

When God Is Seen, Who Is It?

John 1:18; 1 John 4:12

William J. Stewart



“...no one has seen God...”

At the beginning of John’s unique gospel account, he makes the monumental statement, “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18). Later, in the first epistle by the same writer, he repeats verbatim, “No one has seen God at any time” (1 John 4:12).

The Scriptures reveal that Jesus is God (John 1:1; 5:18; 20:20). When He came into the world, He became a man, taking on a body of flesh and blood (John 1:14; Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 2:14; 10:5) and was seen daily by people. He did not cease to be God, but was “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Thus, it is obvious that John’s statement was not about the Lord.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil... Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.’”
(Hebrews 2:14; 10:5)

The Scriptures reveal that the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3–4). Though He is described as a spirit, which has no physical form, Luke tells us
...the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him... (Luke 3:22)
That being the case, the statement that no one has seen God is not about the Holy Spirit.

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“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”
(John 1:1, 14)

Since it is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit that “no one has seen,” we must conclude that it is the Father who is referred to. Jesus confirms that this is the case, stating,

...Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father... (John 6:46)

If no one has seen the Father except the Son, then when God is seen, we can conclude that it is not the Father, but the Son. In the course of our study we will look at a number of instances in the Old Testament where God appeared to and interacted with man. It is my affirmation that it is the pre-incarnate Christ who shows Himself.

“...and I have been working...”

The Pharisees and scribes sought to kill Jesus after He healed a man on the Sabbath. They were offended at His work. Thus, He explained,

My Father has been working until now, and I have been working. (John 5:17)

This statement angered the Jews further, for they perceived that in calling God His Father, He made Himself equal with God. They were right. In a subsequent discussion, Jesus would bluntly declare, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

Do not let the significance of Jesus words in John 5:17 slip by. He was not speaking about His earthly ministry. The duration of the Son’s work is equal to the duration of the Father’s work. In the beginning of John’s gospel, we read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him, nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1–3)

Jesus’ work, as is recorded for us in the Scriptures begins with creation. He and the Father worked in unison to create all things (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Throughout the Genesis account of creation, we find the words, “God said” (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29). It does not tell us whether this is the Father or the Son in the context, but as we consider this in light of what texts such as John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2 say, we begin to understand that creation was a joint effort, involving both the Father and the Son. It is interesting that as John introduces Jesus, he calls Him the “Word.” And

then immediately turns his attention to the work of creation which Jesus was involved in. We have in the one place, “God said,” and in the other, Jesus identified as “the Word.” [NOTE – the Spirit is also identified in the creation process, as He is described as “hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

To remove all doubt about Jesus’ involvement in the creation process, we are given a glimpse into the mutual work of the Father and Son in Genesis 1:26. There we read,

Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’

Jesus was there in the beginning, involved in creation. We will see in the course of our study that He was working throughout the Old Testament.

*“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.
(Colossians 1:16)*

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- When God has appeared to someone, it cannot be the Father – no one has seen the Father.
 - Jesus has been working from the beginning. It should be no surprise then if we see Him working throughout the Old Testament.
 - He was not known by the name Jesus, but rather is referred to as God, Jehovah, the Angel of the LORD, etc. throughout the Old Testament.
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The God Who Sees & Provides

Genesis 12:7; 14:18-20; 16:7-13; 17:1-22; 18:1-33; 21:17-19; 22:1-18

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“..he LORD appeared to Abram..”

At the beginning of Genesis 12, God calls Abram to depart from his father’s house and to go to a land which God would show to him. In verse 1, it simply says “...the LORD had said...” However, when we get to verse 7, it is no longer just a matter of hearing a voice from heaven, but “...the LORD appeared to Abram...”

Since “...no one has seen God [the Father] at any time...” (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; cf. John 6:46), we must conclude that this was not the Father who spoke with and appeared to Abram, but someone else. This is not merely an angel appearing to the patriarch, for the text identifies the one who appears as the LORD (Jehovah). Who can be called Jehovah, aside from the Father? Jesus is identified as God throughout the New Testament (John 1:1, 5:30; 20:20; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; etc.). He is Jehovah God.

This was the first of several appearances to Abraham recorded in the Scriptures.

