

God E9 Final

The Angel of the Lord

Podcast Date: September 17, 2018

(38:48)

Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

Scott

Jody

The Angel of the Lord

- Jon: We've been talking about the identity of God in the Bible, how God is not like anything we can know and understand.
- Tim: He's transcendent, above all, the creator, totally other.
- Jon: But at the same time, the story of the Bible is about how this God is involved in our world...
- Tim: And cares about it and has gotten His hands dirty in the storyline.
- Jon: And so, this seems to be at odds with each other. How can we experience a God that we can't understand? As it turns out...
- Tim: The Bible has a whole palette of paint colors to talk about how God is involved sometimes through people. Here we're going to see sometimes through other spiritual beings.
- Jon: In this episode, we're going to look at how God interacts with humans through angels. Now, we're not going to talk about angels in general, we're actually going to talk about one particular angel.
- Tim: That goes by a particular title in Hebrew. It's the "Malak Yahweh" - the Messenger of Yahweh.
- Jon: Which can also be translated "the angel of the Lord." This character has confused Bible readers for thousands of years. One reason this character is so confusing is that he is...
- Tim: So closely connected to God's own identity. In the narratives where this figure appears, it's hard to tell if it's Yahweh or distinct from Yahweh.
- Jon: What does that mean? How can you be something and also be distinct from that thing? It doesn't seem possible, but it's how stories of this character seem to work. Take, for example, the story of Hagar in Genesis. Hagar has a conversation with someone who by all appearances looks like a normal man.
- Tim: The narrator introduces the speaker as the angel of Yahweh, which you think it's the messenger representing Yahweh. But then she says who she just ran into. She just says, "Yahweh. I just had a conversation with Yahweh."
- Jon: Now these stories can feel jumbling, and confusing, and contradictory. Don't biblical authors realize this sounds ridiculous? Or maybe they're doing something quite profound.
- Tim: These authors were guided by God's Spirit to portray God in these very complex ways.
- Jon: This is The Bible Project podcast. I'm Jon Collins, and today we're going to look at stories about the angel of the Lord and wrestle with what this character means for God's complex identity. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

The Angel of the Lord

Okay. Today on this episode we're going to talk about angels. This is an ongoing series of conversations about God. We're at the point in the conversation where we're talking about how does God interact with the world, people in the world? In the last two episodes, we talked about how God uses human mediators, we talked a lot about Moses, and we talked a little bit about the suffering servant. In this conversation, we're going to talk about angels. Angelos.

Tim: In the big umbrella, we're exploring the complex portrait in the Bible of how God relates to the world and how God acts and carries out purposes, plans and activities in the world.

Jon: Tim, who's your favorite angel?

Tim: If I knew baseball, I would say a baseball player.

Jon: A baseball player?

Tim: Isn't there a baseball team?

Jon: Yeah, The Angels. I don't watch baseball.

Tim: Sorry. Sorry, guys, and gals. So we've been looking at human agents that God uses where the Bible would show a human doing something and then say, "That's God doing that?" because it's a human functioning as God's agent.

Jon: And that conversation about Moses was really impactful for me. I just never heard that explained that way of Moses embodying the image of God. So if you're listening this and you haven't listened to those two episodes, I highly recommend it. It will tee up why we're talking about angels.

I think I told you I got shivers down my spine at one point when we're talking about Moses.

Tim: Yes, you did.

Jon: I was just like, "Whoa, this is cool."

Tim: It is cool. The big umbrella is the biblical authors want to both say about the God of the Bible, Yahweh the supreme Elohim, that He's transcendent, above all, the creator, and ruler, totally other than any created thing. But at the same time, this God is intimately involved with the story of this world and cares about it, and has gotten His hands, so to speak, dirty in the storyline.

For some people, those two are intention with each other. And the Bible has a whole palette of paint colors to talk about how God is involved, sometimes through people. Here we're going to see sometimes through other spiritual beings who are sometimes called Elohim, sometimes they're called in Hebrew "malachim," "messengers," or in Greek, they're called angelos, which is also just the word for messenger. But interestingly, that Greek word angelos got carried into English, not translated but just spelled with English letters. And that's where we got the word

The Angel of the Lord

"angel." So angel is actually not an English word. It's a Greek word spelled with English letters.

