and commentators understand (e.g. Tenney, 133), by “His” glory John is referring to *Jesus’* glory, when Isaiah saw “*the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted*” and the seraphim proclaiming his holiness and his glory filling the earth (Isa. 6:1-3), he was in fact seeing the glory of the Holy One who later became flesh (Joh.1:14) and was given the name Jesus. “This amazing statement is in fact altogether consistent with the high Christology of the NT writers, for Jesus is God incarnate, and the same God is revealed in both Testaments. This might in fact suggest that John understood the trisagion in trinitarian terms” (Grogan, 56). Alternatively, D.A. Carson suggests that the phrase more likely refers to *God’s* glory – Jesus is God’s glory (Carson 450). It is difficult to be certain, but the immediately following verse in John continues the thought, clearly speaking of Jesus as “him” without any indication of change of persons: “*Nevertheless many even of the rulers be-*

lied in Him,” indicating strong likelihood that the preceding “*his*” also refers to Jesus, rather than to God (Joh.12:41-42). Carson also suggests that “when the Evangelist says that Isaiah saw God’s glory, namely Jesus, *and spoke about him*, he may well be thinking of the Suffering Servant who was exalted” (Carson 450). That is, the reference is primarily to the quotation from Isaiah 53 rather than the one from Isaiah 6. The allusions to Isaiah 53 in John 12 are many, but to me the phrase “*he saw His glory*” links more clearly with Isaiah’s words in chapter 6, “*I saw the Lord... The whole earth is full of His glory... my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.*”

This appearance of Yahweh is consistent with that seen by the elders of Israel (Exo. 24:9-11), the prophets Ezekiel (Eze. 1:25-28; 10:1) and Daniel (Dan.7:9-14), and the apostle John (Rev. 4-5; 7:15-17). Isaiah’s horrified reaction (*I am ruined!*) to the realization that he has “*seen the king, Yahweh of host*” with his own eyes, is also consistent with the reactions of the others, (including those who saw the angel of the Lord, like Manoah in Judges 13). In all of these scenes there is the likeness of a human figure (notice “*the train of his robe*”) on the throne of God, an astounding fact with which any serious student of the Old Testament needs to reckon.

32. **Isaiah 40:3-11.** These verses clearly promise two things: (1) *The glory of the Lord will be revealed* in such a way that *all flesh will see it*; (2) *The Lord GOD will come...* The coming of the Lord referred to here will not be some invisible intervention, behind the scenes of history, but the visible appearing of the Lord of glory himself. It will not be to some privileged leader alone, not to the chosen people, but to all mankind. The fact that the way of the Lord will be prepared by a unique forerunner (40:3-4) surely leads to the expectations fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.
33. **Isaiah 60:2.** Much like Psalm 102:13-16 the restoration of Jerusalem is linked with the coming of Yahweh: “*Yahweh will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you.*” These expressions on their own might be taken metaphorically for Yahweh’s acting behind the scenes of history, but taken with other references, it seems likely that there is more involved.
34. **Amos 9:1.** Amos “*saw Yahweh standing beside the altar*” of burnt offering in the temple courtyard. “*Standing*” is a rather human activity, and implies that the Lord’s appearance was in a human form of some kind. This is consistent with other references to his “*standing*” (e.g. Gen.18:2; 28:13; 1Sa.3:10).
35. **Zechariah 14:3-5.** Yahweh himself will go out to battle, his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the one Zechariah calls “*Yahweh my God*” will come with all the holy ones. Of course this passage draws the Christian’s mind to Acts 1:9-

12, which records Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives and the angels' promise that he will return just as they have seen him go. One must ask in what way Yahweh will come and in what way his own "feet" will stand on the mount, if not literally in Jesus' return?

This brief survey of texts referring to the visible appearances of Yahweh/God shows a persistent, remarkably consistent phenomenon. Men and women saw Yahweh in visible form; though we are not given many details as to what form this was. Since the OT record affirms this phenomenon just as it affirms the general truth that Yahweh is the invisible God, unseen by human eyes. No attempt is made to explain the tension created by this paradox. Erich Weiger points out that "we tend to think of invisible as a kind of property of non-physicality; God talks more of the *danger* of seeing Him, and Scripture testifies of to moments of grace when He appears and of His tendency to *hide*."

B. The "angel" or "messenger" of Yahweh appears

In addition to the appearances of Yahweh surveyed above, we find that a special "angel" or "messenger" of Yahweh/God, whom Goldingay calls "Yhwh's Aide" (Goldingay 248) also appears repeatedly throughout the OT record. To these references, which are examined briefly below, I have added others where the Lord is specifically said to appear as a "man."

1. **Genesis 16:7-14.** The first appearance of the angel of the Lord is to Hagar in the wilderness. He promises to personally ("I will...") multiply her offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude, and informs her that she is pregnant and will bear a son whom she is to name Ishmael. The text informs us that the one who talked to Hagar was Yahweh, and that she had understood this in some sense, for she "*called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, 'You are a God who sees'; for she said, 'Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?'*" (16:13). Another interpretation is that "The use of 'after' with 'see' in her next statement probably means that she did not see him directly but only realized that he had been present (cf. Exo.33:23). One sees only what God leaves behind... Lindblom translates it 'Have I here really seen the back of Him who has seen me?'" (Ross 323; cf. TNIV footnote). Whatever the precise translation, it seems that Hagar was astonished that she had "seen" God (in some way), so much so that she was moved to give a name to Yahweh. This reaction is to be observed in other similar scenes (e.g. Gen.32:20).

It is worth noting that the first appearance of the "messenger of Yahweh" is to an Egyptian servant woman rather than to Abraham or another of the chosen line. God's covenant will indeed be worked out through Sarah's son rather than Hagar's, but his overall long-range purpose is to bless all the nations, including the despised and outcast, whose "misery" Yahweh hears (16:11). The messenger appears at this strategic juncture (when the covenant is in jeopardy be-

cause of Abraham's foolish listening to Sarah) and confirms Yahweh's commitment to Sarah's future son (and the line of promise) by telling Hagar to return and submit to her mistress (16:9), and gives hope for other nations as well by promising to increase her descendants beyond counting (16:10).

2. **Genesis 18:1-33.** Yahweh appears to Abraham as one of three "men" who visit him at his tent and share his hospitality (Gen.18:1-8). The other two turn out to be ordinary (created) angels (19:1), but the details of the narrative make it clear that the first "man" is Yahweh himself. For example we read that as they conversed during the meal "*Yahweh said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him*" (18:10). Sarah is behind the speaker, who is Yahweh. The three visitors set out for Sodom and Abraham accompanies them; two men go on to Sodom, but "*Abraham was still standing before Yahweh,*" who was telling him of the purpose of his visit—to investigate Sodom's wicked condition. Abraham then "*draws near*" and intercedes for the hoped-for righteous in the condemned city (18:23-32). Finally, as in 17:22, we read that "*as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham Yahweh departed*" (18:33). The whole chapter portrays a clear, visible, tangible appearance of Yahweh himself in the form of a "man" (*ish*), narrated in very natural language. It may be that Yahweh went from his discussion with Abraham still in the form of a man to destroy the wicked cities, because we find a peculiar phrase summing up this climax: "*Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven*" (19:24). We could perhaps say that the visible Yahweh executes judgment on behalf of the hidden Yahweh. It is certain that the "man" with whom Abraham negotiated was the One who was going to destroy Sodom.

When the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise in 18:10 is described in chapter 21, his "*returning to*" Sarah is described as a "*visitation*": "*Yahweh **visited** Sarah as he had said, and Yahweh did to Sarah as he had promised*" (21:1 ESV). This significant word (*Pāqad*) conveys the idea of active (though not necessarily bodily) intervention to bless or punish.³⁰ Thus the appearance of the Lord in bodily form to Abraham also fits this category of "*visitation*" and prepares the way for the greater *visitation* of the Lord in the birth of a greater "firstborn" son through a greater miracle—"*Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will*

³⁰ "The basic idea... is 'to determine the destiny.'... In the book of Genesis two key passages use the word with the idea of great blessing. The birth of Isaac is explained as a visitation from the Lord, a divine intervention in the lives of Abraham and Sarah to provide the promised seed and alter the destiny of the family forever. And then at the end of the book, Joseph announced that God would surely visit them and deliver them from Egypt. This visitation also was a divine intervention to fulfill the promises made to the fathers" (Ross 740).

visit us” (Luk.1:78 uses the same verb as is used in the LXX of Gen 21:1—*episkeptomai*). God fulfills his promises by visiting his people.

3. **Genesis 21:14-21.** The next appearance of the angel, who is here called “*the angel of God*,” is again to Hagar. Once more she is in the wilderness, having been driven out by her mistress, this time with God’s approval. The angel promises again to personally bless her son greatly: “*I will make a great nation of him*” (21:18). The interchangeability between the Angel and Yahweh is notable here; just as he did in 16:10, the angel promises to do for Hagar’s son precisely what Yahweh himself promises to do for him in 17:20: “*As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.*” See additional details in Appendix 1.

4. **Genesis 22:9-18.** God tests Abraham by commanding him to offer his “*only son*,” Isaac, as a burnt offering. At the last moment the angel of Yahweh intervenes, calling to him from heaven: “*now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me*” (22:12). A clear identity is thus established between God who called him to sacrifice his son and the angel who intervenes. In the angel’s second word to Abraham this identification is not so clear, because he adds the word’s “*declares Yahweh*” (22:16), as though speaking for him (but see comments on Gen.35:1-15 and on page 59).

Von Gronigen argues that “the act of [Isaac] being placed on and bound to the altar is not to be considered typologically messianic” (Von Gronigen 145). Yet the NT points to parallels between this poignant event and God’s work in both the death³¹ and the resurrection³² of Christ. This is the great OT example of what Walton calls “covenant jeopardy—if Isaac is sacrificed, how can the promises of God be fulfilled in him?... The recurring motif is, of course, that the death of the principal party (i.e., Isaac and Jesus) has the appearance of making the covenant promises impossible to fulfill” (Walton, *Covenant* 99, 91-92). The ram which dies in Isaac’s place is the type of the substitutionary death of Christ, who is not spared, but offered up as the “lamb” which God would provide (Gen.22:8; Joh.1:29).

5. **Genesis 31:11-13.** Jacob recounts to his wives the dream in which “*the angel of God*” told him to return to the land of his birth. Of importance to our study is that the angel had identified himself with these words: “*I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you*

³¹ “*God did not spare his own Son, but freely delivering him over for us all*” (Rom.8:32).

³² “*He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type*” (Heb.11:17-19).

made a vow to Me.” This can hardly be interpreted as an addition by the Yahwistic editors, but is a clear affirmation of the mysterious oneness of the angel with God himself.

6. **Genesis 32:24-32.** Goldingay summarizes this scene with a comment on the injury inflicted on Jacob by the man: “His injury... is a witness to the reality of the event, if Jacob ever needed one. This was no dream, no mere spiritual struggle. God becomes human in order to struggle with humanity” (Goldingay 251). The canonical confirmation of the identity of this being with the Lord of hosts himself is given through the prophet Hosea (see comments on Hos.12:3-4).
7. **Genesis 48:1-16.** “In blessing Joseph, Jacob offers one final indication of the equivalence of Yhwh’s aide and an appearance of Yhwh in person” (Goldingay 251). The threefold parallelism in 48:15-16 clearly identifies the “angel” with the God of Abraham and Isaac:

*“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.”*

Other examples of this parallel are found in Isaiah 63:9, Hosea 12:3-4 and Zechariah 12:8).

8. **Exodus 3:1 - 4:17.** This wonderful passage records the Lord’s first appearance to Moses in the Sinai desert at the “*mountain of God*.” The unaffected change of persons in the narrative reveals the close identification of the angel/messenger with the Lord God himself:

*“The angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush” (3:2)
“Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look” (3:4)
“God called to him from the midst of the bush and said...” (3:4)
“He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham” (3:6)
“Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” (3:6)
“Yahweh said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people’” (3:7)
“But Moses said to God...” (3:11)*

Only by radically and artificially dismembering the passage can the obvious conclusion be avoided: The Angel who speaks to Moses from the midst of the bush is one with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, in a profound unity that is simply and naturally presented by the narrative writer. He reveals himself in his character as Yahweh now to initiate a new beginning through the sending of Moses to Israel. The nation will henceforth be defined by the work God does on their behalf and the self-revelation he brings to them through the mediation of Moses (Moberley, 1992 21–26). Their great blessing will be “*the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush*” (Deu.33:16). “The God of the bush” is a God who is faithful to his promises however old they may be.³³ The announcement of his name is like a royal declaration of an eternal relationship

³³ Suggested by a taped message entitled “*the God of the Bush*,” from a series of expositions from Exodus, by Dr. Ralph Davis, at the Younger Ministers Conference, April 2002, sponsored by the Proclamation Trust, The Tape Ministry, 140-148 Borough High Street, London, UK SE1 1LB.

with his people. He is not so much the god Abraham worships but the god to whom Abraham belongs. “I will be your God! My commitment will never cease.” He is also a God who feels his people’s pain (3:7), and a God whose name, YHWH, recalls the divine assertion “*I AM*” (‘*ehyeh*): “The effect of this play on words (‘*ehyeh/yeh*) is to draw attention to the perceived implications of the name YHWH, implications related to what God will be or do, understood in terms of the Hebrew verb *hayah* (to be)” (Moberley, 1992 22). As Yahweh he begins to reveal himself as the God of salvation, delivering his people from slavery and bringing them to himself. What he “*will be*” for his people is “*their God*,” with all the glory and security that brings. This is developed especially beginning in Exodus 6:7, “*I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians,*” but is based on the unchanging purpose he swore to Abraham: “*I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendents after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendents after you*” (Gen.17:7-8). It is further fulfilled through the construction of his dwelling place, the tabernacle: “*I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. They shall know that I am Yahweh their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am Yahweh their God*” (Exo.29:45-46; also Lev.26:12, 45).

