

Angel of the LORD

The name “Angel of the LORD” or its equivalent appears a number of times in the Old Testament. The contexts in which it is found make clear this “Angel” is the Second Person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his pre-Incarnate interactions with men. Below are some references and a few comments on each.

Genesis 16:6-16 – This is the first mention of the angel of the Lord in scripture. As an interpretive rule, first mentions have spiritual significance. In this context, the Angel appears to Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid of Sarai, Abraham's wife. Thrust of this text: Christ sees the plight of outcasts, and has compassion on them.

Genesis 22:11-18 – In this second mention, the Angel withholds Abraham's hand as he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac. In addition, the Angel reiterates his promise to bless Abraham and his seed.

Exodus 3:1-10 – This is perhaps the most well-known appearance of the angel of the LORD as he makes himself known to Moses and calls him to lead Israel out of Egypt. The angel self-identifies as the “LORD” and removes all doubt as to WHO he is. The Christ who inhabited that thorny bramble on the backside of Sinai's desert is the same Christ who now inhabits every born-again believer in the Church Age.

Numbers 22:21-35 – As Israel moved into the land of Moab prior to entry into the Promised Land, the princes of Moab recruited Balaam the prophet to curse them. The angel of LORD stood in the way of Balaam riding on his donkey. The Angel made himself visible to the donkey, but not immediately to Balaam. While the donkey sought to sidestep the Angel, Balaam got angry with his donkey. When the Angel finally opened Balaam's eyes, he saw the Angel with a sword in his hand and acknowledged his sin.

Judges 6:11-22 – After seven years of bullying by the Midianites, Israel cries out to the Lord for relief. The angel of the LORD appears to Gideon, calls him a “mighty man of valour” and assures him he will deliver Israel. The Angel gives him three signs to validate his promise—a fire from heaven that consumed his flesh and unleavened cakes offering, a wet fleece on dry ground and a dry fleece on wet ground.

Judges 13:1-21 – After forty years of harassment by the Philistines, the angel of the LORD appears to Manoah and his barren wife to announce a coming son, a Naranite (Samson). As with Gideon, the Angel consumed their offering with fire and ascended in the fire back to heaven. When Manoah asked his name, the Angel told him it was “secret” (13:18). The Hebrew word “secret” means “wonderful, incomprehensible, extraordinary.” Compare with Isaiah 9:6: “his name shall be called *Wonderful*” (same Hebrew root).

2 Samuel 24 – The angel of the LORD killed seventy thousand Israelites from Dan to Beersheba in response to David numbering the people of Israel. In this text, God the Father and God the Son are seen working in tandem.

1 Kings 19:1ff – After the prophet Elijah fled from Jezebel, he found a juniper tree in the wilderness under which he could rest. He told the LORD to take his life lest Jezebel should take it first and went to sleep. While he was napping, the angel of the LORD (19:7) fixed him cakes and water. It fueled his body for forty days.

See 2 Kings 1:1-15, 1 Chronicles 21 – Encounters with the angel of the LORD by Elijah and a recap of 2 Samuel 24 concerning David and the numbering of Israel.

Psalms – The angel of the LORD encamps around and delivers those who fear him (34:7). As David thought on those who fought against him and devised hurt against him, he prayed the angel of the LORD would chase them as the wind chases the chaff (35:5), and persecute them in their dark and slippery ways (35:6).

Isaiah 37:36 – Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had threatened Israel and deployed his army to surround the city of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah entreated God for Israel and deliverance. The angel of the LORD overnight destroyed 185,000 of Sennacherib's soldiers. In the morning, he discovered the “dead corpses” and fled to Nineveh. Shortly afterwards, his own two sons killed him with the sword.

Zechariah 3:1ff – Joshua the high priest is standing before the angel of the LORD. Satan is standing at Joshua's right hand “to resist him.” The LORD in 3:2 (the angel of the LORD in 3:1) rebuked Satan. As Israel (Jerusalem) was “chosen” and “a brand plucked out of the fire” (3:2), so are believers in this age. Jesus is our Defender!

This is not an exhaustive list. But it provides a sense of the OT role the Angel of the LORD—the pre-Incarnate Jesus of Nazareth—played in protecting his people and accomplishing his will on earth before his Holy Ghost conception in Mary's womb.