There you go. We're going to talk about the portrait of the angel of Yahweh, the angel of the Lord, who's the main focus but is broader category of angels.

Jon: We talked before about how in the biblical framework of spiritual beings there's Yahweh who is supreme, and then there's his heavenly host.

Tim: That goes by different names. It goes by "the army of the skies," "the host of heaven." Literally just the armies of the skies.

Jon: Walk around church and start talking about the armies of the skies, and see how people—

Tim: You are like, "What? It's in the Bible." They are also called...

Jon: Sons of God.

Tim: Sons of Elohim.

Jon: And sons of Elohim and sons of the Elohim (plural). What else was there?

Tim: Holy ones.

Jon: The holy ones.

Tim: Yeah. The council of the holy ones. That's in Psalm 89. Book of Daniel, they are referred to three times as the watchers.

Jon: The watchers

Tim: The watchers.

Jon: And that has a whole thing, right?

Tim: Yeah. And then that term has an afterlife in later Jewish texts in the Second Temple period. Later non-biblical authors, Jewish authors who want to explore and speculate about the makeup of the Divine Council and their names and the hierarchies of angels and call them the watchers. And then I think that made it into the Noah movie.

Jon: Oh, I never saw the Noah movie.

Tim: Darren Aronofsky, pretty sure.

Jon: I know it was a lot about the whole sons of God.

Tim: Yeah. Mostly that movie was based off of later Jewish literature that was speculating about older biblical stories.

The Angel of the Lord

[00:07:52]

Tim: So, angels. The word both in Hebrew and Greek simply means messenger. And we know this because there are as many humans in the Old and New Testaments called angels.

Jon: Angels, messengers, because they're acting as messenger.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. In fact, there's a book of the Bible where a prophet is called by this Hebrew word. This is the book of Malachi. Malachi is just the Hebrew word for angel. Mal'achi - my angel, my messenger. His name means "my messenger."

Jon: Okay. So the reason why we refer to them as angels instead of sons of God or Elohim—

Tim: It's the dominant term in the New Testament.

Jon: It's the dominant term in the New Testament.

Tim: Yeah. It's not the dominant term in the Hebrew Bible. There's a variety of terms. No one term is used more than another. But in the New Testament, the Greek word *angelos*.

Jon: Keep it simple.

Tim: Basically, they do we talked about a few episodes ago in the Divine Council. They are God's Emissaries, His messengers, delegated authorities to go do stuff. Usually, carry messengers.

Jon: And do they have wings?

Tim: No. There are no winged angels called "angelos" or "Malak" in the Bible. There are winged creatures in the Bible.

Jon: Seraphim?

Tim: Yeah, but they're not humanoid. They're multiform. There might be a human hand or foot in there, but there's no winged human angels.

Jon: How did we get that in the popular imagination?

Tim: Yeah, exactly. I should do some research about that.

Jon: Well, I mean, if they're going to fly around, they need wings.

Tim: Right, but they're not depicted as flying. They just appear.

Jon: They just appear. Yeah.

Tim: They just appear. Sometimes they appear and people think that they're just humans. So if anything, they look like normal humans. But they can appear—

The Angel of the Lord

Jon: Sometimes they're glowing.

Tim: One like in Luke, in the famous Shepherd scene in Luke, one is in the sky and then behind him is an army of heaven, the host of heaven announcing the birth of the Messiah. But there's no explicit depiction of wings on any of these beings. Isn't that interesting?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Anyway. I'm working hard anytime we come across a children's book with my boys—

Jon: Just to let them know that's not the Bible.

Tim: It's not the deal.

Jon: You can't take the wings from the angels, man. That's just like...

Tim: It's like saying there's no Santa.

Jon: Just the feathered wings.

Tim: However, here's something that's interesting. There is one particular messenger, spiritual messenger being that goes by a particular title. In Hebrew, it's the Malak Yahweh - the messenger of Yahweh. That figure appears in the New Testament. The angelos of the Lord, the angel of the Lord. This seems to be a particular Elohim or a particular spiritual being who is so closely connected to Yahweh's own identity. He's the angel of Yahweh. In the narratives where this figure appears, it actually, it's hard to tell if it's Yahweh or distinct from Yahweh.