9. **Exodus 14:19.** In Exodus 13:21 we read that “*Yahweh was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way.*” Now we are told that the Lord’s presence was somehow mediated by his special messenger: “*The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.*” It will not do to say that the “*angel*” here is the “*cloud*.” It seems Yahweh was in the midst of the bright cloud, much as he was “*in the midst of a bush*” in Exodus 3:2, 4; that is, in the person of the angel, the Lord himself was objectively present. Confirming this, we are told in 14:24 that “*Yahweh looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud.*”
10. **Exodus 23:20-23; 32:34-33:6; 33:12-16.** Yahweh promised to send an angel with Israel to guard them and bring them safely into the promised land. But that this is no ordinary angel is shown in the phrase “*My name is in him.*” This is a significant phrase which essentially means “*I am revealed in him.*” In Isaiah 42:8 Yahweh says “*I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another.*” Thus it is highly unlikely that such a phrase would be used of any created angel, but only of one who is elsewhere called the “*face*” or “*presence*” of Yahweh

(Exo.33:15). He wields the authority of God to forgive sins (or not forgive them), and obeying his voice is equivalent to obeying Yahweh himself (Exo.23:21-22).

The reference to the angel in 33:1-3 might lead one to distinguish between the angel and the Lord's own presence: *"I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite... I will not go up in your midst."* But it is more likely that following the sin of the golden calf Yahweh was threatening to send the angel on ahead, *"before"* the people, to drive out the inhabitants of the land rather than going *"in their midst"* with his own name and presence, and for this reason the people mourned and Moses interceded again: *"See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send **with me**... If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here"* (33:12-15). Alternatively, the meaning could be that whereas the name of Yahweh himself was to have gone before the Israelites in the angel of his presence as promised in Exo. 23:20, now he himself would not go up to Canaan, but would simply send a created angel before them. This explanation introduces a different angel into the discussion, making this explanation marginally more complicated; so in line with the first explanation, I conclude that this angel of God's "presence" (see notes on Isaiah 63:9 on page 49) is no ordinary created angel, but the unique angel of the covenant in whom God himself was manifested in OT days.

11. **Numbers 20:16.** Moses sends messengers to the king of Edom, asking for passage through his land, and summarizes the exodus in one sentence: *"when we cried to Yahweh, he heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt."* The mission of this angel is particularly linked with covenant deliverance, as he himself declares decades later: *"I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you...'"* (Jdg. 2:2). Regarding the indefinite reference of this sent one (*"an angel"*), it may be used particularly in light of the gentile audience: *"the angel of the Lord, the visible revealer of the invisible God, whom the messengers describe indefinitely as 'an angel,' when addressing the Edomites"* (Keil & Delitzsch).
12. **Numbers 22:22-35.** In the midst of the straightforward narrative record of Balak's calling Balaam, and God's appearing to direct Balaam's actions, is the fascinating account of the journey during which the angel of the Lord comes as Balaam's "adversary" (satan). He is seen by the donkey before becoming visible to the money-mad prophet (see 2Pe.2:15-16). With a drawn sword in this hand he reveals God as the "man of war" or "warrior," fighting either for (Jos. 5) or against (in Num.22 and 1Ch. 21) those to whom he is appearing, depending on the state of their relationship to him. The easy movement between the angel and Yahweh as speakers indi-

cates their close identification. The angel's words in 22:35 -- "*Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you*" -- are nearly identical to God's words in 22:20 -- "*rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.*"

13. **Joshua 5:13 - 6:2.** This is another scene where the drawn sword is prominent. While the "angel" is not named as such, we are told that as Joshua pondered the massive, tightly barred walls of Jericho he saw "*a man was standing opposite him*" who soon identifies himself as "*captain of the host of Yahweh*" -- referring to the angelic army of God (e.g. 1Ki. 22:19; Psa. 148:2). Joshua's subservient bowing before this commander prompts a single command: "*Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.*" This further clarifies the identity of this "man." He is none other same holy One (Yahweh) who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the same command before commissioning him. Joshua is about to lead the people into Canaan as Moses had led them out of Egypt, and Yahweh has appeared to give him his orders. As the commander of the Lord's army begins to give his orders, the frequently observed switch of speakers occurs and we find Yahweh outlining his peculiar battle plan (6:1-5).³⁴
14. **Judges 2:1-4.** The angel of the Lord comes objectively from one location in Israel (Gilgal) to another (Bochim). He identifies himself clearly as the one who brought them out of Egypt, the one who swore to the patriarchs to give them the land and the one who promised to be faithful to the covenant he established with them (see 2:20); thus he is one with Yahweh himself. Comparison with Judges 6:8-10 shows how different this narrative is from that of the prophet sent to declare the word of the Lord.³⁵ The prophet begins his words with the familiar formula: "*thus says Yahweh*" (6:8), thus distinguishing himself from the one whose word he is delivering. It is also notable that the Israelites offered a sacrifice on the site, as was sometimes done when Yahweh himself appeared to his people (Gen.12:7; 35:7; Jdg. 6:26; 1Ch.21:26 with 2Ch. 3:1), even though the tabernacle was probably still in Shiloh at this point (Jos.18:1).
15. **Judges 5:23.** In her victory celebration song, Deborah includes a divine curse on the inhabitants of a place called Meroz, "*'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of Yahweh, 'Utterly curse its inhabitants; because they did not come to the help of Yahweh, to the help of Yahweh against the*

³⁴ It seems clear that the commissioning in 6:1-5 continues the same scene. 6:1 is parenthetical, emphasizing the difficulty of the task as well as the fear that had fallen on Jericho.

³⁵ Prophets are almost never called "*the messenger of Yahweh*" in narrative passages. Only in Haggai 1:13 and Malachi 2:7 is this term used (one other related reference is 2Ch. 36:15-16, "*the messengers of God*"), and in each of these it is likely because of links in the books: Hag. 1:13 refers to the "message" brought by the messenger, and Malachi 2:7 connects both to the title/name given to the author in 1:1, and to the greater messengers in 3:1.

warriors.” Apparently Deborah received this word from the angel of the Lord, who was the commander of the battle (if we can extrapolate from Joshua’s days). Deborah encouraged Barak with the words, “*Yahweh has gone out before you*” and the text tells us that “*Yahweh routed Sisera*” (Jdg.4.14-15). So again we observe a very close identification between the Lord and his “Angel.”

16. **Judges 6:11-24.** In a scene reminiscent of Abraham’s visit by Yahweh in the form of one of three travelers in Genesis 18, the angel of Yahweh/God appeared to Gideon. That this visitor sitting under the oak tree was in fact Yahweh himself, in a visible self-revelation in human form, becomes evident as the narrative develops. In recording the conversation between this angel and Gideon, the text reads, “*Yahweh looked at him and said, ‘Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?’*” (6:14, also 6:16). Still not knowing with whom he is speaking, Gideon asks him to wait there while he fixes him a meal, to which he agrees (6:17-18). When Gideon returns with the food, the visitor (referred to once as “*the angel of God*” and then as “*the angel of Yahweh,*” 6:20-21) directs him to lay it out as an offering and then consumes it by fire before vanishing.³⁶ At this point Gideon realizes just who his strange visitor is and responds in the same way as others who see the Lord: “*When Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, he said, ‘Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face’*” (6:22). The now invisible Yahweh comforts him with the words “*Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die,*” and Gideon offers him sacrifice with better understanding. This action, too, is a common response to an appearance of Yahweh (Gen.12:7-8; 26:25; 35:7; 1Ch.21:26).
17. **Judges 13:3-23.** Manoah and his wife are visited by the angel of Yahweh, who is also in the same narrative called “*the angel of Elohim*” both in the narrative framework (13:9) and in the words of the woman (13:6). His appearance was as a man, yet “*very awesome*” (13:6). Manoah did not know that this was the angel of Yahweh and has to be told to offer his gift of a young goat as an offering “*to Yahweh*” (13:16). This is not to say “don’t offer it to me, offer it to Yahweh,” but that despite the hint given by the angel that his mysterious name is “*wonderful*” (13:18), Manoah has still not recognized his visitor.³⁷ Not until this being performs wonders by rising in the flame of the burnt offering does he realize (like Gideon before him) that he has

³⁶ See Leviticus 9:23 for another instance of Yahweh’s showing his acceptance of a sacrifice in this way.

³⁷ “It is to be understood in an absolute sense, - “absolutely and supremely wonderful” (*Seb. Schmidt*), - as a predicate belonging to God alone (compare the term “Wonderful” in Isa. 9:6), and not to be toned down as... signifying “neither easy to utter nor easy to comprehend.” (Keil & Delitzsch)

been looking upon the angel of Yahweh himself, and says in terror, “*We will surely die, for we have seen God*” (13:22). Walton argues that Manoah was in error in this conclusion: “Here the angel makes a clear distinction between himself and the Lord, the confusion of Manoah notwithstanding” (Walton, Genesis 466). But nothing else in the text indicates that his interpretation of the event was wrong, and examples of this kind of third-person reference to the Lord can be found in God’s own mouth (see Gen.35:1-15 Exo.19:24; 34:10 and Zec.3:2). Rather, Manoah’s wife sensibly calms him by pointing out the obvious: “*If Yahweh had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands.*”

18. **2 Samuel 14:17, 20; 19:27.** In these pleas by the woman of Tekoa and Mephibosheth, king David is addressed and flattered as being “*like the angel of God*”—that is he has great insight and wisdom to discern the truth and execute justice. Thus the angel of God was known as the ultimate executor or kingly mediator of God’s wise, holy government of his people.
19. **2 Samuel 24:16-17; 1 Chronicles 21:10-30.** In our comments on 2 Chronicles 3:1 above it was pointed out that the appearance of the sword-drawn angel of the Lord as the avenger of David’s sin of numbering the people is likely understood by the chronicler (and thus by the Holy Spirit who inspired him) as the appearance of Yahweh himself to David. As a result of this appearance David was instructed by the prophet Gad to build an altar on that site, where the temple was later built (2 Sa.24:18; 2Ch.3:1), much as Abraham had done when Yahweh appeared to him (Gen.12:7).
On the other hand, in this scene the angel is addressed by Yahweh (1Ch. 21:15), and is thus to be distinguished from him. The picture that emerges is that the angel both is somehow one with Yahweh and also distinct from him (tantalizingly similar to the Son of God in the NT who both “was with God” and also “was God”). The angel of Yahweh is seen to be “*standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword*” as the executor of God’s judgment.
20. **2 Kings 1:3, 15.** We are not told that the angel of Yahweh appeared, only that he spoke to Elijah and, without any introductory formula, sends him to intercept the messengers of the king. This seems much like what happened when “*the word of the Lord came to*” the prophet (1Ki. 18:1; 21:17, 28). The angel is thus linked closely with the word of God.
21. **2 Kings 19:35 / Isaiah 37:36.** It is difficult to determine whether this scene records the act of a created angel or an appearance of the unique “angel of Yahweh.” The angel goes out and destroys the Assyrian army in one night. This resembles the Passover account, where it is Yahweh who is “*going out*” into the land of Egypt to destroy the firstborn of Egypt: “*I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both*

man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments--I am Yahweh" (Exo.12:12, 27). Yet at the same time the one doing the destroying is distinguished from Yahweh: "*Yahweh will pass through to smite the Egyptians... Yahweh will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you*" (12:23). Likewise in this scene the Lord's own destroying activity is mediated through the angel of Yahweh.

An earlier poetic passage in Isaiah, possibly describing this very event, suggests that this occurs through a "*Mighty*" or "*Majestic One*," meaning Yahweh himself (10:33-34). Commenting on Isaiah 10:34, Keil and Delitzsch say, "The angel of Jehovah is not a messenger of God sent from afar, but the chosen organ of the ever-present divine power." One could argue that this is simply an example of the Lord being said to "do" what in fact he "has done" by means of an intermediary, but the many references to this angel lead us to think that there is more involved here as well. It is also significant that once again the covenant is at stake. Hezekiah has openly trusted in Yahweh and God has promised in return that the house of David will stand.³⁸ Now the angel of Yahweh carries out the covenant-keeping deliverance.