“..Melchizedek king of Salem..”

The identity of Melchizedek, a priest and king before God, is an intriguing consideration. He appears in Genesis 14:18, and just as quickly as he appeared, he is gone. Then, with the exception of a single mention in the Psalms, he is not mentioned again until the book of Hebrews.

In the absence of an absolute statement, it would be unwise to be dogmatic about his identity, but the description of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7 certainly presents an interesting possibility. It may be, as some have assumed, that the writer is saying his genealogy is of no consequence. Or, it is possible that the writer is inferring much more. Consider:

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“...this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,” without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. (Hebrews 7:1-3)

- Melchizedek = king of righteousness;
- King of Salem = king of peace;
- Without father ...mother ...genealogy;
- Neither beginning of days nor end of life; Made like the Son of God...

“..the Angel of the LORD..”

When Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar, she ran away into the wilderness. Moses tells us that “...the angel of the LORD found her...” and spoke with her (Genesis 16:7-10). If we are not careful, we will miss exactly who this is that found and spoke with her. This is not an angel such as Gabriel or Michael, come as a messenger of God. This is the Angel of the LORD!

Hagar perceived who this was that spoke to her – who had appeared to her; and Moses confirmed it for us in the Genesis record. We read:

Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, ‘Have I also here seen Him who sees me?’ (Genesis 16:13)

You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees! Hagar was seen by and had seen God! But, not the Father, for no one has seen the Father. This was the pre-incarnate Christ. She did not just see an angel, for the text refers to the one whom she as as the LORD (ie. Jehovah). One of the ways the Christ appeared to people through the Old Testament was as the Angel of the LORD.

Years later, after Isaac was born, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away by Abraham. Their water supply used up, and unsure what to do, Hagar all but gave up. At this point, it was “the angel of God” who assured her that all would be find with her son (Genesis 21:16–20). This was likely the same God-Who-Sees that comforted her the last time she had departed from Abraham’s house.

“..I Am Almighty God..”

In Genesis 17, “...the LORD appeared to Abram...” yet again. He immediately identifies Himself as “Almighty God.” (17:1) And so Abram conversed with God throughout this chapter, as the Lord reaffirmed His promises to Abraham, established the covenant of circumcision, and foretold the birth of Isaac to Sarai. Having “finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.” (17:22) It was God who appeared and spoke with the patriarch in person – it cannot be

the Father (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12); it was the pre-incarnate Christ.

In the next chapter, again “the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees” (Genesis 18:1). Abraham saw three men on this occasion – two of them were angels who went down to Sodom to warn Lot and his family. The third person whom he saw was the LORD.

And the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ Is anything to hard for the LORD? (Genesis 18:13–14)

The LORD (the Christ) would continue to talk with Abraham, and reveal to him the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:17ff). Once more, when the LORD was done speaking with Abraham, he went His way (18:33).

“..The-LORD-Will-Provide..”

Abraham was commanded by God to take Isaac, the son of promise, and to offer him as a burnt offering. With no argument, Abraham left the next morning to do as God said. As he took the knife to slay Isaac, the Angel of the LORD called to him, saying:

Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me. (Genesis 22:12)

Abraham saw a ram caught in the thickets nearby, the LORD provided.

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- If we read that God “appeared” to someone, then we must conclude that it was not the Father, since no man has seen the Father. If there is an appearance of God, it must be the Christ.
 - “The Angel of the LORD” is not the same as “an angel of the LORD.” This is a description of the pre-incarnate Christ as God’s messenger throughout the Old Testament.
 - The Old Testament establishes that Jesus is indeed Almighty God.
 - Melchizedek is certainly a foreshadow of the Christ – could he actually be the Christ?
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The LORD Appears To Isaac & Jacob

Genesis 26:2, 24-25; 28:10-22; 31:11-16; 32:24-30; 35:1, 7, 9-15

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The LORD Appears to Isaac

The Hebrew word רָאָה (ra'ah), rendered "appeared," means to gaze upon, show or behold. As we noted last week, the LORD had appeared to Abraham – that is, Abraham had seen the LORD. And yet, since "...no one has seen God [the Father] at any time..." (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; cf. John 6:46), we must conclude that it was not the Father, but the Son who spoke to and appeared to him. So it was with Isaac.