For example, one of the first stories where this figure appears is in Genesis 16, the story of Hagar the Egyptian slave that got abused by Abraham and Sarah. And so, she's run out of the house, she runs away, she's out in the wilderness, and the angel of Yahweh found her by a spring water. He starts having conversation with her. "Hagar, what are you doing out here?" "Well, I'm Sarah's maidservant and she's being lame. I'm fleeing. I'm running from her."

So he has this whole conversation where he is like, "You're pregnant with Abraham's child now. I'm going to bless the child. I'm going to protect you. I'm with you. Go back. I'm with you. I got you." Her response to this conversation is, "Then she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, - and then she names God - "You are a God who sees (or in Hebrew El Roi)," for she said, "I've remained alive even after seeing him." There you go.

Jon: So she conflates the angel of Yahweh with Yahweh himself.

Tim: Exactly, yeah. The narrator introduces this figure as the angel of Yahweh, which you think it's the messenger representing Yahweh. But then when she says who she just ran into, she just says, Yahweh. I just had a conversation with Yahweh."

Jon: Could they not just decide which character they want to put in there?

The Angel of the Lord

Tim: Well, it's fascinating. There's been multiple explanations. For some people in earlier phase of biblical scholarship, when people were really interested in the composite nature of biblical texts, many - and this is true - many of biblical stories and books and poems are themselves are quilts of preexisting materials that have been brought together and composed and sewn together, so to speak. So that's true, very demonstrable in many cases.

So some people thought that these different titles were...

Jon: Came from different traditions.

Tim: ...were signs of the literary seams of different sources.

Tim: The problem is that—

Jon: When seam stretch, eventually, you iron it out.

Tim: Totally. I mean, you have to say, "Okay, the seamstress was not capable of producing a coherent text, adapting the name so that it would be the same character, which I suppose that's possible theory. But hardly any two scholars have come up with the same theories about what the original quote pieces were becomes really speculative. They are composite, but people debate on where the seams are.

And then we're just sidestepping the question of, is there something intentional happening here? And I've come to the conviction that like 8 times out of 10, there's something intentional literarily. As the portrait of this angel of Yahweh character keeps going on, you see the same pattern in all the stories, that this angel is Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh. And somehow for the authors, these stories, they're not just—

Jon: That's important for them.

Tim: Yeah. They keep developing this.

Jon: Yeah. Which is a weird thing to be like, "Oh, this is important." Where does this come from?

Tim: Let's keep going.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: In the first sets of commandments that Israelites get at Mount Sinai in Exodus 23, near the end of the first major block of laws, God says, "Hey, I'm going to send you guys into the promised land." This is Exodus 23:20. "And Yahweh said, 'Behold, I'm going to send an angel, a Malak, a messenger before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place that I've prepared.'"

So in all these other places, God Yahweh himself said he would do that. Now he says, "I'm going to send an angel." "Watch yourself before him, obey His voice." Which is normally something you always would say about "obey my voice." "Obey

The Angel of the Lord

his voice, don't rebel against him because he's got a high bar. He won't pardon you because my name is in him."

Jon: What does that mean?

Tim: We'll talk about the name. But somehow the name is one of these attributes of God that begins to take on a distinct life. Because you call upon the name of the Lord, you can be delivered by the name of the Lord in the Psalms. So what's the name? Yahweh.

So something Yahweh's name is so utterly unique among all names. It's like God can take His stamp, his uniqueness, can become a metaphorically spoken of as a thing that you put in him.

Jon: My name is in him.

Tim: My name is in him. Look at the logic. The logic is—

Jon: That's not like a normal turn of phrase in Hebrew?

Tim: No, no. This is not normal. This is set of no other. "My name is not in Moses." God never says that.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Moses speaks in the Name of Yahweh. The prophets speak in the name—

Jon: But one ever has someone's name in them? God's name or someone else name?

Tim: It's a very unique turn of phrase.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: When God says, "My name is in this angel," it's connected to this angel being described in ways that elsewhere are described of Yahweh himself. Obey his voice.

Jon: His ability to pardon.

Tim: Yeah. "He will bring you into the promised land, He will lead you through the wilderness." You're like, "Oh, I thought it was Yahweh leading with the tabernacle on the pillar of cloud and fire."