22. **Psalm 34:7** The psalmist celebrates the wonderful assurance of God's protection with the words "*the angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.*" The singular "*angel*" used with "*encamps around*"³⁹ is interesting here, when it could have been said that the "*angels*" surround and protect God's people (as for example in 2Ki. 6:16-17 and Psa. 91:11-12). Either he is the commander of this angelic army (as in Jos. 5:14) or he is the omnipresent one who is able in himself to encircle the one he protects. In this latter case he is Yahweh himself.
23. **Psalm 35:5-6.** "*With the angel of the LORD driving them on.*" The angel often appears in the context of crucial moments in the history of Israel, such as the beginning of the Davidic kingdom which forms the background of this imprecatory psalm. He is seen as the avenger, pursuing the wicked enemies of God's anointed king like the wind does the chaff, leaving nothing behind. This one who appeared and discussed the destruction of Sodom with Abraham, is the one who will judge the world righteously, separating the chaff from the wheat, and who will not "*sweep away the righteous with the wicked*" (Gen.18:23-25). We may also notice this separating, judging work of the Messiah (e.g. Mat.3:12, see comments on page 59).

³⁸ Erich Weiger's notes.

³⁹ This two-word phrase is uniformly used in the OT of many camping around a central object, such as the Levites and other tribes camping around the tabernacle (Num. 1:50, 53; 2:2), soldiers camping around their king (1Sa. 26:5), and besieging a city (2Ki. 25:1; Jer. 50:29; 52:4).

- 24. Ecclesiastes 5:2, 6.** While it is more probable that this reference to the “messenger” refers to the priest in the house of God (5:1; e.g. Mal.2:7), the parallelism could also indicate the angel of the Lord, in whose holy “*presence*” the worshipper should be careful about his or her words:

“Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God... Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?” (Ecc.5:2, 6)

If this is correct, then the messenger is once again identified with the immanent Lord before whom our words and works are weighed.⁴⁰

- 25. Isaiah 63:9.** This is another case of parallelism which equates the angel with the Lord himself:

*In all their affliction He was afflicted,
And the angel of His presence (face) saved them;
In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them,
And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.*

This is the only place where the messenger is described precisely as “*the angel of His presence*” or “*face*.”⁴¹ But this idea is found in Deuteronomy 4:37, in a similar context, again using the word “face”: “*because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence*” (ESV). The angel thus seems to be more than an angel who beholds or stands in the presence of God like Gabriel (Luk.1:19), but as Keil puts it, “the angel who is His face, or in whom His face is manifested.” There is a close conceptual link between this “face” of God and the “image” and “likeness” of God in which man was created (Gen.1:26).⁴² The God of Abraham is not unmoved or unaffected by the afflictions of his people: “*In all their affliction He was afflicted.*” God’s sharing in the afflictions of his people is apparently mediated through his angel.

- 26. Ezekiel 1:25-28; 8:1-6.** These two passages, which record Ezekiel’s extraordinary visions of the glory of the Lord, describe the radiant one whom the prophet sees as having “*the appearance of a man.*” He is Yahweh himself: he speaks as the one whose own sanctuary is being violated by Israel’s idolatry - “*My sanctuary*” (8:6). Yet he appears in the form of a human being (*adam*) seated upon the throne (Eze.1:25-28). The very center of this vision of the glory of the

⁴⁰ For example: “*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom*” (2Ti.4:1).

⁴¹ See notes on Exodus 23:20-23 and 32:34 - 33:6.

⁴² New Testament verses spring to mind regarding Christ as the “*image*” of God, in whose “*face*” God’s glory is seen (2Co. 4:4, 6) or the Son who is the “*exact representation of His nature*” (Heb. 3:1). Erich Weiger states it directly, arguing that this angel “is the Face, the Likeness of Genesis 1:26.”

Lord is the appearance of a man; brilliant, radiant like a rainbow, yet human in form! This is much like Isaiah's vision where he sees "*the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple*" (Isa.6:1), again described in human form, "*sitting*" and wearing a "*robe*."

27. **Daniel 7:9-14.** The remarkable courtroom scene in Daniel's vision centers around the wheeled throne, upon which God himself sits to pronounce judgment on the great enemy who is seeking to destroy his people: "*The Ancient of Days took his seat; his vesture was like white snow and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire*" (Dan.7:9). Yet even more important for our study is the arrival of a divine-human figure who comes to the throne and receives from God eternal sovereignty over all nations: "*And behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed*" (7:13-14). Once again we see that the covenant purposes of God are to be fulfilled through the appearance of a royal mediator who is "*like a son of man*", but whose rule will be eternal. Jesus repeatedly took for himself the title "*the Son of Man*" and directly applied this vision to himself, especially to his second coming (Mat.13:41; 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; cf. Rev.1:7). The similar vision of the throne of God in Revelation 4-5 culminates in the arrival of the "*Lion*" of the tribe of Judah, the slain "*Lamb*," who receives from the One on the throne the authority to carry out judgment on the great enemy, to restore all things and to establish his eternal kingdom.

28. **Hosea 12:3-4.** This passage further illuminates the incident in Genesis 32:24-32 where "*a man*" wrestled with Jacob until daybreak. Hosea lays the foundation for the Lord's dispute with Jacob with these poetic words:

*"In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
And in his maturity he contended with God.
Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed;
He wept and sought His favor.
He found Him at Bethel
And there He spoke with us,
Even Yahweh, the God of hosts,
Yahweh is His name."*

The passage clearly states that the "*man*" with whom Jacob wrestled was in fact God, and the parallelism equates him with "*the angel*." It goes on to identify him with Yahweh of hosts. If we follow the rule of allowing scripture to interpret scripture, even allowing for poetic license,

we have strong canonical evidence here for the identity of the “*angel of the Lord*.” He is none other than God revealed in human form.

29. **Zechariah 1:10-12; 3:1-6.** The angel’s role as an intercessor or mediator stands out in both of these passages, but particularly in the second one. Though it is difficult at times to determine with certainty the speakers and actors in these scenes, it is hard to avoid the sense of a special messenger of Yahweh who is different from the other angels in the scenes. David Baron weighs the evidence at length and concludes, “We see, then, that ‘the angel that talked with me’ is not the same as the Divine Angel of Jehovah – the Messenger of the Covenant – but an *attendant angel* whose mission it was to be God’s expositor to the prophet of the meaning of the visions” (Baron 31). The courtroom-like scene in chapter 3 is especially thought-provoking, as the angel of Yahweh is seen to be the one removing the iniquities of the high priest Joshua who is standing before him (3:4). Exodus 23:21 assigns similar authority to the angel: “*he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.*” The angel’s words to Joshua recall Jesus’ words to the paralyzed man which caused such outrage: “‘*Son, your sins are forgiven.*’ But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘*Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?*’” (Mar.2:5-7).
30. **Zechariah 12:8.** The parallelism in this phrase again identifies God and his messenger in a striking way: “*...and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of Yahweh before them.*” The great power of the house of David in that day is to be such that the royal house will be “*like God*” going before the inhabitants of Jerusalem to defend them, and this comparison is restated: “*like the angel of Yahweh.*”
31. **Malachi 3:1.** This complex and important messianic passage is among those most clearly exhibiting the interchangeability of the messenger and Yahweh. Expositors give a range of answers to the question of the identity of the three figures in the verse: the “*messenger*” sent before the speaker to clear his way, “*the Lord*” coming to his temple, and the “*messenger of the covenant*” who shall come. Stuart sums up the questions and positions regarding the two “messengers” (Stuart 1351). Are they the same or different? Is the first messenger the prophet (1:1)? Or the temple priest (2:7)? Consideration of the evidence in the text leads to a clear enough answer. First, the speaker is Yahweh (“*says Yahweh of hosts*”) and the first messenger is sent by him (“*my messenger*”) to clear his way (“*before me*”) as a forerunner, thus this messenger is to be distinguished from Yahweh. Second, it is also quite certain that “*the Lord*” (*ha adon*) who is coming to his own temple is none other than Yahweh, unless we are to introduce some other

“master” (*adon*) than Yahweh (see 1:6). Third, the second and third lines of the verse are in clear three-fold synonymous⁴³ parallelism:

(a) <i>The Lord</i>	(b) <i>whom you seek</i>	(c) <i>will suddenly come to his temple</i>
(a) <i>the messenger of the covenant</i>	(b) <i>in whom you delight</i>	(c) <i>behold, he is coming</i>

If the Lord who will suddenly come to his temple is parallel with the messenger of the covenant who is coming, it shows that the second messenger/angel is none other than the Lord himself. This is comparable to the consistent picture we have seen where the angel of Yahweh is both distinguished from Yahweh and at the same time one with him. “One could argue that the covenant messenger and the Lord are two different characters. However the strong elements of parallelism between the two lines militate against such a claim” (Petersen 211f). So we really have two figures: the messenger who comes before to prepare the way and the Lord who is also called the messenger of the covenant.

In other words, the verse says that God is going to send someone to prepare people for the sudden arrival of the individual whom people are seeking/wanting and that this second individual is both Lord and covenant messenger. (Stuart 1351)

The God of justice who men claimed they sought was the ‘*Lord, whom you seek*’ (3:1b). He was ‘*the Messenger of the covenant*’ (3:1c), the owner of the temple. He ‘*will suddenly come to His temple*’ 3:1c. (Kaiser, 1992, 473)

The relationship of the second messenger, who is the Lord, to the first messenger or forerunner who is to go before him to prepare the way is established by the New Testament passages that identify the forerunner as John the Baptist and thus Jesus as the Lord himself who has come as promised (see Mar.1:2-3; with Mat.11:10; Luk.1:17, 76; 7:27; though aspects of this prophecy seem to refer to Jesus’ second coming as well). The Malachi passage as a whole confirms this; it pictures the Lord coming in the person of his messenger to assess and purify his people (3:2-5), typical of other “*day of the Lord*” passages. His “*coming*” is also described as his “*appearing*”: “*But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?*” He will come “*suddenly*” to his temple, and his appearing will be disastrous to all who refuse his purifying work. Taken together with John’s announcement that the mighty one coming after him would sift the people, there is striking harmony with the work of the coming one of Malachi:

“*His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*” (Mat. 3:12)

⁴³ The fact that elements (b) and (c) of the two lines are synonymous argues strongly that element (a) is synonymous as well.

The most significant question which must be answered is whether this “*messenger/angel of the covenant*” is to be identified with “*the messenger/angel of the Lord*” whose appearances are being considered in this section. Since the title, “*the angel of the covenant*,” occurs only here, it is difficult to make this link with complete certainty. Nevertheless, there are three persuasive arguments supporting it:

1) The interchangeability of the second messenger with Yahweh seen in this verse has also characterized many of the references discussed above, particularly in the similar parallelism found in Genesis 48:15-16, Isaiah 63:9, Hosea 12:3-4 and Zechariah 12:8. “The relationship between ‘the Angel’ and ‘the Lord’ is clearly the same as elsewhere in the OT where ‘the angel of the Lord’ is both identified with and distinguished from God (cf. Gen.16:7-14; 21:17-21; 22:1-18; Exo.3:2-22; etc.)” (Verhoef 289). “It is not at all unlikely, indeed, that ‘the messenger of the covenant’ is here confused with Yahweh, as elsewhere the ‘messenger of Yahweh’ is confused with Yahweh” (Smith 63).

2) The title (*angel of the covenant*) draws attention to the specifically covenantal context of many of the Angel’s appearances which we have noted above (e.g. Gen.22; Exo.3; 23; Jdg.2). This being has a central role as the messenger or even mediator of the covenant relationship of the invisible God with his people. In fact it is arguable that the establishing of the covenants (especially the Abrahamic and Mosaic) was always accompanied by an appearance of the Lord or his angel in some visible way. “Wherever he is mentioned he immediately takes his place at the centre of the event. He is a being who helps, and who everywhere acts in Israel’s favor, saving and protecting her; he is Jehovah’s aid to Israel personalized almost in the way of a mediating official of the covenant relationship” (Von Rad 286). It would thus be very appropriate to find the “*messenger of the Lord*” referred to as the “*messenger of the covenant*” of the Lord, and difficult to find another recognized candidate in the OT for this lofty title; only one like Moses or greater than him would do. The appearances of the angel of the Lord are also part of the revelatory purpose of the covenant – so that his people will “know Yahweh.” This aligns with Walton’s thesis that “the purpose of the covenant is to reveal God.” (Walton, Covenant 24).

3) This figure is well known and deeply revered in Israel: “*in whom you delight.*” The people were seeking the coming of God to bless them according to the covenant (in spite their disrespectful attitude). Their complaining words throughout the book show this naïve expectation. It would be quite natural for them to hope for the Lord to act through his unique messenger again. Appearing in this form he had redeemed Israel out of Egypt (Exo.3:1-6.), gone before the peo-

ple through the desert (Exo.14:19), and led them to Canaan (Exo.23:20; 33:14). So their longing for the God of justice to come (2:17) could well be linked with hope for the angel of the Lord to appear. David Petersen's judgments seem unsatisfactory in this light:

These verses do not appear to cohere. Why is the appearance of the messenger a suitable response to the questions about theodicy? What sort of transition occurs between vv. 4 and 5? There are no satisfactory answers.

On the contrary, the appearance of the first messenger would signal that the time was near; the Lord (in the person of the second messenger) was coming to begin the work of his kingdom, including both refining the righteous and burning away the wicked. "This is the answer to the skeptical question of the people. The wrongs of the present age are to be righted by Yahweh in person" (Smith 62). Only in this climactic work of God is there a satisfactory answer to the deepest questions about theodicy⁴⁴!

Based upon these three arguments it seems very likely that the reference to the "angel of the covenant" refers to the well-known "angel of the Lord" who appeared at important turning points during Israel's history. The far-reaching implications of this conclusion, together with the NT usage of this verse, will be drawn out in the following sections.