The first appearance to Isaac is recorded in Genesis 26:2. It simply says that God appears to him, telling him to dwell in the land which was promised to his father, and would belong to his descendants. After much difficulty with Abimelech and the Philistines, Isaac acknowledged that the LORD had provided room for them in the land. That night, we're told,

...the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." So he build an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.
(Genesis 26:24-25)

Neither text gives much detail, except to say that the LORD appeared to Isaac. Nonetheless, we are here seeing appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ.

Jacob's Ladder

As Jacob travelled toward Haran, he stopped at Luz along the way. There, he had a dream. In his dream, he saw a ladder between the earth and heaven, and the angels of God ascending and

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Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. (John 1:47-51)

descending upon it. The LORD stood above the ladder, introduced Himself to Jacob, and shared the same promise with him that had been given to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob called the place Bethel, literally, "house of God."

Was it the pre-incarnate Christ who was at the top of the ladder? The text is not clear, but in John 1, Jesus indicates to Nathanael that while He was upon the earth, He was the ladder which Jacob had seen.

Another Dream For Jacob

After spending 20 years in Haran, the LORD came to Jacob in a dream. Jacob, as he spoke with his wives about it said,

...the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.'
(Genesis 31:11)

It is interesting that as Jacob refers to the One who appeared to him, he knew that it was “the Angel of God” (a.k.a., the Angel of the LORD). We have noted previously that the Angel of the LORD is the Messiah, the pre-incarnate Christ.

He identified Himself to Jacob, as the One who had appeared to him at Luz (a.k.a. Bethel), “I am the God of Bethel...”

Jacob Wrestles the LORD

As Jacob returned to his own land with his family, having sent them all ahead, he was left alone. Initially, we are told that he wrestled with a “Man” until daybreak. Jacob knew who it was that he was wrestling with, for he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” (Genesis 32:26) and so the response came,

Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed. (Genesis 32:28)

Jacob called the name of that place Peniel, stating, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” (Genesis 32:30) He was not mistaken, he had seen God – it was the pre-incarnate Christ.

One Final Appearance

After Simeon and Levi killed all the males in the city of Shechem and plundered their goods, Jacob feared for his household. At this point, God spoke to Jacob, telling him to go to Bethel, and there he was to “make an altar there to God, who appeared to you” (Genesis 35:1)

I am the God of Bethel (31:13)

...the LORD stood above it and said: 'I am the LORD God of Abraham...' (28:13)

When he arrived at Bethel, he built the altar, “...because there God appeared to him...” (Genesis 35:7)

Once more, God appeared to Jacob and blessed him (Genesis 35:9). He reaffirmed the name change, no longer was he Jacob, but now would be called Israel. The promises were stated to Jacob,

I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land. (35:11–12)

Since we’re told that “God went up from him in the place where He talked with him” (Genesis 35:13), it should be understood that God had come down (ie. appeared) to him.

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- The Lord Jesus appeared to Isaac twice that is recorded in Scripture.
 - To Jacob, the pre-incarnate Christ appeared at least four times. Jacob acknowledged that he had seen God. Indeed, he did – it was the Christ.
 - Though we find it stated throughout Joseph’s life that God was with him, it is never recorded that God appeared to him.
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A Burning Bush & A Pillar Of Fire

Exodus 126:2, 24-25; 28:10-22; 31:11-16; 32:24-30; 35:1, 7, 9-15

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The Burning Bush

As we have noted already in the course of our study, "...no one has seen God at any time..." (John 1:18; cf. 6:46; 1 John 4:12). Yet there are times in the Old Testament where we read about God appearing to man. This is not the Father, but the Son, who has come to declare the Father to us (John 1:18; 14:9-10).

Exodus 3 speaks of the Angel of the LORD appearing to Moses in the burning bush. This person is described through the text as "the LORD" (v 4) and "God" (v 4, 6). As we have noted before, when we see a reference to the Angel of the LORD, we should understand it to be the pre-incarnate Christ. The Lord Jesus appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the book of Genesis as the Angel of the LORD - now, that has become part of His identity, "the God of Abraham ...Isaac ...Jacob" (v 6).

