

Who is the Angel of the Lord in Exodus 3.2 in the Burning Bush Narrative?

The Biblical Texts:

Exodus 3:2-4 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Cf. Acts 7:30-34 where the interchange of the Angel of the Lord and God appears.

Explanation:

The context of Exodus 3 is Moses who was pasturing the flock in Egypt near the Mt. Sinai area (Ex 3:1). He came to Horeb — the mountain of God (Mt Sinai) (3:1b). When he came to this area, "the angel of the LORD" appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush (3:2).

Intrigued by this, Moses wanted to see this "marvelous sight" (3:3). The text then says that when the LORD (*Yahweh*) saw that Moses turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush (3:4). In fact, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the bush and then just a few verses later the voice says "do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (3:5). And even more explicitly, the voice comes from the bush and says: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:6). Humbled and in awe, Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God (3:6).

Because of the interchange of terms for the *One who spoke with Moses from the midst of the bush*, it seems abundantly clear that Moses (the author of this text) believed that "The Angel of the LORD" was none other than God Himself (esp. Compare Ex 3:2 and Ex 3:4, 6).

As one writer summarized it: "likewise in Exodus 3:2-6 the phrase 'the angel of the LORD' is used interchangeably with 'the LORD.' In fact the angel claims, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' (Ex 3:6)" (Walt Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*).

Even Acts 7:30-34 uses the same language as the Exodus account as Luke (the author of Acts) says that "An Angel appeared to Moses in the wilderness" (7:30) and then when Moses saw it he marveled and heard from the midst of the bush: "I am the God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (7:32). Note this important and very clear parallel. In Acts 7:30 "an angel" appeared to Moses. In Acts 7:33 it was "the LORD" talking with him. The text seems to equate the angel of the Lord with the LORD here (just as it occurs in the Exodus 3 text).

An interesting cross reference also found in this same book is Exodus 23:20-23. Here, God reveals that he sends "My angel" ahead of the people of Israel as they travel through the

wilderness. But amazingly, God says concerning “the angel” that “My Name is in him” (23:21). When God speaks of His Name it refers to His character, His essence, His attributes, His being. Thus, all that God is is found in this angel. Israel must obey this angel and not rebel against him. Again, Walt Kaiser writes: “God would never share his memorial name with anyone else, for Isaiah 42:8 advised that he would never share his glory with another. Thus the name of God stands for himself. And when a person is said to have the name of God in him, that person is God!”

Walt Kaiser notes the following in his book on *Hard Sayings of the Bible*:

“This “Angel of the LORD” in the Old Testament amazingly reveals qualities that only God possesses. He has amazing authority and capabilities.

For instance, He has the power to give life (Gen 16:10) and to see and know all (Gen 16:13; Ex 3:7). Only God can forgive sin, yet this angel did the same in Exodus 23:21. The angel performed miracles such as keeping a burning bush from being consumed (Ex 3:2), smiting Egypt with plagues (Ex 3:20), calling forth fire on the rock to consume the meal set for him (Judg 6:21) and ascending the flame of the altar (Judg 13:20).

Finally, this angel commanded and received worship from Moses (Ex 3:5) and Joshua (Josh 5:14). Angels were not to receive worship. When John attempted to worship an angel in Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9, he was corrected quickly and told not to do it.

We thus can conclude that the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was a preincarnate form of our Lord Jesus Christ, who would later permanently take on flesh when he came as a babe in Bethlehem. But mark it well: the one who came after John had already been before--he was that angel of the Lord. His full deity was always observed and yet he presented the same mystery of the Trinity that would later be observed in "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30) and "my other witness is the Father, who sent me" (Jn 8:18). It is that word sent that ties together the angel, messenger or sent one into an Old Testament theology of Christophanies, appearances of God in human form.”

Other texts that relate The Angel of the LORD with God (thus speaking of a “Christophany”) include Genesis 16:7; Judges 6:22-23; and Judges 13:15-22.

Bibliography:

Walter Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*: <http://www.ivpress.com/title/exc/1423-8c.php> (more details & Scriptures here that may be of help!)