C. Integrating the Lord's appearing and the Angel's appearing

We have now looked at the most significant OT passages which record the appearances of the Lord or his angel. Some of these speak only of the Lord himself appearing and some of them speak only of the angel appearing. Some indicate that to see the angel is to see Yahweh himself. If we take seriously the accumulation of clear language noted throughout the exposition above, showing that the Lord himself was "seen," we cannot avoid the conclusion that the Lord came and revealed himself visibly. The same language is used of the angel of the Lord in the same way. It is evident that these two groups of passages are distinguishable, yet intimately related to each other (as in fact are the angel and the Lord). Thus it seems that in the OT text the temporary appearances of the Lord merge rather naturally with the appearances of his messenger, to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to determine who is appearing. We sum up by saying that this angel is both distinguished from the Lord and also identified with him. More clearly, "this angel is the Lord, though sometimes a distinction is made between the sending Lord and the sent Lord."⁴⁵

The presence of other such paradoxes in the OT should alert us to deal reverently with this one before seeking to simply explain it away. For example, in the OT we find the anticipation that the

⁴⁴ The vindication of the justice of (an all powerful, good) God in ordaining or permitting natural and moral evil.

⁴⁵ E. Weiger, notes on this paper.

promised royal seed of Abraham and David will come (Gen.49:10; Psa.2; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-10; etc.) paralleled by an expectation that Yahweh himself will come (Psa.96; 98; Isa.40:10-11; Zec.14:3-5; Mal.3:1).⁴⁶ The NT teaches that these two seemingly divergent streams of promise merged in the person of the Child born in the city of David, who is declared to be “*Christ the Lord*” (Luk.2:11). Similarly, the apparent contrast between the reigning King and the suffering Servant turn out to merge in the two comings of the one Messiah. It is therefore not surprising to find that the expectation of the *messenger’s* coming merges with the expectation of the *Lord’s* coming, as seen in Malachi 3:1.

D. Explaining the paradox

How are we to explain the presence and identity of this unique messenger? Is he deity or not? Is there another way of interpreting the phenomenon? In his 1999 paper in the Tyndale Bulletin, “Angel of the Lord: Messenger or Euphemism?”, Stephen L. White first gives a brief analysis of the appearances of the angel of Yahweh, concluding that “the pattern of appearance, command, promise, and in most cases, a foretelling of some event has the weight of divine intervention in human lives” (White 302). He then cites three explanations for “the interchangeability of the angel of the LORD and Yahweh,” as given by W.G. Heidt: (1) The Logos Theory, (2) the Representation Theory and (3) the Interpolation Theory (White 303-304). White dismisses all three of them and then gives his own explanation (4), “that the phrase ‘angel of the LORD’ is a euphemism for God used both to create tension in the narrative and to emphasize the transcendence of Yahweh” (White 299). I will respond to White’s comments on these four positions before dealing in greater depth with the one I see as the interpretation which best explains the evidence. Many variations of these positions have been held throughout church history.⁴⁷

(1) The Logos Theory.

According to this openly Trinitarian position, the appearances of this messenger were pre-incarnate appearances of the divine Logos, the eternal Word or Son of God described in John

⁴⁶ In connection with these passages we may note other passages in the prophets promising that Yahweh himself would come to save his people, judge the nations and reign in Zion. Among the clearest of these are Isaiah 24:23; 25:6-10; 35:3-6, 10; 52:7-10; 59:15-17 with 63:1-6; 66:14-16; Ezekiel 34:10-12; 43:1-9; Zephaniah 3:14-17 and Zechariah 2:4-5, 10-12; 8:2-3; 14:1-5, 9, 16 (see Clowney, chapter 9: “The Lord to Come” 179-202).

⁴⁷ In Appendix 1 of his book Borland gives “A Brief Outline of the History of the Interpretation of the Christophanies” (his word for the OT appearances of the pre-incarnate Son of God) (Borland 123-137). The above “official messenger” theory would include what Borland calls “The finite angel representative theory” and “the impersonal agent theory.” He also lists the “interpolation theory” (that “the Angel of the Lord accounts were introduced into the text long after the original had been written”) and the “Tradition and myth theory” (that “all theophany accounts are simply Jewish tradition and myth often associated with sacred places”). His fifth view, that “the Preincarnate Christ, Himself fully God, was manifested in human form,” is essentially the view I am defending.

1:1-18. White, following Heidt, dismisses this in a few words: “(a) there is no evidence in the texts of the OT that there was any awareness of a plurality of the persons of God; and (b) there is positive emphasis throughout the OT on the unicity of God” (White 303-04). But his summary of the theory misrepresents the position, by saying that “it holds that the manifested angel is not Yahweh, but the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ” (White 303). This misses the important point that the NT identifies Jesus the Son of God (as well as the Father) as Yahweh.⁴⁸ For example, “*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” is the common NT title of the One from whom all spiritual blessing flows, rather than Yahweh (Rom.1:7; 1Co.1:3; 8:6; 2Co.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; 6:23; Phi.1:2; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:1, 2; 1Ti.1:2; 2Ti.1:2; Phm.1:3). Yahweh is not simply the Father, whose Son only appears in the NT, but God, whom the NT reveals more clearly as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As to (a), the very texts I am studying in this paper constitute part of the evidence of OT awareness of a fascinating complexity within the divine unity; the argument begs the question. Point (b) is a weak argument as well. God’s “unicity,”⁴⁹ while stressed more frequently in the OT, is also a positive emphasis in the NT, but it does not imply the impossibility of plurality within this unity (e.g. Joh.17:3; Dt.6:4 with 1Co.8:6). This approach will be taken up in detail below, as the position for which I am arguing, referred to as the “proto-incarnation” explanation.

(2) The Representation Theory.

“This theory holds that the angel is a divine messenger sent by God to humanity as a messenger” (White 304). Thus the “angel” is the Lord’s angelic or symbolic ambassador, who speaks for him so authoritatively that he stands for the Lord in these passages, though not being deity himself. White gives Heidt’s primary objection to this theory: “there is no acknowledgement by the angels in the texts that they are, in fact, acting as ambassadors” and adds that the theory does not explain the “interchangeability problem” (White 304).

John Walton defends a version of this theory, which he calls a “contextual explanation,” that is, to see the phenomenon as the biblical equivalent of “the role of the official messenger in the ancient world.” (Walton, Genesis 464–66) Thus, for example, for this being to be called “the messenger of the Lord” is no different from the prophet Haggai being called “the messenger of

⁴⁸ Compare Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12 with Rev.1:8, 17-18; 21:6 and 22:13; Isaiah 45:21-25 with Php.2:10; and Isaiah 8:12-13 with 1Pe.3:13-14 as examples of the apostolic application to Jesus Christ of OT references to Yahweh. Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes the Greek Septuagint version of Psalm 102:25-27 referring to the creator Yahweh and applies it to Christ. The apostle quotes Psalm 68:18 referring to Yah (an abbreviated form of the name Yahweh) and applies it to the ascension of Jesus Christ in Eph.4:8-10.

⁴⁹ The condition of being united or possessing the quality of uniqueness.

the Lord” (Hag.1:13). “There is no warrant to move beyond the intention of the author and posit a more theologically sophisticated explanation” (Walton, Genesis 466). Borland cites Dutch Catholic OT theologian P. Van Imschoot’s similar assessment: The angel is God’s “grand vizier, just as the powerful kings of Egypt and Babylon and the kings of Israel had one... [he is] God’s representative and, in Yahweh’s absence, wields divine power just as a grand vizier would do” (Borland 48-9).

To my mind this “contextual” explanation does not do justice to the whole range of data. First of all it does not adequately take into consideration the numerous instances in which the Lord himself is said to appear and speak for himself, and where people are clearly said to have “seen God” (e.g. Exo.24:10-11). A “royal envoy” might be necessary for a human king who cannot appear at will, but seems rather unnecessary for a God who regularly appears to those he wishes to address. Secondly, it is not only from ten passages where the angel speaks in the first person for/as God that biblical support is derived for identifying the angel as deity (contra Walton, Genesis 463). In the discussion above I have attempted to show numerous reasons for holding this position. This is a case where cumulative evidence is built up gradually rather than one based upon a single phenomenon. Thirdly, the argument that “the angel makes a clear distinction between himself and the Lord” (Walton, Genesis 468), based on references to the Lord in the third person during speeches by the angel, is undermined by the fact that God himself does the same in some speeches. This was noted above in our comments on Genesis 35:1-15. Another example of this fluidity is Exodus 19:24: “*Then Yahweh said to him, ‘Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh, or He will break forth upon them.’*” Still other examples are Exodus 34:10 and Zechariah 3:2: “*Yahweh said to Satan, ‘Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!’*” Therefore a case should not be built on this phenomenon one way or the other.

In the end I am still compelled to ask, who is this being referred to as the “angel of the Lord”? Is he merely a figure in a literary device? But this is surely inadequate to explain the pervasive quality of personhood found in the passages. Or is this one a created spirit being (an angel such as Gabriel in Dan.8:16; 9:21) sent to God’s people as his spokesman? The plurality (*mal’ākhim*) and limited characteristics of such finite angels and their corporate worship of God⁵⁰ show that this being (referred to in the singular) is far above them:

⁵⁰ Their refusal to accept worship in the NT (Rev.19:10; 22:9) is consistent with this OT picture.

- In Gen.19:1 and 15 the two *angels* who accompanied the Lord when visiting Abraham go on to Sodom to rescue Lot and destroy the city;
- In Gen.28:12 Jacob sees *angels* ascending and descending a staircase from heaven to earth;
- In Gen.32:1 God's *angels* meet Jacob, who then sends his own "messengers" to Esau (32:3);
- In Job 4:18 *angels* are charged with sin;
- In Psalms 78:49 a "*band of destroying angels*" is seen;
- In Psalm 91:11 the *angels* protect the one who trusts in the Lord;
- In Psalm 103:20 and 148:2 the created *angels* worship the Lord.⁵¹

To my mind neither the impersonal representative nor the finite angel version of the official messenger or representation explanation is adequate to explain the full range of evidence.

(3) The Interpolation Theory.

This theory, which "suggests that the theological ideas of the people of Israel were transformed over the course of its long history and the 'angel of the LORD' was added to the text in those instances where the operations of Yahweh seemed too anthropomorphic," is correctly rejected by Heidt "because it does not explain why the term 'mal'âk' was not added in many other passages where Yahweh appears and speaks" (White 304). Obviously this theory is part of the range of approaches which explain apparent difficulties in the text (or at least difficulties which arise from naturalistic presuppositions) by positing various sources and deliberate additions to the text by later editors. It cannot be substantiated by a canonical approach such as that taken in this paper.

(4) A Euphemism for God.

White's preferred explanation follows in part C. A. Newsom's article on angels in the Anchor Bible Dictionary: "Yahweh's authority and presence in these encounters is to be affirmed, but yet it is not possible for human beings to have an unmediated encounter with God" (White 305). He sums up his explanation this way:

In conclusion, while I agree with Newsom that the interchangeability of the angel of the LORD and Yahweh is a literary device to create tension, I also believe it may reflect different usage of source and editor whose purpose was to place distance between Yahweh and humanity in order to emphasize the transcendence of Yahweh. In this sense, then, 'angel of the LORD' is a euphemism for God. It is God who speaks to Hagar, Abraham... and it is God's appearances, commands, promises, and foretellings that we read in these passages. The variation between the use of device of the 'angel of the LORD' and the name of Yahweh serves both to emphasize God's transcendence when it is applied and to remind us who is really acting when it is not.

⁵¹ Note that in Heb.1:6 the author quotes Psalm 97:7 to show that the angels worship the "*first born*" Son of God.

I find this theory unsupported by the evidence. As far as I am aware there is no consistent textual evidence of such editing of the text for this presumed theological purpose. A reading of the passages referred to the previous sections yields no pattern that would explain which events would be recorded with this “device” and which would simply be recorded as Yahweh’s own appearances. A euphemism is an example of substituting a mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive. But surely the potential confusion with created angels would argue against the choice of this name as a euphemism. The transcendence and immanence of Yahweh are both emphasized by the OT text in many other ways, making such an obscure device unnecessary. The OT tabernacle/temple and sacerdotal priesthood system made it clear that mediation is necessary between God and mankind, and the NT affirms that ultimately there is only “*and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1Ti.2:5) who fulfills that temporary system. It is preferable to look for explanations that are compatible with this evidence rather than postulate the use of a “euphemism for God” where it is unnecessary. Finally, I must register my concern at the ease with which White finds “inconsistencies” in the canonical text. He claims “it is unreasonable for us to expect of the authors of the OT a uniformity of thinking and belief about the character of God as God relates to humanity” (White 305). On the contrary it is not only reasonable but logical to expect the divinely inspired Scriptures to deal consistently with this most central of topics. Consistent patterns emerge as we accept and examine the whole record as coming from one and the same Spirit.