As the conversation proceeds, in addition to being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Angel of the LORD also says of Himself, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:13-15). Jesus would reveal Himself to be I AM (John 8:24, 28, 58; 9:9; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8).

As the text continues, Moses suggests that perhaps the Israelites might not believe that the LORD had appeared to him (Exodus 4:1). This would not be a concern if Moses did not plan on claiming that the LORD appeared to him. But the LORD did appear to him - the Christ.

In Acts 7:30, Stephen clearly states of Moses that the "Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush." Again, Moses is said to be the ruler and deliverer who was sent "by the Angel who appeared to him in the bush" (v 35).

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...the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.' So 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.' Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.' Moreover He said, 'I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face for He was afraid to look upon God. (Exodus 3:2-6)

The Angel of the LORD, the pre-incarnate Christ showed Himself to Moses at Horeb, sending him to Egypt to bring the Israelites away from their captivity, and promising that he would again serve God on that very mountain.

A Pillar Of Fire

After the final plague in Egypt, Pharaoh let the people of Israel go. Exodus 13:17–18 tells us, *Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, ‘Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.’ So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.*

This text tells us that God led the people, but does not specify whether it was the Father, the Son or the Spirit. However, just a few verses later, we find that

...the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people. (Exodus 13:21–22)

Still, the text does not say who the LORD is here, but does indicate an appearance. A chapter later, when the Egyptians came after the Israelites, we read the following:

...the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus

it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

(Exodus 14:19–20)

The One identified as God in Exodus 13:17–18 and the LORD in Exodus 13:21–22 is here revealed to be the Angel of God, which would be Jesus Christ. He went from leading them to following behind them, that they might be protected from the Egyptians. Notice, the apostle Paul wrote about the exodus from Egypt in 1 Corinthians 10:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1–4)

With Paul’s description of the exodus, there is no doubt who it was that led the people out of the land of Egypt. It was the Christ. Yet again, we’ve seen an appearance of the Christ in the Old Testament.

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- The Christ appeared to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob in Genesis. His appearance to them is used to identify Himself to Moses also.
 - Moses first met the Angel of the LORD in the burning bush, where He identified Himself as I AM – the eternally existing One. Moses’ interaction with the LORD is throughout the book of Exodus.
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Mount Sinai & Wilderness Wanderings

Exodus 126:2, 24-25; 28:10-22; 31:11-16; 32:24-30; 35:1, 7, 9-15

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Receiving The Law At Sinai

Having come out of Egypt, the children of Israel arrived at the base of Horeb, the same place where God had appeared to Moses when He sent him to Egypt. Moses recorded,

...the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish.

(Exodus 19:20)

The text does not tell us that this is the Christ, at least not outright. But, it is inferred that the LORD was visible to the LORD, and would be to any who might "break through" from the base of the mountain. This would indicate that it is indeed the pre-incarnate Christ at the top of Mount Sinai with Moses.

As we continue into Exodus 20, Moses says that God spoke these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Exodus 20:2)

Who was it that brought Moses and the people of Israel out of Egypt? Recall, 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 revealed that the LORD spoken of in Exodus 13-14 was indeed the Christ. Now, the Christ atop Mount Sinai reveals to Moses that it is again He who has appeared to him.

Later, still atop Sinai, the LORD revealed that He would send His Angel with them (see text to the right). At first glance, this might cause us to think that it was the Father rather than the Son who was speaking with Moses. It is also possible

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Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgression; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

(Exodus 23:20-23)

that the Christ is speaking about Himself in the 3rd person. I suggest this is more likely the case, given what Stephen says about the encounter atop Mount Sinai. Notice,

This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us (Acts 7:38)

It was the Christ, the Angel of the LORD who met with Moses atop Mount Sinai, and revealed the Law to him there.