Jon: Couldn't he just being rhetorical about how important this angel is that you're going to follow?

Tim: Yeah, that is possible. But there aren't any other traditions in the Torah about an angel being the one leading them. It's the Ark of the Covenant symbolically representing God's glory, and the fire and the cloud. So that's another interesting thing. What would, whatever, Jeremiah, Esther, and Israelites see as they're wandering through the wilderness? They would see the fire in the cloud. That's how

The Angel of the Lord

the narrative presents it. And that's a tangible thing. So we're back to this balance beam.

So is that fire and cloud Yahweh? No, but also yes. You can't reduce Yahweh to that fire and cloud because he dwells above the heavens and he's everywhere. But in another sense, that is him. There you go.

[00:17:46]

Tim: Here. Let me show you one last story because this one will spin your brain.

Jon: All right.

Tim: This is from the story of Gideon. Actually, I printed it out for you. I put all the keywords in bold. Why don't you read it?

Jon: Okay.

Tim: When you come to these titles for who's acting or talking, just pay attention to it.

Jon: So judges 6:11. "Then the angel of Yahweh came and sat down under the oak that was in Ophrah which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in a winepress in order to save it from the Midianites. The angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said, "Yahweh is with you, O valiant warrior."

Tim: Stop right there. The angel of Yahweh appeared and said, "Yahweh is with you?"

Jon: Yeah, Yahweh is on your side.

Tim: So based off of the earlier stories, when it seems like the angel of Yahweh is Yahweh, why doesn't the angel say, "I am with you"? That's interesting. So the narrative is clearly presenting the angel of Yahweh, at least at this point, as distinct. It's talking about Yahweh in the third person.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Angel of Yahweh come..." And that makes sense. A messenger from Yahweh. Yahweh is with you.

Jon: Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now Yahweh has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." Yahweh looked at him and said—

Tim: Have you ever noticed this before?

Jon: No. "Yahweh looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" He said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in

The Angel of the Lord

my father's house." But Yahweh said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

Tim: "I will be with you." So notice this conversation with this character began, "The Angel of Yahweh appeared. Yahweh is with you."

Jon: Couldn't you just say like, "Well, this is an example of the Bible just being full of errors. It's just some silly bug."

Tim: Okay, that's one explanation. So the question is, is that a probable explanation? Is that explanation more probable than these literary ninjas and they know exactly what they're doing?

Jon: So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me. "Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And He said, "I will remain until you return." Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them."

Tim: Such a strange story.

Jon: "The angel of God—

Tim: Of Elohim.

Jon: Oh, the Angel of Elohim?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So it's not the angel of Yahweh anymore? It's the angel of Elohim?

Tim: At least in this, yeah, the angel of Elohim.

Jon: "He said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD, the angle of the Yahweh, put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight."

Tim: So we have angel of Yahweh shows up, "Yahweh's with you." And then—

Jon: Yeah, it's bouncing around.

Tim: And Gideon says, "Wait, Yahweh has abandoned us." The next line is "Then Yahweh looked at him."

Jon: Also he's talking with Yahweh, and then he leaves, he gets these snacks and then comes with the offering. And he comes back and the angle of Elohim is there.

The Angel of the Lord

- Tim: He comes back and the angel of Elohim.
- Jon: That's right. Yahweh said, "I'll stick around."
- Tim: Yeah. Yahweh said he'll stick around.
- Jon: He goes back and it's the angel of Elohim.
- Tim: Yeah.
- Jon: And then he's referred to as the angel of Yahweh.
- Tim: Then the fire on the rock.
- Jon: And then the angel of Yahweh vanishes.
- Tim: So the angel of Yahweh is gone. All right. Keep reading.
- Jon: "When Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh" ... But he knew the whole time, right? No, he does not. Suddenly he's realizing that that was the angel of Yahweh. When Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, he said, "Alas, O Yahweh! Elohim! For now, I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face." Yahweh said to him, "Peace to you, do not worry." He's like saying from the sky or something? "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die." Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it Yahweh is Peace.
- Tim: Yahweh is Shalom. What on earth?
- Jon: So the angel of the Lord appears, Gideon doesn't realize it's the angel of the Lord; he just thinks it's some dude.
- Tim: Yeah. Well, because the angel says, "Think, some human walks up to Gideon.
- Jon: Some human-like person.
- Tim: A human walks up to Gideon—
- Jon: Under the oak that was in Ophrah.
- Tim: Yes. And says, "Yahweh is with you." And he's like, "What?"
- Jon: Yeah. "If Yahweh is with us, then why are we hiding from Midianites and making our bread in secret and they're taking advantage of us? Why doesn't he take care of us like the stories I've been told?
- Tim: Exactly. And then the narrator says, "Yahweh looked at him."
- Jon: The narrator said, "Yahweh looked at him." But he still doesn't realize it's Yahweh."
- Tim: Apparently. "Go deliver the people." And he, Gideon said to him...So we're not told yet—