E. The “proto-Incarnation” explanation.

I believe the light provided by the NT allows us to better explain the paradoxical data than do explanations 2, 3, and 4 above. Consistent with explanation 1 above, the “angel of Yahweh” shares equality with Yahweh, possessing the very nature of Yahweh, yet is distinguishable from him as the “person” sent from Yahweh to be his visible manifestation. His appearances are a sort of warm-up for the Incarnation, a “proto-Incarnation.” I am suggesting the term “proto-Incarnation” to encapsulate the way in which this temporary phenomenon seen throughout the OT paves the way for the unique, permanent miracle of the Word becoming flesh. It may be appropriate to regard the OT theophanies, especially those that were in human form, as limited, repeated precursors of the Incarnation. The word “proto-Incarnation” might function similarly to the use of *protoevangelium*, meaning the first gospel, to describe Genesis 3:15.

Against this explanation John Walton argues strongly that the angel of the Lord is not to be equated with the pre-incarnate Christ. He says that such an approach is prejudiced by an apologetic purpose like that found in Justin Martyr’s writings: It “reflected his [Justin’s] determined intention to find the

triune Godhead in the Old Testament in order to defend the cause of Christianity. In the interpretive methods employed throughout that era there was little concern for what the intentions of the human authors of Scripture may have been” (Walton, Genesis 462). He also asserts that “the interpretation of the angel as Christ did not arise from exegetical problems but from an aggressive attempt to read distinctives of Christian theology back into the Old Testament with an apologist’s agenda” (Walton, Genesis 466). I have two comments on this assertion: 1) An overall look at all the relevant passages shows that there is a significant exegetical issue to grapple with, whether or not we have a Christian apologetic agenda. Other explanations offered for this phenomenon are not adequate to explain it satisfactorily; there is an insistent visible presence of the invisible God which warrants “a more theologically sophisticated explanation.” 2) Without question I approach the OT expecting to find it consistent with NT theology in at least a preparatory manner (see comments on pp.3-4). But this does not necessitate illegitimate findings, especially if the NT provides clues for looking at the OT text. It assumes that Jesus taught his apostles to deal with the OT text in honesty and with insight. A careful interpreter approaching it in this way may find legitimate confirmations that “*the Scripture... preached the gospel beforehand*” (Gal.3:8).

It is undeniable that no biblical text specifically states that the angel of Yahweh who appeared interchangeably with Yahweh is the one who appeared in flesh as Jesus Christ. The only possible exception is **Malachi 3:1**, together with the Synoptic Gospel references applying the verse directly to John the Baptist and Jesus Christ (Mar.1:2-3; Mat.11:10; Luk.1:17, 76; 7:27). Whether or not this conclusively identifies the angel of Yahweh with Jesus the Messiah depends on the validity of the case presented above. The three points of my argument were as follows:

- 1) The messenger or angel of the covenant whose coming is promised, is to be identified with the Lord (*ha adon*) himself. This Lord whose way is to be cleared is none other than Yahweh: “*I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me... says Yahweh of hosts*”). The coming of this one will be the coming of Yahweh.
- 2) The NT uniformly identifies the way-preparing forerunner as John the Baptist, and the one whose way he prepared as Jesus the Messiah (Mat.11:10; Mar.1:2-4; Luk.1:76; 7:27). Thus the coming one called both the Lord and the angel of the covenant is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3) The messenger or angel of the covenant is almost certainly to be identified with the “*angel of Yahweh*” whose many previous appearances I examined in some detail above, and whose connection with the covenant has been established.

If these three points are established beyond reasonable doubt (see my argument on page 51ff), then this verse is strong evidence that the angel of Yahweh is none other than the One who became flesh and began his ministry on the heels of the forerunner John. But the overall conclusion does not depend on this verse alone. I will present other reasons for the consistency of this explanation with the NT evidence in section VIII below. anticipation

The OT records repeated appearances of Yahweh and of his angel, but never both of them together. That is, we never read that both Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh appeared to anyone at the same time.⁵² My understanding of this phenomenon is that the Angel was Yahweh himself, who at many key points chose to reveal himself in this specific form. Thus it seems best to see the OT appearances of the Lord in the person of his angel as part of the overall process of preparing the people of God for his climactic intervention in human history, the Incarnation. Commenting on Zechariah 1:7-17, David Baron sums up the conclusion that I also have reached about the identity of the angel:

The ‘man,’ as we are told in ver. 11, was the *Malakh Yehovah*—the Angel of Jehovah, who is none other than the ‘Angel of His face,’ the second person in the Blessed Trinity, whose early manifestations to the patriarch and prophets as the ‘Angel’ or Messenger of Jehovah in the form of man, were anticipations of His incarnation and of that incomprehensible humiliation to which He would afterwards condescend for our salvation. (Baron 23)

Before summarizing the continuity between the NT doctrine of the Incarnation and the OT appearances of the God of Abraham and his angel, it will be helpful to look at the relationship of Jesus and Abraham in some of its aspects.

⁵² Yet we do read of Yahweh appearing with his created angels (Gen.18; 1Ki.22:19).

VII. JESUS AND ABRAHAM

Jesus' relationship to Abraham can be looked at in relation to his royal lineage, his teaching, his transfiguration and his claims about his own identity.

A. Jesus the son of Abraham and David

The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah is traced directly to Abraham and he is called both "*the son of Abraham*" and "*the son of David*" (Mat.1:1-17; cf. Luk.3:23-34). Although God's covenant with Abraham is more frequently seen as the basis of the kingdom than his Messiah's descent from Abraham, the OT is careful to show that the royal line of David is taken by God from the seed of Abraham (e.g. Jer.33:25-26). Jesus is especially presented as both the son of Abraham and the son of David in the Gospel of Matthew and in the epistle to the Romans (4:1-8). The coming of Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham; he is the heir and channel of God's blessing for Israel and the nations (Luk.1:69-73; Act.3:25-26; 13:13-23, 32-33 Rom.15:8).

B. Jesus' teaching about Abraham

While not extensive, Jesus' words include a number of significant references to Abraham.

1. **The Abrahamic Seed.** Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ rebuke the religious leadership of Israel for boasting in their Abrahamic lineage while not doing the deeds of Abraham (Mat.3:9; Luk.3:8; Joh.8:39, 56).⁵³ Nevertheless Jesus argues the right of needy Jews to receive the benefit of his messianic blessings with inescapable logic: "*And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?*" (Luk.13:16; likewise 19:9).
2. **The coming messianic banquet.** In his proclamation of the kingdom Jesus teaches a future messianic banquet to which people from all nations will come and "*recline with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*" in the kingdom of heaven/God (Mat.8:11; Luk.13:28). The place or position of comfort and blessing to which the righteous will be taken after death is called "*Abraham's bosom*" (Luk.16:22-23), perhaps to be thought of similarly to the disciple Jesus whom loved "*reclining on Jesus' bosom*" (Joh.13:23, 25; 21:20). In the coming era the faithful will share intimate fellowship with both Abraham and his Master. Jesus claims sovereign authority as "*head of the house*" to admit only those who are known to him (Luk.13:25-27; Mat.7:21-23). This role as executor of the divine judgment links him with the OT angel of the covenant.

⁵³ The apostle Paul, too, argues that while this heritage is a great privilege, it is meaningless without faith in Christ (2Co.11:22; Phi.3:2-11).

3. The God of the living. In his final series of confrontations with the religious leaders of Israel Jesus draws particular attention to the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Moses at the bush, who identified himself as “*the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*” (Mat.22:32; Mar.12:26; Luk.20:37). Jesus uses this passage to demonstrate that the resurrection of God’s people from the dead is an absolute certainty; he is not the God of the dead but of the living. His covenant faithfulness is eternal, and those to whom he has so committed himself are his forever! He is not ashamed to be called their God because he has prepared a city for all who love and trust him as Abraham did (Heb.11:8-16). When this teaching is linked with Jesus’ claims to be “*the resurrection and the life*” (Joh.11:25-26), the glorious one who will grant life to his people in the age to come (Mat.25:34, 46; Mar.10:29-30; Joh.5:24; 8:51; cf. Mal.3:17 - 4:3), his oneness with this “*God of the living,*” who dwelt in the bush, becomes clearer. Later New Testament teaching also finds truths concerning resurrection from the dead in God’s relationship with Abraham (Heb.11:17-19).

C. Jesus appears in glory.

While there is no reference to Abraham in the accounts of Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain, the whole scene strongly recalls the events of “*the mountain of God,*” where the angel appeared to Moses, identifying himself as “*the God of Abraham,*” and the subsequent awe-inspiring appearance in the giving of the Law (and to Elijah on the same mountain centuries later). This mountain-top event contains “many points of contact with that seminal event in Israel’s history” (Edwards 262). Though Jesus converses with the two great prophets who have appeared in glory, and all are overshadowed by the bright cloud from which the Father addresses them, the scene is not an appearance of God to the final prophet Jesus. It is Jesus’ own glory that dominates the scene, which “combines elements of Jesus as... the Son of God and prophet like Moses, and... as the Son of Man who appears in the manner of Yahweh at Mount Sinai” (Marshall 381). Jesus was the one “*appearing*” to his people, including Moses and Elijah, as one of the three apostles later wrote about the event: “*we were eyewitnesses of His majesty*” (2Pe.1:16).

D. Jesus, the God of Abraham

In the gospel of John, Jesus’ teaching on Abraham is concentrated in the events recorded in the eighth chapter, which occurs toward the end of his ministry in Jerusalem. His staggering claims are triggered by two challenges to the Jews regarding their acceptance or rejection of his words:

(1) “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (8:31-32). The Jews answer this challenge by boasting that as Abraham’s descendents they have never been enslaved to anyone, to which Jesus responds that the

slavery of which he speaks is bondage to sin. He tells them that if they were truly Abraham's descendants they would listen to these liberating words of truth from the Son of God. Abraham did not reject God's command to offer up the unique son of promise (Gen.22:1-2, 11, 15). But unlike Abraham, the Jews were now rejecting the Son of God when he told them he would be offering his body and blood for the life of the world (Joh.6:47-62).

(2) Secondly, he boldly declares that *"if anyone keeps My word he will never see death"* (8:51).

Here the Jews respond that to claim such a thing Jesus must think he is greater than Abraham, who died! They ask, *"Who do you make yourself out to be?"* (8:53), which is precisely the issue at stake. Jesus' provocative response to this challenge takes us to the heart of his relationship to Abraham. He says two things (a) *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad"* (8:56), showing that the great promises which Abraham believed were centered in the "day" of Messiah's coming, and that he (Jesus) was that Messiah. "My day" may look back to Psalm 118:24, *"This is the day which Yahweh has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."* This in turn pointed to the day of the builders' rejection of what was in reality the *"chief corner stone,"* as Jesus elsewhere tied to Israel's leaders' rejection of himself (Psa.118:22-23; Mat.21:42-45, par.).⁵⁴

(b) His second prophetic word, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am,"* using a very unusual juxtaposition of verbs and forms,⁵⁵ draws deliberate attention to the words of the angel that appeared to Moses and, identifying himself as the God of Abraham, revealed the meaning of his name YHWH, which likely comes from the verb "to be" (see comments on Exo.3:1 – 4:17). At this point, understanding his meaning clearly, the Jews picked up stones to put him to death for blasphemy. Guthrie comments in his NT theology:

There seems little doubt... that the statement of 8:58 is intended to convey in an extraordinary way such exclusively divine qualities as changelessness and pre-existence. The divine implications of the words would alone account for the extraordinary anger and opposition which the claim immediately aroused. (quoted by Erickson 29)

To conclude this discussion of Jesus and Abraham, it is inadequate to say only that Jesus is the son of Abraham. We must also point out that just as Jesus challenged Israel's leadership by presenting himself as both David's son and David's Lord (Mat.22:41-46), so also he boldly presented himself as both the

⁵⁴ In his doctoral thesis on the use of Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John, fellow-worker and minister in Turkey Andrew Brunson suggests "that the unique verbal combination in John 8.56 comes from Ps 118.24, that the event Jesus refers to is Abraham's rejoicing at the Tabernacles celebration of *Jub. 16* in anticipation of the future exalted seed of Isaac, and that Abraham's enactment of the Ps 118 liturgy provides the link for John to describe the event in the language of Ps 118.24" (Brunson 301)

⁵⁵ "This is the only passage in the NT where we have the contrast between *einai* and *genesqai*" (Friedrich Büchsel, *eimi, o wn*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Freidrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976, vol. 2, p. 399; Quoted in Erickson 29).

son of Abraham and the God of Abraham.