Wandering In The Wilderness

The Angel of the LORD was promised to accompany the people of Israel in Exodus 23. As we continue to consider the LORD's discourse with Moses, Exodus 33 also affirms that the Angel of the LORD would go with them. Notice:

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people. (Exodus 33:1-3)

As Moses heard this, he apparently thought that the Angel of the LORD who had accompanied them thus far would be replaced by another angel (Exodus 33:12). The LORD makes it clear that the Angel of the LORD would continue with them:

And He said, 'My Presence will go with You, and I will give you rest.' Then he said to Him, 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.' (Exodus 33:14-15)

What is the "Presence" spoken of here? In Deuteronomy 4:37, from the NIV, we read:

...he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength.

Likewise, Isaiah 63:9 speaks of "...the Angel of His Presence..." who saved them.

The book of Numbers records a lot of details about their wandering in the wilderness. In Numbers 21:5-6, it is recorded,

...the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.' So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many of the people died. (Numbers 21:5-6)

In 1 Corinthians 10:9, Paul reveals that it was the Christ whom they tempted, and were thus destroyed by the serpents. God, whom they spoke against in Numbers 21:5-6 was indeed Christ Jesus - the Angel of the LORD.

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- It was from the Christ that Moses received the Law. When He saw Jehovah face to face at Mount Sinai, it was Jesus Christ whom he saw.
 - When Israel wandered about in the wilderness, the very same One who led them from Egypt led them through the wilderness wanderings.
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Standing Before Balaam & Joshua

Numbers 22:22-35; Judges 13

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Standing Before Balaam

Being exceedingly afraid of the children of Israel, Balak, king of Moab, sent messengers to Balaam, a prophet of God. His stated:

...a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed. (Numbers 22:5-6)

Interestingly, that last statement is the very thing God spoke concerning Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 12:3). The LORD revealed that he should not go with them, nor should he curse the people, for they were blessed.

Balak again sent men to Balaam (22:15), and again Balaam said that he would inquire of the LORD. We should learn in Balaam to accept what the LORD has said, and not seek something new. God told him to go with them – He would use it as an opportunity to teach Balaam.

Three times Balaam's donkey saw the LORD, and three times, she saved Balaam from His sword. However, he was not aware. Rather, he struck the animal in anger each time. The donkey spoke to him after the third time! Balaam, still clueless simply told the donkey he was mad at her and if he had a sword, he'd kill her on the spot!

It was at this point that Balaam's eyes were opened and he saw the Angel of the LORD stand before him (Numbers 22:31). It was revealed to him that his way was perverse (v 32), and that his donkey had saved his life (v 33).

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Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. ...the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His sword drawn in His hand, and the donkey turned aside... Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards... And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall... Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn ... when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam... (Numbers 22:22-27)

Balaam offered to turn back, if it pleased the LORD, but rather, the LORD told him to go with them men, "but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." (22:35)

Balaam would go to Balak, and each time he was asked to curse the people, he would listen to the LORD and bless them.

Standing Before Joshua

After the death of Moses, Joshua became the leader of the nation Israel. He would take them to the land promised by God. Several times, Joshua was told to “be strong and of good courage” (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23; Joshua 1:6–9, 18).

After Joshua had circumcised all the people, and the final preparations were being made for them to go into the land to conquer it, on a given day, Joshua was by Jericho, and saw a Man standing opposite him. Notice the text:

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’ The the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.’ And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13–15)

Though Joshua was the commander of the armies of Israel, he acknowledged the position truly belong to the One who stood before him. This was not just a Man, this was the LORD.

In response to this wonderful event, Joshua bowed to the ground and worshiped. If this were just an angel or a man, he would have surely been corrected. But, he wasn’t. It was appropriate that he worship the Commander of the army of the LORD.

In fact, the LORD told him, as He had told Moses at the time when He called him to service, “...the place where you stand is holy.”

Another case of the LORD appearing to man, to Joshua this time. It was not the Father, nor was this the Spirit of God – this was the pre-incarnate Christ; worthy of worship and with authority to command all of Israel.

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- Balaam’s donkey saw what Balaam could not – she saw the LORD. Balaam eventually did, but not until the LORD had used his own donkey to rebuke him.
 - Joshua was of an entirely different disposition than Balaam. He waited for the greatest opportunity of his life – the defeat of the nations in Canaan. The LORD appeared to him as the Commander of the army. The LORD is in control, not man. What a comfort!!
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Gideon, Samson's Parents, etc.