The Angel of the Lord

Jon: So when Gideon thinks he's going to go make this offering, he doesn't know he's transacting with Yahweh himself.

Tim: Well, he says, "Show me a sign that it's you speaking with me."

Jon: Oh, yeah. What does that mean?

Tim: So, he begins to get a hunch. And is it a hunch that I'm speaking to a divine messenger? So he goes and does this stuff. He's making this figure prove...

Jon: That he is a messenger.

Tim: ...which fits in perfectly with Gideon character. So he comes back and then fire consumes all the stuff on the rock, then gone. Then Gideon—

Jon: He's like, "Whoa, that was the angel of Yahweh."

Tim: Yeah, but that's the end of the story. The Angel of Yahweh, just the human was there speaking to him disappears, and Gideon's like, "Oh." And what he says is, "Alas! Oh, Yahweh, God, I've seen the angel of Yahweh." Then Yahweh said to him, "It's okay, you're not going to die."

So apparently, the angel of Yahweh is a human figure who can appear and disappear and is distinct in the narrative from Yahweh.

Jon: But not really.

Tim: But not really because earlier when that angel was on the scene, sometimes it's the angel of Yahweh.

Jon: You don't want to say he's not distinct from Yahweh. There's such a blurring.

Tim: Totally. Exactly. But there is some kind of distinction because the angel of Yahweh in the story can peace out, vanish...

Jon: But Yahweh is still there.

Tim: But apparently Yahweh is still there talking to him afterwards. What is happening? I'm just showing you the story. And the same experience you're having is the same experience hundreds of thousands of people have had for 2000 years. Are you with me? But it's right there. So you can either say, "This author has no clue. This is just a jumble."

Jon: It does seem like a jumble in a way. It kind of reads like someone who has such short term memory, they don't remember what part of the story they are in. They're just going with it anyway.

Tim: Yeah. You know, I've come to a place it's so clear to me that these biblical authors, there's no word that is unintentional. This is just one piece of a much larger pattern connected to physical beings, human beings that appear, and they are called here the angel of Yahweh, but then they become indistinguishable from Yahweh. The

The Angel of the Lord

biblical authors seem to want us to foster that idea. This is a human figure who can appear and disappear, and is Yahweh but it's also distinct from Yahweh.

There's only one other messenger, angel figure, who could fit the bill. It's the one described in Exodus 23. "My name is in him." I'm just saying these texts - there's many more as you go through - but once again, they're creating a shelf in your brain for it's not a human, it's an Elohim. Right? It's a messenger. It's an angelic messenger that appears to look like a human and is distinct from Yahweh. But then in other parts of the story, that same figure is Yahweh.

[00:27:11]

Tim: These texts create a huge conversation that goes back thousands of years. And what you see in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period is there are many different suggestions for who this figure is. This figure is given names. Some people think it's Mikha'el - Michael. In later Jewish literature—

Jon: Because that name means "My name is El."

Tim: Who is like El.

Jon: Who is like El.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So Michael, archangel.

Jon: What does that mean, the archangel?

Tim: A chief angel. A chief angel who isn't just Yahweh but is so—

Jon: He's up the pecking order.

Tim: He's the top of the Elohim.

Jon: He's the chief of staff.

Tim: Yeah, chief of staff. He's not commander in chief. That's a conception. So there are many Jewish scholars and they wrote books. There's a Second Temple text called the "Apocalypse of Abraham." It creates a whole bunch of visions and poems that Abraham sees when he's sleeping, when he falls asleep in the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15. This is a very Jewish way of generating commentary on the Bible. But they do that by retelling biblical stories and inserting their own reflections on the scriptures into the characters' minds and speeches. It's actually a lot like modern movies about the Bible. They're not just repeating the Bible; they insert lots of new dialogue.