VIII. THE INCARNATION: THE ULTIMATE APPEARANCE OF GOD

The New Testament teaches clearly that in Jesus Christ, the pre-existent Son of God became a true man of flesh and blood. C.S. Lewis spoke of the incarnation as the “grand miracle,” the central truth, upon which Christianity stands (or falls):

The Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle, the Christian assertion being that what is beyond all space and time, what is uncreated, eternal, came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing nature up with Him. It is precisely one great miracle. If you take that away, there is nothing specifically Christian left. There may be many admirable human things which Christianity shares with all other systems in the world, but there would be nothing specifically Christian. Conversely, once you have accepted that, then you will see that all the... well-established Christian miracles are part of it, that they all either prepare for, or exhibit, or result from the Incarnation. (Lewis, 56-57)

My contention is that the OT appearances of God and his messenger are part of these many “miracles” which “prepare for” the Incarnation. In light of the significance of God’s appearing to many of the great leaders of Israel (as well as more obscure people such as Hagar and Samson’s mother) at each turning point in their history, it is remarkable that the New Testament records no similar appearances of God or his angel TO Jesus.⁵⁶ Rather Jesus’ presence IS the ultimate appearance of the Lord! He is *Immanuel*, meaning *God with us* (Mat.1:23). Isaiah’s and Malachi’s great prophecies of the *Lord’s* coming are fulfilled (at least in part) in the first coming of *Jesus* (Mar.1:1-4, 14-15); others will be fulfilled at his return in glory to judge the world. Jesus is the Lord whose glory Isaiah saw in the temple (Joh.12:40-41 with Isa.6:1-10).⁵⁷ One who sees him sees God (Joh.14:9). Commenting on John 1:18, D. A. Carson summarizes the wonder of the Incarnation:

The fact remains that the consistent Old Testament assumption is that God cannot be seen, or more precisely, that for a sinful human being to see him would bring death (Ex. 33:20; Deu.4:12; Ps.97:2). Apparent exceptions are always qualified in some way. But, John adds, the unique and beloved one, [himself] God, has made him known. What it means is that the beloved Son, the incarnate Word (1:14), himself God while being *at the Father’s side* – just as in v. 1 the Word was simultaneously God and with God – has broken the barrier that made it impossible for human beings to see God, and *has made him known*. This prepares the way for 6:46 and 14:9: ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.’... The emphasis of the Prologue, then is on the revelation of the Word as the ultimate disclosure of God himself (Carson 134-35).

⁵⁶ The divine voice accompanying the descent of the Spirit as a dove at Jesus’ baptism (and similarly at the Transfiguration and in John 12:27) could possibly be interpreted this way, but it is not treated as revelatory; rather as the Father’s unparalleled affirmation of his unique Son and the Spirit’s limitless anointing for his mission. Angels also ministered to him at his times of temptation in the wilderness and the garden (Mat.4:11; Luk.22:43). In the NT angels worship the Son/Lamb.

⁵⁷ An alternative understanding of John 12:41 is possible, as discussed briefly in my comments on Isaiah 6 above, but the continuity with 12:42 seems to me to support this understanding.

We must think of the Incarnation both in terms of continuity with the OT appearances of the Lord and in terms of discontinuity. It has both deep and organic parallelism with the OT as the final stage in God's one progressive program of self-revelation and also complete distinctiveness as the once and for all, unparalleled saving act of God.

A. The continuity of the Incarnation as the Lord's appearing

A number of areas of continuity can be identified in addition to the ones pointed out above.

1. **Terminology of "appearing" or "being seen."** In speaking of the coming of the Lord, the NT sometimes uses language with which we have become familiar in the OT, that of "*appearing*" or "*being seen*."⁵⁸ For example the apostle John describes Christ's coming this way:

*"...the life was **manifested**, and **we have seen** and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1Jo.1:1-2)*

The apostolic testimony is that the unseen Word has now come and they have touched him. In the Incarnation the life was made visible and tangible, in fact the Word has become flesh! God has "*appeared in the flesh*" (1Ti.3:16). This understanding gives added meaning to references to Jesus' subsequent appearances. For instance, on the mountain "*the appearance of His face*" was transformed and shone like the sun (Luk.9:29; Mat.17:2; see above). Additionally there are a number of passages that summarize the forty-day period when the risen Jesus appeared to his apostles (Mar.16:9, 12, 14; Acts 1:3; 10:40-42; 13:30-31; 1Co 15:5-8). The common vocabulary used to express this reality—*appeared, presented Himself alive, granted that He become visible (Act.10:40)*—points to significant continuity with the OT phenomenon.

Hebrews 9:24-28 uses three different words to convey the present, past and future aspects of Christ's appearing:

For Christ...now to appear (emfanizw) in the presence of God for us [present]... but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested (fanerow) to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself [past]... will appear (oraw) a second time [future] for salvation... to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb 9:24, 26, 28)

The group of words used for Christ's "appearing" (or revelation, manifestation: apokaluyis, epifaneia, parousia) are used more frequently for the second coming of Christ than for his first coming.⁵⁹ There is perhaps a closer parallelism between the often awe-inspiring appearance of the angel of the Lord in the OT and the future "*appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior*,

⁵⁸ The Septuagint generally uses the aorist passive form of this verb (oraw, see) to translate the Hebrew "appeared" (to be seen) in the passages we have studied (Gen.12:7; 17:1; etc).

⁵⁹ For example, Col.3:4; 1Th.2:1, 19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2Th.1:7; 2:1; 2Ti 4:1, 8; Tit.2:13; Jas.5:7-8; 1Pe.1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:4; 2Pe.1:16; 3:4; 1Jo 2:28; 3:2 all refer to Christ's second coming.

Christ Jesus” (Tit.2:13). This fits Malachi 3:1-5, where the emphasis is probably more on the coming Lord’s future work of judgment. Nevertheless, Christ’s first, humble appearance in “*the days of his flesh*” (Heb.5:7) has many parallels with the Lord’s slowly-recognized appearances to OT individuals. **NOTE SEE BEALE’S NOTES, HANDOUT REGARDING**

DAMASCUS ROAD APPEARANCE, AS PART OF THE PATTERN OF APPEARANCES!! NT THEOLOGY CLASS, FALL 2006, HANDOUT ON 10/24/06

2. **The image and revealer of the invisible God.** How do we reconcile statements that God cannot be seen with OT references to people seeing God⁶⁰ or with the NT truth that the Son is God himself? It is important to keep in mind first of all that the issue is not so much a metaphysical impossibility (humans cannot see God because He is spirit) as it is a moral impossibility (sinful humans are not permitted to approach God).

1 Timothy 6:16 is a strongly worded example that no one sees God (the Father):

*I charge you in the presence of God... that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time--He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, **whom no man has seen or can see.** To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (1Ti 6:13-16)*

Only with a “high Christology” and a robust doctrine of the Trinity is there real resolution; in this light two explanations are possible: (1) Such verses refer to God the Father; no one has ever seen the Father, thus everyone who sees God in any era is seeing God the Son; (2) The meaning of such verses is like one seeing “his face in a mirror, he in a sense sees himself; yet in another sense, he does not literally see himself. So men saw the reflection of God’s glory but they did not see his essence” (Thiessen 76). Both explanations give related aspects of the overall explanation. References to Jesus as “*the image of the invisible God*” (Col.1:15; 2Co.4:4) or as “*the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (Heb.1:3) correspond nicely with the OT phenomenon we have repeatedly noticed; the One who cannot be seen is nevertheless seen (often in the likeness of a man). To my mind the only adequate explanation for this language is that previous to the Incarnation, God, probably in the person of the Word or Son of God, drew near and permitted himself (though apparently not his essential being) to be seen in a bodily (human) form. From earliest ages many Christian theologians have been persuaded that such appearances were in fact pre-incarnate appearances of the eternal Son or Word of God. In addition to Justin Martyr, who used the “human form theophanies” for apologetic purposes,

⁶⁰ Verses promising that the redeemed will some day see God can be added to the discussion of this question (Psa.17:15; Mat.5:8; Heb.12:14; Rev.22:4).

“Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Theophilus, the Apostolic Constitutions, Tertullian, Cyprian, Cyril, Hilary and Chrysostom” are listed by Borland as early church Fathers who believed these appearances were the exclusive function of the Son (Borland 58).⁶¹ While not wishing to be dogmatic about this point, it seems to me that such a position fits very naturally with all that the NT tells us of Christ sole revealer or “exegete” of the invisible Father God (Mat. 11:27/Luk. 10:22; Joh.1:18; 14:9; 15:24; 17:6, 26; 1Jo.5:20). If, as argued above, one of the primary purposes of God in appearing visibly in OT times was self-revelation, then the apostolic pronouncement, “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory...*” testifies to the final stage of a unified, progressive program of revelation (Joh.1:14). Long ago Athanasius pointed out this purpose in the Incarnation:

It was His part and His alone, Whose ordering of the universe reveals the Father, to renew the same teaching. But how was He to do it? ...Men had neglected to consider the heavens before, and now they were looking in the opposite direction. Wherefore, in all naturalness and fitness, desiring to do good to men, as Man He dwells, taking to Himself a body like the rest; and through His actions done in that body, as it were on their own level, He teaches those who would not learn by other means to know Himself, the Word of God, and through Him the Father. (Athanasius, On the Incarnation 9-10)

A more recent expression of this “chain of Christian reasoning” is given by D. A. Carson in his commentary on John’s Gospel (though he does so while arguing that John 12:41 is not certain proof for it):

If the Son, the Word, was with God in the beginning, and was God, and if he was God’s agent of creation, and the perfect revelation of God to humankind, then it stands to reason that in those Old Testament passages where God is said to reveal himself rather spectacularly to someone, it must have been through the agency of his Son, his Word, however imperfectly the point was spelled out at the time. (Carson 450)

3. Compatibility with the pre-incarnate state of the Son. While the references are limited, those NT texts which tell us something about Christ before he came into the world are eminently compatible with what we have seen concerning the angel of the Lord:

- It is said of the eternal Word both that he “was with God” and that he himself “was God” (Joh.1:1).
- Before Abraham was (born), he was there as “egw eimi” or Yahweh himself (Joh.8:58; cf. Exo.3:14; or, more likely, Isa.41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 45:18; 46:4; 48:12 (Carson 343-44)).
- He existed in the form of God, possessing equality with God (Phi.2:6)
- He shared glory with God before the world was (Joh.17:5).

⁶¹ Borland cites Liddon: “The earliest Fathers answer with general unanimity that He was the Word or Son of God himself.”

- He was the Son of God who was “sent forth” in the fullness of time (Gal.4:4).

All of these are in harmony with the OT evidence of the relationship between God and the one called the angel of God. Rejected by Israel, Christ speaks in language reminiscent of Judges 2:1-2 or Hosea 6:4 and 11:1-9 lamenting his unfulfilled desire to gather Jerusalem’s people to himself: “*How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling*”(Mat.23:37). In this phrase Jesus seems to state that he was in fact the one pursuing this protective work in the OT era.

4. **Parallels** between the relationship between Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh in the OT, and the relationship between God and Christ (the Father and the Son) in the NT also contribute to this overall sense of continuity between the testaments:

- **Sender and Sent** – The idea of the sent one and the sending one is inherent in the term⁶² “*messenger of the Lord.*” The one who is at times identified as the Lord himself is at other times identified as the one sent by the Lord. While the Son is clearly set apart from all created angels (Heb.1:4-14), he is nevertheless the “*apostle / sent one*” (*apostoloj*, Heb.3:1), and the “*servant*” (Mat.12:18) who came to do the will and works of the Father in his name (Joh.5:43; 10:25).
- **Unity of nature and distinction of persons.** As we have struggled at times to determine whether the Lord or the angel is under consideration, we find a similar fluidity of usage in the NT, where both unity of nature and distinction of persons is discernable. A subtle distinction is implied between the “one God” the Father, and the “one Lord,” Jesus Christ (1Co.8:6). This emphasizes the mediatory position of the Son (*we exist **through** Him*) between believers and the Father (*we exist **for** Him*). Even this distinction is compatible with the OT phenomenon. A striking example of this truth is seen in the repeated reference in the book of Revelation to “*God and the Lamb*” in heaven, receiving worship, sharing the throne and exercising wrath (6:17; 7:10, 17; 14:4; 21:22-23; 22:1, 3). There is but one God, yet within that unity genuine distinction of persons and roles is evident.
- **The divine name** - Both Christ and the angel are said to be the bearer and revealer of the name of God (Exo.23:20-21; Joh.17:6, 17, 26).
- **Unseen and yet seen.** In the NT no one sees God, but the one who sees the Son has seen the Father; similarly in the OT we are told that no one can see God and live, but repeatedly in

⁶² “The root idea of *mal’āk*, then, is one sent, a messenger or an envoy. Only in the context does the term take on specificity” (James R. Battenfield, cited in Borland, p. 36)

the OT God is seen, particularly in the person of his angel. When people see him, they have “seen God.”

- God’s visible intervention in human affairs is described as a “**visitation**” (see notes on Gen.18:1-33). It is possible that John 1:10, “*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him,*” refers to these earlier visitations. Likewise Jesus’ birth and indeed his whole first coming is presented as the Lord’s mercy-visit, particularly in the gospel of Luke, which so emphasizes his visits to homes and table-fellowship he offered even to Pharisees (e.g. 1:67-79; 7:16). The guilt of Jerusalem’s people was that they “*did not recognize the time of their visitation*” (19:44).
- **The executor of God’s judgment.** As the angel often carried out the divine judgment, so also the Christ the Son of God will judge the living and the dead (Psa.2:9; 110:2, 6; Joh.5:22, 27; Act.10:42; 17:30; 2Ti.4:1).
- **Both originator of message and messenger.** As the angel is at times seen speaking as the Lord himself in the first person, yet is the message-bearer; so Christ is both the incarnate Word himself (Joh.1:1, 14) and also one sent to speak the words of God (Joh.3:34; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 17:8).

Thus it is clear that there is a significant continuity between the self-revelation of God in the OT and his self-revelation in the Incarnation.