Judges 2:1-7; 6:11-24; Judges 13:2-23

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You Have Not Obeyed My Voice

After Israel had settled in the promised land, but before the death of Joshua (Judges 2:6), the Angel of the LORD came to the children of Israel. He said to them:

I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'

(Judges 2:1-3)

The people of Israel were to purge the land of the inhabitants, but they failed to do so (Judges 1:19, 21, 27-35). It was not a matter of inability, but lack of effort and faith.

The LORD could have given this message through Joshua, or by sending a prophet; but He chose to bring it Himself, appearing to the people. In response to the word of the Angel of the LORD, the people wept, and made sacrifice to the LORD (v 4-5). Though troubles would come, the result of the LORD's rebuke was that Israel was faithful to the LORD through the rest of Joshua's life, and throughout the life of the elders who outlived him (Judges 2:7).

Bochim - the place of weeping

Appearing To Gideon

Again, the LORD gave a message to the people of Israel about their failure to be faithful to Him, this time, by sending a prophet to them

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(Judges 6:7-10). After the prophet spoke to all the people, the Angel of the LORD came to speak with Gideon specifically. Notice their conversation:

...the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!' Gideon said to Him, 'O my lord, if the LORD 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 the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.' Then the LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?' (Judges 6:12-14)

Gideon focused on his weaknesses (v 15); the LORD wanted him to focus on the strength that was with him (2 Corinthians 12:9). He answered Gideon in the same way He answered Moses (Judges 6:16; Exodus 3:12).

It would seem that Gideon began to understand who this was before him. He asked that He

not depart until he brought his offering out to set before the LORD. Having prepared an offering, he brought it to the LORD. The Angel of the LORD received the offering, bringing fire forth from the rock upon which it was laid (Judges 6:20–21).

Gideon was now certain who it was that had appeared to him (Judges 6:22), and seemed to be concerned that he would die (v 23). He named the place, “the LORD is Peace”.

Appearing to Manoah’s wife

The wife of Manoah, a man from the tribe of Dan, was barren. We read:

...the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, ‘Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.

(Judges 13:3)

It was revealed to her that the son born to them (Samson) would be a Nazirite. It was also revealed that he would deliver the Israelites from their enemies, the Philistines.

As the woman spoke to her husband about the event, she called the One who appeared to her “A Man of God,” and spoke of His countenance as being “like the countenance of the Angel of God” (Judges 13:6). Manoah prayed to the LORD, asking that this Man of God would come to them again.

God heard his prayer, and answered it. Once more, the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman. She ran to get her husband (Judges 13:9–10). Manoah spoke with the Man, but did not realize who He was. In fact, he asked that He wait, while they prepared a young goat for Him; not as an offering, but as a meal. The Angel of the LORD as much as told Manoah that he should offer the young goat as an offering.

Then man then asked the LORD, “What is Your name?” (Judges 13:17) In return, the LORD asked why he asked, “seeing it is wonderful?” (see Isaiah 9:6).

Manoah followed the LORD’s suggestion, and provided the young goat with a grain offering as an offering. With Manoah and his wife watching, the Angel of the LORD ascended into heaven in the flame from the altar. Now, Manoah knew who it was that appeared to him (Judges 13:21).

In fact, he was afraid! He thought that they would die, for they had seen God (v 22). His wife reasoned with him, that if the LORD wanted them dead, He would not have accepted their offering, and would not have given them the great news of a child to be born.

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- What a fearful thing for the people of Israel to have the Angel of the LORD come and speak with them. Recall the fear when He spoke from Mount Sinai to their fathers?
 - Gideon was despondent about the position of the nation, but the Angel of the LORD purposed to use his weakness to bring about great things.
 - Samson would be a great deliverer for the people of Israel. His birth was announced, not by an angel, but by the Angel of the LORD!
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Other References to the Angel of the LORD

2 Samuel 24:16-17 (1 Chronicles 21:16); 1 Kings 19:7; 2 Kings 1:3, 15; 19:35; Psalm 34:7; 35:5-6; Ecclesiastes 5:6; Isaiah 37:36; 63:9; Hosea 12:3-5; Zechariah 1:11; 3:1-6; 12:8

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2 Samuel 24:16–17

In the context, David had sinned against the LORD by numbering the people. The prophet Gad came to David, giving him a choice of three things which would come as a result. That day, the LORD brought a plague upon the land, and seventy thousand men of Israel died (1 Chronicles 21:14). After this great number had died, the LORD restrained the Angel of the LORD, for it was enough. In 1 Chronicles 21:16, we read:

...David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces.