Jon: Like which movie are you thinking about?

Tim: Oh, well, like Noah. It's a good example.

Jon: Oh, okay.

The Angel of the Lord

- Tim: Or like the Exodus Movie. There are some like Jesus movies that just—
- Jon: Stick to the script.
- Tim: But there have been others that try and develop the story more. So those are modern versions, they're doing the same thing. Children's books do this all the time. In that text, "Apocalypse of Abraham" this angel is called Yahoel. It combines Yahweh and El into a figure called Yahoel. In later Jewish literature, this figure is called Metatron.
- Jon: Metatron?
- Tim: Yeah. It's a Greek word spelled with Hebrew letters. I'm not joking.
- Jon: It sounds like a transformer.
- Tim: It's awesome. It's called Metatron. The chief Angel.
- Jon: Wait, I thought Mikha'el was a chief angel.
- Tim: Yeah, for some Jewish people who wrote text. But other Jewish people who wrote texts called it Metatron.
- Jon: Got it. Got it.
- Tim: Then my favorite, there's the Dead Sea scroll that thinks it's Melchizedek.
- Jon: Which was an actual dude. A human.
- Tim: Yeah, the human, but they think that actually, he was an angel appearing as a human to Abraham. Actually, it calls him the chief angel who's going to mediate God's judgment and destroy the wicked in the final battle and so on. All that to say is these texts generated a huge amount of conversation throughout Jewish history.
- Jon: What's like a typical evangelical or protestant...?
- Tim: Tim: Somewhere in the second century in the writings of the early church fathers, they pick this up and they assigned it to pre-incarnation Jesus. This is Jesus appearing pre-incarnation. Again, I want to get the horse in front of the cart.
- Jon: Because we haven't met Jesus yet.
- Tim: So we haven't got in our conversation about Jesus yet but I'm just saying, once again, just like Moses creates a shelf for a human who became so merged with God, he begins to take on attributes of God, here it's like the other direction. It's an Elohim, a spiritual being that is so represents Yahweh but is also appears as a human. You're right. It's like that but from the other side. So it's creating shelf space in our minds for a creature that is Yahweh but is distinct from Yahweh at the same time.

The Angel of the Lord

These authors were guided by God's Spirit to portray God in these very complex ways.

Jon: Very complex.

Tim: Yeah. In these ways, approach boundary lines that make exclusive monotheistic, a bit twitchy, these modern monotheists.

Jon: So there isn't character the angel of Yahweh. And when you say, "Angel of Yahweh," you should be picturing a human figure. In the story of the burning bush, it's a flaming human figure. That's pretty intense.

Tim: Yeah. He says he's going to look at why the bushes not burned up and then what he ends up seeing is a human figure in there. Which is a lot like what people see in the story of Daniel and the friends - fiery furnace.

Jon: That's right. And then other times the angel of Yahweh, like in Genesis, was just hanging out by a spring of water in the wilderness. We don't know what he looks like there. But Hagar is talking with him. We never know if Hagar realizes...

Tim: No, because what she says is, "Then she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, 'You're a God who sees.'" Then she said, 'Holy cow. I'm still alive. That was Yahweh.'

Jon: She realized it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's the reaction when people realized they were around Yahweh, they're like, "Why am I not dead?"

Tim: Yeah. It's not like, "Happy, go have a cup of coffee with Yahweh." It's like, "Holy cow." There you go.

And then you have that description we looked at where Yahweh says, "Hey, I'm going to appoint an angel" - and you're like, "Oh, yeah, another Elohim - to guide you through the wilderness. "Wait, I thought you're going to do that personally." "Yeah, my name is in him."

Jon: So there's this character, the Angel of Yahweh, in which it is distinct from Yahweh because it is the angel of Yahweh, this spiritual being that appears as a human who is not Yahweh, or distinct from Yahweh.

Tim: Yeah, distinct from Yahweh. And that's the point. He is Yahweh, but also at the same time, somehow, in some way distinct.

Jon: And in which ways, just to be very clear? In which ways distinct?