B. The discontinuity or uniqueness of the Incarnation

Alongside this real continuity, it is crucial to keep the discontinuity or uniqueness of the Incarnation in view. While God or the angel of God appeared in human form in previous generations, he never became man. He was never born of a woman. He never partook of flesh and blood. This staggering act belongs rather to the uniqueness of the Gospel. Only now, at the end of the ages, has the Holy One been made in the likeness of sinful flesh. In this sense the Incarnation is unlike any of the OT appearances, which by contrast were:

1. **Only brief visits.** In the previous ages the appearances of the Lord were brief visits.⁶³ But the terminology used in John 1:14 —“*tabernacled among us*”— “conveys the idea of a lengthy period of residence rather than a temporary visit” (Erickson 27). In the Incarnation, the one who was by very nature God has taken on himself human nature for all eternity (Phi.2:6-7). He is eternally “*the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1Ti.2:5).

⁶³ With the exception of the journey in the wilderness where the Lord appeared among them in connection with the tabernacle for a period of 40 years in the pillar of fire.

In the New Testament, God's revelation to man changed from the temporary and intermittent nature of His original theophanies to that which is entirely permanent in Christ. Thus, G. Henton Davies says, "In reality there are no true theophanies in the NT, for their place is taken by the manifestation of God in Christ (John 1:14; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-3)." (Borland 19)

2. **Not a partaking of human nature.** Despite their recurrent human form, the purpose of the appearances of the angel of the Lord had nothing to do with membership in the human race, but only with a revelation of deity to men. There was no sense of a "body" being "prepared" (Heb.10:5). Contrariwise, the Incarnation is precisely a true, permanent partaking of our human nature (Heb.2:11-14). Jesus Christ is "flesh and blood" in every sense of the word, except that he is sinless, and to deny this is to deny apostolic truth (1Jo. 4:2-3; 2Jo.7).
3. **Limited in revelatory scope.** The unstated foundation of this study is that the living God has revealed Himself to mankind. In addition to the wordless testimony of the created universe to the power and wisdom of its Creator, God has also spoken in the Scriptures, which are the very "word" or "oracles" of God. In the OT era God's greatest self-revelation was the Law, or Testimony, given through Moses at Sinai. The OT appearances of God, while accompanying the crucial turning-points in covenant history, including Sinai, were not in themselves the primary means of revelation. But in the Incarnation of the Son God has revealed himself to the fullest extent: "*All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows... the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*" "*The only begotten, God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*" (Mat.11:27; Joh.1:18)
4. **Not for the purpose of atonement.** While similar to the Incarnation in being instances of God's self-revelation, the OT appearances were in no way linked to the self-offering of God in his Son.⁶⁴ But in the Incarnation God became man in Christ in order to give himself as an offering, and this purpose is the very heart of the gospel (Mar.10:45; Rom.8:3; Heb.2:9-17).

It will be noted that many of these manifestations of Christ were in angelic form. "The Angel of Jehovah" is the usual appellation. In many cases the angelic visitor was at first mistaken for a man. Christ could have come in angelic form, but then sinning men could not have been redeemed. Angels cannot die, and sinners are human. No angel would have been competent to act as substitute for the sinner (Heb.2:14-18).

*No angel could our place have taken,
Highest of the high though he;
The Loved One on the cross forsaken
Was one of the Godhead Three.* (Sanders 23)

⁶⁴ This truth was only pictured in Passover, the sacrificial system and perhaps in the offering of Isaac. Erich Weiger suggests that the Angel's going up in the flame and smoke of Manoah's sacrificial offering could be another such picture (Jdg.13:20).

Thus there is both significant continuity and discontinuity between God's self-revealing OT appearances and his final self-revelation in the Incarnation of the Son. While being unique and final among the saving acts of God, the Incarnation of the Son of God nevertheless follows naturally from the OT appearances of the God of Abraham and is the ultimate means of fulfilling of all that he promised Abraham.

IX. SUMMARY: God's self-revelation program beginning with Abraham

I have looked briefly at the contrast between the God of Abraham and the God of Islam on the one hand and the pagan gods of the ANE on the other hand. I have tried to sketch the broad outline of what the biblical text teaches about the God who is identified with Abraham. The largest part of the study has been devoted to briefly examining sixty-five passages in which God or the angel of God appeared, starting with his appearances to Abraham. I concluded that indeed the NT presentation of Jesus as the final stage in God's self-revelation program is not only compatible with, but follows naturally and progressively from the OT revelation of the Lord who appeared to Abraham and Moses. Jesus Christ is the goal and climax of Israel's history, the glory of God's people, and the one in whom dwells all the fullness of Deity in bodily form (Luk.2:32; Col.2:9).

A. New Testament and Old Testament

Thus the NT does not bring an entirely new perspective on God; certainly no more so than the revelation of God which came in the Mosaic era was new relative to the patriarchal era. God said to Moses, *"I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them"*; in the NT it is as though he is saying, *"I appeared to Israel as Yahweh, but by my Son I did not make myself known to them. Now I am appearing in my Son, Jesus, who reveals me fully and truly. Hear him!"* This is precisely the opening argument of the letter to the Hebrews (1:1-2). All his previous appearances were only the warm-up for the ultimate appearance, of which the NT is the inspired record. Moberly's summary of his book *"The Old Testament of the Old Testament"* makes a related argument:

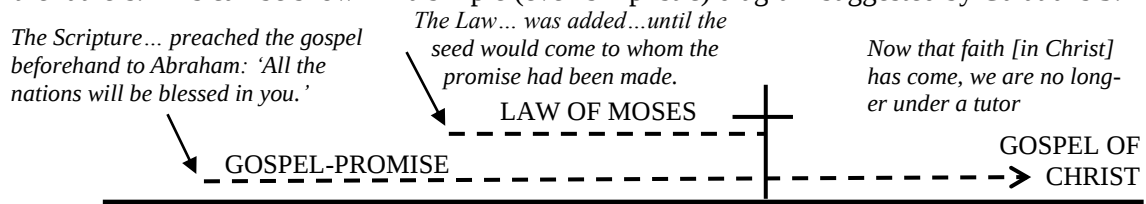
The problem of a Christian approach to the Hebrew Scriptures as Old Testament is closely paralleled by a similar problem [he uses a better word--'phenomenon'--further on in the same article] within the heart of Torah. When God reveals Himself to Moses as YHWH at the burning bush, this constitutes a new beginning in relation to the patriarchal knowledge of God in Genesis 12-50 comparable to the new beginning in Christ in relation to the Old Testament. The problem that the Old Testament poses to Christians—How do we use it when we know the one God differently, and Jesus relativizes Torah?—is the problem that the patriarchal traditions posed to the writers of the Pentateuch, for the patriarchal context is pre-Torah, and the patriarchs do not observe Torah; how then should those who obey Torah understand and use the patriarchal stories? The hermeneutical assumptions of promise and fulfillment and typology, which Christians have used to appropriate the Old Testament, were used by Mosaic Yahwistic writers of the Pentateuch to appropriate the patriarchal

traditions. It follows from this that the language of 'Old/New Testament' is christological and embodies basic Christian assumptions about a Christian relationship to Hebrew Scripture (the one God, truly revealed to Israel, known definitively in Christ). (Moberly 1999, 461)

Yet as it is important not to exaggerate the discontinuity between Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch (as argued on page 12) so it is wrong to overstate the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. There is in fact great continuity; together these writings form a striking unity when understood in the light of progressive revelation. The later sections of the Bible may be more complex and full, but they do not invalidate or replace the earlier ones. Rather they expand and deepen the same essential truths. Each stage of God's revelation builds on and reinforces the preceding ones. Comparison with the holy book of Islam, which claims to be the successor to the books of Moses, David and Jesus, shows that there is vastly more continuity between the testaments than either the OT or NT share with the Koran (let alone any other sacred writings).

B. The Promise and the Law

I suggest that the NT finds great continuity not only with the OT as a whole, but connects specifically with the patriarchal narratives. The era beginning with the giving of the Law functions as a sort of parenthesis in God's program, insofar as the NT is the picking up and fulfilling of the promises to the fathers. This can be shown in a simple (even simplistic) diagram suggested by Galatians 3:



As pointed out in the exposition of Exodus 19:16-25, the fiery appearance to the whole nation at Sinai, in contrast with the personal appearances of the Lord in the patriarchal era, sets out character of this introduction of the Law in a vivid way.

C. The final word

God appeared most frequently to his people at these crucial turning points in this program, at the calling of Abraham and his seed, and four hundred years later at the calling of Moses and the nation. Now once for all he has appeared in his Son to reconcile the world to himself and fulfill his eternal purposes for the restoration of all things. The living God is actively at work. If I may paraphrase Isaiah 9:7, the zeal of the God of Abraham will accomplish this!

The supreme religious value of the Old Testament is the way in which it presents God as the Living God, One who is dynamically alive and active in self-revelation, not simply the Prime Mover or Pure Actuality of certain schools of philosophy, nor yet merely the Self-Existent Being. He is that, of course, but He is much more. He is the God of creation, providence and redemption; He is the

God who makes Himself known in the mighty acts with which He breaks into the course of history. And this picture of God in the Old Testament prepares us for the supremely redemptive mighty act which He wrought in sending His Son into the world for our deliverance and in raising Him from the dead (Bruce 76 quoted in Walton, Covenant 155).

The appearances of God and his unique revelatory messenger is one of the most significant elements of this preparation and continuity. To one who has worked thoughtfully through these OT passages beginning with Abraham, the opening words of the letter to the Hebrews come as no surprise, but as a clear statement of the gracious final stage of the redemptive self-revelation of God:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb.1:1-3)

X. OUTLINE FOR A BOOK

In order to present this material to an average Turkish reader, in the form of a non-confrontational apologetic/evangelistic book inviting him or her to reconsider the identity of the God of Abraham, it will have to be simplified and restructured. After the introductory sections it should follow a more conversational, story-telling approach to communicate the narratives explored in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

- Importance of knowing God as he really is (emphasis on God wanting to be known)
- Common ideas about Abraham's God (note Abraham represented as anti-Trinitarian)

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AMONG OTHER GODS

- Is "El" the God of Abraham? (focus on Turkish Sumerologist Muazzez Hilmiye Çığ's work)
- Contrasts between Abraham's God and all others (pick up attributes that are in fact contrasting with Islam's Allah as well, while not making a direct issue of this)
- The God of Abraham and the God of Islam

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM IN THE SCRIPTURES

Here the approach will be to combine information from sections V and VI of this paper, taking the reader on a story-telling tour of God's appearances to "prophets" familiar to most Muslims (Moses, Abraham, etc. selected from section VI), and drawing out the issues noticed in section V such as the following:

- The God who appears to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (begin at Exo.3 and move back to Gen).
- The God who is also the "angel" of the Lord
- The God who promises
- The God who befriends those He justifies by faith

- The God who saves
- The God who makes covenants
- The God who comes to dwell among his people
- The Lord and Messenger who will come to his own temple (Mal.3:1)

JESUS AND ABRAHAM

- Jesus the son of Abraham and David
- Jesus' teaching about Abraham
- Jesus' appearance transformed
- Jesus: Before Abraham was I am (Jesus' arguments with Jews presenting himself as David's Son and David's Lord as well as the Son of Abraham and the God of Abraham).

THE INCARNATION: THE ULTIMATE APPEARANCE OF GOD

- The grand miracle
- No revelatory appearance of God to Jesus
- The "Visitation" of God
- Continuity themes (appearance language, image of invisible God, comments on pre-incarnate state, parallels between OT and NT, the angel of the Lord and the Son of God).
- Discontinuity themes (show the uniqueness of the Incarnation and the claim of the Gospel).

CONCLUSION – Who is the God of Abraham? Do you know him? Does he know you?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: The Documentary Hypothesis and the theophanies.

Using Driver's analysis of the Pentateuch as given by Oswald J. Allis (Allis 291–94) I put the supposed JEDP documents side by side in a table. Once the narrative records of God's "appearances" are placed alongside their references in the alleged documents in which they appear, it seems clear that this repeated phenomenon is not confined to any one of the alleged "sources." Robert Dick Wilson's detailed assessment, which I discovered after reaching my own conclusion, confirms this:

It is clear from the above evidence that the Deity is said in all the documents J, E, D, H, and P to have "appeared" and that the Niphal of *ra'ah*, "to see," the most common expression used to describe it, is found in all of them. (Wilson 33-34)

Though there are more occurrences in the so-called Jahwist (J) source, these appearances are also found in the sections called "Priestly" (P) and "Elohist" (E). For example, Genesis 17 is classified as a "P" document and 18:1 - 19:28 as a "J" document (according to Driver). Yet both sections begin with Yahweh "appearing" to Abram/Abraham. 18:1 says "*Yahweh appeared to him*", obviously referring to a previous section in the same document when "he" was referred to by name (notably as Abraham, not Abram).⁶⁵ Another comparison is the appearance of the angel of Yahweh/God to Hagar in Genesis 16:7-14 (supposedly belonging to "J") and in 21:9-21 (supposedly from "E"). These are clearly two separate but related occasions (in the first Hagar is expecting, while in the second Ishmael is at least 14 years old; in the first Hagar is told to return to her mistress Sarai, in the second she goes on into the desert). Yet tying the two events together are the appearances of the angel of Yahweh/God, whom Hagar believes to be one with God himself (16:13).

So the documentary hypothesis provides a very inadequate explanation of this particular phenomenon (or any other) which runs through all the alleged sources. To modify T.D. Alexander's illustration, rather than the source document "strands" being woven together so that each color appears and reappears, or at least dominates, from time to time, this theme (God's appearing) is one of the many reappearing "strands" that run through the entire Pentateuch, tying it together as one literary unit (Alexander 16-17).