1 Kings 19:7

In the context, Elijah just heard that Jezebel planned to kill him because of what had happened to the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 19:2; 18:40). He had given up (v 4). As he lay there, an angel touched him (v 5). A couple verses later, the one who touched him came back, and is called “the Angel of the LORD” (v 7).

2 Kings 1:3, 15

Having fallen and injured himself, Ahaziah sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub. The Angel of the LORD told Elijah to intercept the messengers (v 3). The king wanted Elijah brought to him. After two failed attempts (v 10, 12), the third captain came with fear before Elijah, and the Angel of the LORD told Elijah to go with him, fearing nothing (v 15).

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2 Kings 19:35

The Assyrians, having defeated Israel thought that they would also rise up against Jerusalem. The Lord stated, “...I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.” (2 Kings 19:34) A verse later, we find that the Angel of the LORD entered the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 of their men.

Psalm 34:7; 35:5–6

Psalm 34 was written while David pretended madness before Abimelech (34:1). It is a Psalm of praise, for God hears, answers and protects His people. Verse 7 declares

The Angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.

In the next Psalm, David likens his enemies to chaff before the wind, chased by the Angel of the LORD.

Ecclesiastes 5:6

Solomon stresses the importance of us keeping our vows (v 5). He has no pleasure in fools (v 4), and does not way hear excuses (v 6). The writer says for us not to sin by excusing ourselves before “the messenger of God” (KJV, the angel).

Isaiah 37:36

The prophet speaks of the LORD defending Jerusalem, as was already noted in 2 Kings 19:35. It was the Angel of the LORD who went into the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 of their troops. Jerusalem stood protected, Sennacherib fled away and remained at Nineveh.

Isaiah 63:9

Isaiah speaks about the LORD, who became the Savior of His people (verse 8). The One who provides salvation is identified as the Angel of His Presence.

Hosea 12:3–5

Hosea contrasts the unfaithfulness of God's people in his time (v 1–2) with the greatness of Jacob's faith. Jacob struggled with God, the Angel, and prevailed (Genesis 32:24–28).

Zechariah 1:11; 3:1–6

Throughout this text, an angel is Zechariah's guide to the visions that he sees (1:9). Like John experienced in the Revelation, an angel guided Zechariah, but the LORD also spoke and appeared to him.

The prophet saw a man standing among the myrtle trees (1:8). He is identified as the Angel of the LORD (1:11).

In chapter 3, Zecharias sees Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD (v 1, 3, 5, 6), who is the Lord Jesus.

Zechariah 12:8

The prophet speaks of God's protection for Jerusalem against her enemies (12:1–4). At verse 8, their strength is revealed, for the Angel of the LORD would be before them.

Isaiah 6:1–10

Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne (v 1). He feared, for he was of unclean lips, but had seen "the King, the LORD of hosts" (v 5). The Lord gave him a message for the people; a message which Jesus would quote a few times in His ministry:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed. (Isaiah 6:9–10)

John 12:37–41 reveals that it was in fact Jesus that Isaiah saw. Jesus participated in the fulfillment of the word He had given to Isaiah (Matthew 13:13–15; Mark 4:11–12; Luke 8:10).

Are there more texts that speak about the appearances and activities of the Christ in the Old Testament? Likely. But the texts given in these 8 lessons are ample evidence of His presence and activity in every age, not just during His earthly ministry.

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- Hopefully having considered the evidence for the Lord's work in the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Gideon, Manoah, David, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Zechariah, we have come to the understanding that the LORD Jesus has been present and active in every age.
 - He promises that He is active in our age also. He told the disciples, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). The book of Revelation reveals that the Lord is protecting His people, and providing for us. He is present, His is active!
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