Tim: Just by the calling of Angel of Yahweh. Angel representing Yahweh.

Jon: It's not like Yahweh in disguise calling themselves the messenger?

The Angel of the Lord

Tim: That's possible. That's possible. But it seems like there's something the stories is saying when this human figure appears. This human being isn't the sum total of Yahweh's identity. Yahweh is still greater and above all. This is a localized expression of Yahweh, but it's not all that Yahweh is. So it's Yahweh and it's distinct from Yahweh.

Jon: I'm tracking. I'm tracking, finally.

Tim: Over the years, I've chosen really carefully to stick to certain language when I talk about these things because this is the area that's right for misunderstanding. And you can see why it's not easy to sort out. Okay, so that's the angel of Yahweh figure.

Once again, as we're laying the groundwork, what we're going to see is that the New Testament authors are going to draw upon the shelf space of a figure, the language and ideas about a figure that is Yahweh, but is a human figure who is also distinct from Yahweh. I mean, just see where this is going. And so, this is another set of images and ideas from the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: Already in the Old Testament you have a category of the one God, Yahweh, having a manifestation of himself that is in some way distinct from Yahweh, called the angel of the Lord.

Tim: But in essence is always Yahweh.

Jon: But who in essence is Yahweh. I see what's happening here, Tim. I get it. Like the language of Trinity or the paradigm of Trinity in that there can be one God who appears in different persons, that isn't just something that all sudden later the apostles were like, "Maybe this is it. Let's kind of run with this." It's something that they saw in the Hebrew Bible. And so when they had to try to come to grips with what Jesus really was, they realized, "Oh, well, it's already here."

Tim: That's right. Not fully baked and not fully...Again, it's always going to be the appropriate categories from the Hebrew Bible, and then make a layer of claim and meaning that breaks or over exceeds those earlier categories too. But this one comes the closest I think, to giving you a framework for one and more than one at the same time.

Jon: And then is there any evidence that the apostles thought the angel of Yahweh was Jesus?

Tim: What you have is texts where the apostles will quote from the Hebrew Bible texts, passages in the Old Testament, sometimes Yahweh, sometimes the angel of Yahweh. And they'll use the word Lord in Greek, but it's clear in the context, they're using that word to refer to Jesus.

So Jesus, all of a sudden, starts being the one that all of these Old Testament Yahweh texts refer to. And sometimes it's Yahweh and sometimes angel of Yahweh. And you kind of have to just sort through them and you go through them.

The thing is, the New Testament authors were really concerned actually to make clear to their Jewish contemporaries that they didn't think Jesus was an angel and

The Angel of the Lord

they didn't think Jesus even was an exalted archangel. The book of Hebrews comes out of the gate swinging on that one. It strikes modern readers as, "Okay, Jesus is more powerful than angels." Oh, cool. But right in the Second Temple period, this was a major, major conversation going on. Because saying Jesus was an exalted angel would be comfortable. It would fit.

Jon: You'd be like, "Okay, you're just another Jewish sect that like you got an angel..."

Tim: You're an important angel or you think his name is Jesus? We think his name is Metatron." Those cooks down at the Dead Sea think he's Melchizedek.

Jon: "Let's all agree to disagree."

Tim: That's right. But then the moment you begin saying, "No, Jesus is the angel of Yahweh, he's Yahweh, then you've stepped the boundary line."

Jon: Thank you for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. The Bible Project is a nonprofit in Portland, Oregon. This episode was edited and produced by Dan Gummel and today's music was made special by Tae the Producer.

We have a whole library of videos, books of the Bible, themes of the Bible, a series on how to read the Bible, series on word studies of Hebrew and Greek words. They're all for free. You can find them at our website, thebibleproject.com. We're a crowdfunded project by thousands of people just like you. So thanks for being a part of this with us.

Scott: Hey, this is Scott.

Jody: And I'm his sister Jody.

Scott: We're from Nova Scotia, Canada, and we're just here visiting the Bible project and we just love the resources so much. Right, Jod?

Jody: Yeah, totally. We believe the Bible is a unified story and it leads to Jesus. The Bible Project is crowdfunding by people like us, and you can find free videos, study notes and more at thebibleproject.com.

Scott: Thanks