⁶⁵ This detail is also noted by Ross: "That Abraham is not mentioned (cf. 17:1) suggests that this account builds on the previous one, in which Abraham was the subject" (Ross 341).

APPENDIX 2: Usage of the names of God (verses per book, from Bible Companion statistics)

	<i>El</i> [410]	<i>Elohim</i> [430]	<i>Yah- weh</i> [3068]	<i>Elohim [430] + Yahweh [3068]</i>	<i>Shaddai</i> [7706]	<i>El [410] + Shaddai</i> [7706]	<i>Adonai</i> [136]	<i>Adonai [136] + Yahweh [3068]</i>
Gen	13	189	143	32	6	6	7	2
Exo	6	109	338	49	1	1	5	0
Lev	0	47	273	37	0	0	0	0
Num	10	23	340	9	2	2	1	0
Deu	13	311	435	281	0	0	3	2
Jos	3	65	169	61	0	0	5	3
Jdg	0	61	134	22	0	0	4	0
Rut	0	3	15	1	2	0	0	0
1Sa	1	91	234	31	0	0	0	0
2Sa	5	48	124	23	0	0	6	5
1Ki	0	90	212	58	0	0	5	2
2Ki	0	83	227	39	0	0	2	0
1Ch	0	101	143	49	0	0	0	0
2Ch	0	165	306	107	0	0	0	0
Ezr	0	45	28	19	0	0	1	0
Neh	4	63	15	10	0	0	4	0
Est	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Job	55	17	23	5	31	13	1	0
Psa	73	324	626	80	2	0	61	12
Pro	0	5	87	2	0	0	0	0
Ecc	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	0
Son	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isa	21	85	391	56	1	0	52	29
Jer	2	128	619	100	0	0	13	12
Lam	1	0	29	0	0	0	13	0
Eze	4	33	396	11	2	1	214	208
Dan	2	19	7	5	0	0	9	1
Hos	3	23	38	10	0	0	1	0
Joe	0	10	26	8	1	0	0	0
Amo	0	14	72	9	0	0	24	21
Oba	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	1
Jon	1	14	21	5	0	0	0	0
Mic	2	9	36	8	0	0	2	2
Nah	1	1	10	1	0	0	0	0
Hab	0	2	10	2	0	0	1	1
Zep	0	5	25	5	0	0	1	1
Hag	0	2	24	2	0	0	0	0
Zec	0	11	102	9	0	0	4	1
Mal	2	7	38	3	0	0	2	1
TOTAL	222	2237	5721	1149	48	23	442	304

APPENDIX 3: “Abraham’s Yahwistic Faith” – summary by Allen Ross

1. First, God is alive – in contrast to the pagan deities.

God spoke to Abraham and his relatives (12:1-4; 13:14; 16:8-9; 21:12; etc.); he appeared to people (12:7; 15:1 [in a vision]; 18:1; 20:3 [in a dream to Abimelek]); he saw people in their needs (16:3); and he heard their cries (16:11; 21:17).

2. Second, God is the sovereign Lord.

Abraham knew that the Lord was the true Creator of the universe (14:22); that he raised up nations and made kings (17:6); that he could give the land to whomever he wished (13:15); that he brought plagues on people (12:17); that he judged nations for their sin (13:13; 15:14, 16; chaps. 18-19); and that he protected his covenant by preventing sin (20:6). God also protected his people like a shield (15:1) by delivering the enemies into their hands (14:20) and by providing for them in the wilderness (16:7; 21:19). God could provide life (17:16), and he could destroy it (18:23). All these activities demonstrated the power of the Lord as well, so aptly summarized in the Lord’s question, “Is anything too marvelous for the Lord?” (18:14).

3. Then, God is the righteous Judge

Abraham believed that the Lord was the Judge of the whole earth (18:25) and the God of heaven (24:7). He learned that the Lord was able to discern the heart, for he was omniscient (18:13, 15); he knew that God was just in his decisions (15:16; 18:25) and would spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous (18:26). He also knew that the punishment of sin was death (20:3, 7).

4. Fourth, God is gracious

The predominant theme through these chapters is that God graciously elected Abram to be his worshiper and made specific promises to him (12:1-3). These promises were for blessings for Abraham and his descendants (12:1-3; 15:4-5; 22:17). The promise of blessings also came through a priest (14:19), and their fulfillment was observed by pagans (21:22).

The essence of the relationship between God and Abraham is expressed in Genesis 15:6... The form of the grace of God was his covenant. Genesis 15:7-21 shows that the Lord graciously made a covenant with Abram and his descendants. He prescribed the ritual for its formation (15:9) and established its reliability by fulfilling (in part) its promises (17:7), proving himself to be their God (17:8). He prophesied the future history of his covenant people because he established destiny (15:13) in accordance with his plan to bless the world (12:3).

At the heart of the covenant promise was fertility—it came from the Lord and not pagan gods. The promise of God to multiply Abraham’s seed was repeated often to the patriarch (13:16; 15:5; 17:2). God would also multiply the seed of Hagar (16:10). Conversely, God could prevent childbirth (15:3) and close the womb (20:17-18).

God’s gracious dealings were also revealed in his providential intervention in the lives of his people. Notable is the coming of the Lord to eat Abraham’s meal (18:8) in order to reveal his plans... Later Abraham told his servant that the Lord would send his angel to lead him on the journey (24:7, 21, 27; see also 12:7).

5. Finally, God is faithful

Abraham ultimately knew that God was faithful in keeping his promises (12:7; 21:1-7). His faithfulness was also seen in (22:8) and in the preservation of Lot in accord with his word to Abraham (19:29). (Ross 730-31)

APPENDIX 4: List of appearances of God or The Angel of God considered in this study

Genesis 12:1-7.
 Genesis 15:1-21.
 Genesis 16:7-14.
 Genesis 17:1-22.
 Genesis 18:1-33.
 Genesis 21:14-21.
 Genesis 22:9-18.
 Genesis 26:2-5, 23-25.
 Genesis 28:11-17.
 Genesis 31:11-13.
 Genesis 32:24-32.
 Genesis 35:1-15.
 Genesis 48:1-16.
 Exodus 3:1 – 4:17.
 Exodus 6:1-8.
 Exodus 14:19.
 Exodus 16:10.
 Exodus 19:16-25.
 Exodus 23:20-23; 32:34-33:6; 33:12-16.
 Exodus 24:9-11.
 Exodus 24:15-18.
 Exodus 33:9-11.
 Exodus 33:12 – 4:7.
 Leviticus 9:4, 23.
 Leviticus 16:2.
 Numbers 11:25.
 Numbers 12:5-8.
 Numbers 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6.
 Numbers 14:13-19.
 Numbers 20:16.
 Numbers 22:9, 20; 23:4-5, 16.
 Numbers 22:22-35.
 Deuteronomy 4:11-12, 15, 33; 5:22-26.

Deuteronomy 31:15.
 Deuteronomy 33:2.
 Joshua 5:13 – 6:2.
 Judges 2:1-4.
 Judges 5:23.
 Judges 6:11-24.
 Judges 13:3-23.
 1 Samuel 3:10, 21.
 2 Samuel 14:17, 20; 19:27.
 2 Samuel 24:16-17; 1 Chronicles 21:10-30.
 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:9; 1 Chronicles 1:7; 7:12.
 1 Kings 19:9-14.
 1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Chronicles 18:18-22.
 2 Kings 1:3, 15.
 2 Kings 19:35 / Isaiah 37:36.
 2 Chronicles 3:1.
 Job 19:25-27.
 Psalm 34:7.
 Psalm 35:5-6.
 Psalm 102:13-16.
 Ecclesiastes 5:2, 6.
 Isaiah 6:1-13.
 Isaiah 40:5.
 Isaiah 60:2.
 Isaiah 63:9.
 Ezekiel 1:25-28; 8:1-6.
 Daniel 7:9-14)
 Hosea 12:3-4.
 Amos 9:1.
 Zechariah 1:10-12; 3:1-6.
 Zechariah 12:8.
 Zechariah 14:3-5.
 Malachi 3:1-5.
 (65 passages in total)

APPENDIX 5: Note on reconciling Exodus 6:2-3 with the use of Yahweh in Genesis

One attempt to reconcile Exodus 6:2-3 with the widespread use of Yahweh in Genesis has been the so-called “Documentary Hypothesis,” which starts by assessing the text as it stands as clearly self-contradictory (see Appendix 1). The conservative explanation (and my own preference) has generally argued that God was revealing to Moses for the first time the *significance* of the name YHWH, as stated by Walton:

The patriarchs had not benefited from a systematic revelation of the nature of Yahweh as was made available to the people of Israel at Sinai through the giving of the Law. That is what would be meant by not making himself known as Yahweh, for in Genesis it is clear that the name was familiar. God’s past promises to Abraham, his acts of deliverance from Egypt, and his eventual gift of the land -- all covenantal items -- are clarified and put into a revelatory perspective through the election of Israel and the covenant agreement at Sinai” (Walton, Covenant 34).

Robert Dick Wilson reached this same position on the basis of his detailed investigation of Exo.6:3:

On the basis of the investigation of the verse given above the writer would suggest the following renderings: And God spake unto Moses and said unto him; I am Jehovah and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob in the character of the God of Might (or, mighty God) and in the character of my name Jehovah did I not make myself known unto them. Or, if the last part of the verse is to be regarded as a question, the rendering should be: And in the character of my name Jehovah did I not make myself known unto them? Either of these suggested translations will bring this verse into harmony with the rest of the Pentateuch. Consequently, it is unfair and illogical to use a forced translation of Exodus 6:3 in support of a theory that would destroy the unity of authorship and the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch (Wilson, 40).

The latter suggestion that the phrase was really a rhetorical question has been made by others as well: “...rather, interrogatively, by My name Jehovah was I not known to them? Am not I, the Almighty God, who pledged My honor for the fulfillment of the covenant, also the self-existent God who lives to accomplish it?” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown). This syntactical solution has also been suggested by W. J. Martin (Wenham 187). The various approaches are well summarized by R.W.L. Moberly (Moberley 1992, 36–78). His own answer is yet another possibility, namely that “the use of the name YHWH in Genesis conveys the perspective of the storytellers who tell the originally non-Yahwistic patriarchal stories from within the context of Mosaic Yahwism. As the storytellers take for granted that YHWH the God of Israel is also the God of Abraham... [they] merge their own perspective with that of the stories they tell” (Moberley 1992, 36). I suspect that while there is truth in this position, it relies heavily on the unproven theory that Genesis is the product of later redactors who edited the narratives heavily. Nevertheless (as Dr. Richard Schultz pointed out in one of his corrective comments on this paper) one could say the same if Moses is the author, using previously composed written (or oral) accounts of the patriarchs.

APPENDIX 6: Additional NT teaching about Abraham.

The blessings of the gospel. This “*blessing of Abraham*” is shown by the NT apostles to encapsulate all the riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom.4:9; Gal.3:14) for all “*the descendents of Abraham*” (Heb.2:16-18). Willis J. Beecher summarized this sweeping truth this way

This biblical generalization of the matter may be thus formulated: God gave a promise to Abraham, and through him to all mankind; a promise eternally fulfilled and fulfilling in the history of Israel; and chiefly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, he being that which is principal in the history of Israel. (Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*. Quoted in Kaiser, 1978, 263)

The apostle Paul even goes so far as to say that the Scripture “*preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘all the nations will be blessed in you’*” (Gal.3:8). NT teaching sees hidden in God’s covenant relationship with Abraham the promised gift of the Holy Spirit through whom the blessings of Abraham come to the Gentiles (Gal.3:14), the hope of the resurrection and eternal life (Act.26:6-8; Heb.11:17-19), the doctrine of redemption for the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ (Mat.26:28; 1Co.11:25), and all else that comes to believers through Christ (Kaiser 265).

The God of all those who believe. Before possessing even a son, Abraham believed God when he promised to greatly multiply his descendents, and God counted or reckoned his faith to him as righteousness (Gen.15:6). This act of God is used in the New Testament to support the Christian doctrine known as “justification by faith.” The apostles, especially Paul, saw in this one verse the principle underlying all of God’s relationship with people – it is on the basis of faith in God’s promise, which finds its fulfillment in Christ (Rom.4:1-3; Gal.3:6-9). He is the God of *all* who believe his promises.

The God of only those who believe. God’s choice of Isaac rather than Ishmael, reveals the principle of that it is not physical descent that determines who belongs to God (Rom.9:7, quoting Gen.21:12). Spiritual inheritance or birthright is not based on physical birth, but on faith. So also Isaac’s son Jacob obtains the blessing of the firstborn rather than his older brother Esau. “*The inheritance was granted to Abraham by means of a promise... if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendents, heirs according to promise*” (Gal.3:18, 29). The apostle Paul sees the casting out of Ishmael, the son of Abraham’s bondwoman, to clear the way for Isaac, the son of the free woman, as an allegory contrasting the place of law and promise. It showed God’s intention to make his true people sons of the promise, not of the law. He is the God of *only* those who believe his promises. At the same time Abraham’s later obedience in offering his son is the vindication of his previous faith. Thus he is “*justified by works*” (Jam.2:21-23).

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