

## LESSON 5- God in Human Form

Last week we talked about cosmic geography, the tower of Babel and the table of nations. These events frame the rest of the OT and a good portion of the NT as we see God's kingdom portion of His plan set into motion. God allotted the other nations to His council. Why do this? His plan had continually been thwarted by evil and sin on two fronts – the realms of what we see and what we don't see. Because of this He scattered the people over the earth, but He still needs to have a family of His own to work in and through. The first nine verses of Gen. 11 give us the story of Babel and the dispersion. Verses 11 – 27 give us a genealogy beginning with Shem, one of the sons of Noah. That genealogy eventually works its way down to a man named Abram, with whom God makes a covenant. This covenant involves land and Abram's children becoming a nation (**Gen. 12:1-3**). God is establishing a beachhead from which His newly created family is to eventually draw the other nations back into the fold to worship YHWH. To do this, God needs to

Speak to Abram. But how does He initiate the conversation?

Most of us are at least somewhat familiar with God's visit to Abraham in Gen. 12. We know that he was told to leave his family and go to a land he hadn't known. God will show him the way. Initially God gives him the basics of the covenant. He will give him land, a large family which will become a nation and that nation will be a blessing to all the other nations. God will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. Most of us are familiar with all that. But we tend to think of Abraham's encounters with God as just being voices in his head. Many times, however, that's not the case. God does do that. Most of the time, though, in the OT, that's how He speaks to the prophets of Israel. But with Abraham, we see more than that. With Abraham, more often than not, God spoke to him face to face. God came as a man. This is important not only for the OT but also for the theology we get from the NT.

In Gen. 12:7, God “appeared” to Abraham. Three chapters later, God “appears” again (**Gen.15: 1-6**) We read here that God comes to Abraham as “the word of the LORD” in a vision. (Note the capitalization in most translations)

### **Gen.15:1-6**

**1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”**

**2 But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”**

**4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” 5 Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”**

## **6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

But while it says it is a vision, there is a clue that this isn't the typical vision and can't be just a voice in his head because the "Word" brought him outside to see the stars in order to make the point that his offspring will be innumerable. We also see God appearing to Abraham on other occasions.

In **Gen. 18**, God appears to Abraham along with two other beings – angels. But they are described as men. In **Gen. 26: 1-5**, God appears to Isaac. He also appears to Jacob, Isaac's son, (**Gen. 28:10-22; 31:11,12; 32:24-30**).

The "word" or voice of God as a way of expressing God in human form shows up in unexpected places. We can see this in 1 Samuel 3. The young Samuel heard someone calling his name one night. He thought it was Eli, the priest. Eventually Eli figured out that God was calling to Samuel. Look at verse 10.

**1 Samuel 3:10**

**10 Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”  
And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”**

**The Lord STOOD there.** If we follow Samuel’s story, we see that God continues to appear to him.

**Jeremiah is another prophet to whom, “the word of the LORD” appeared in physical form. In Jeremiah 1:1-9, we read that the “word” came to him and even touched him with His hand.**

We actually see a pattern of God appearing as a man in the OT long before His arrival as Jesus, being born in Nazareth in the NT.

**Why does God do this?**

It actually makes perfect sense that God would do things this way. God is so unlike us. We’re told that no human can see the true essence of God – that is see Him unfiltered without dying. When people in

the Bible physically encountered God, they expected to die.

### **Genesis 32:30**

**30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”**

**Also: Dt. 5:24; Judg. 6:22-24**

Why didn't they die? Because God filtered His presence through something they could actually process – like a cloud, fire, or more often than we may realize – the form of a man.

Some of these encounters are linguistically disguised because God's appearance in human form is described as an encounter with the **“Angel of the LORD.” (Note the capital letters)**

This angel should be familiar, though His true identity may not always be that clear to us. He appears to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-3)

**Ex. 3:1-3**

**1** Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** And 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. **3** Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.”

God appeared to Jacob visibly in a dream at Bethel (**Gen. 28:10-22**) where the Angel was identified as YHWH. Later, in **Gen. 31:11-13**, the Angel of God came to Jacob in another dream and told him that He was the same God whom he saw at Bethel. There may be some who hesitate to identify this “Angel” as God Himself, but there are a few indications that there is no need to be hesitant. The most notable instance can be seen shortly after God gives the Law to Moses.

**Ex. 23:20-22**

**20 “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. 22 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.**

This is no normal angel. This angel can forgive sins. This angel has the name of God in Him. That may sound a little strange, but the phrase is significant. The “name” was an OT way of referring to God Himself, God’s way or presence, or essence. Look at Isaiah 30:27,28.

**Isa. 30:27,28**

**27 Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar,  
Burning with His anger,  
And His burden is heavy;  
His lips are full of indignation,  
And His tongue like a devouring fire.  
28 His breath is like an overflowing stream,  
Which reaches up to the neck,**



**To sift the nations with the sieve of futility;  
And there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the  
people,  
Causing them to err.**

These verses cast the “name of the Lord” as a person – as God Himself. **Even today, observant Jews refer to God by saying, “Ha Shem,” Hebrew for, “the Name.”**

If we compare Ex. 23: 20-22 with other passages we can confirm that this “Angel” who met Moses in the burning bush, the one with God’s name in Him is indeed the one who brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

### **Judges 2: 1-4**

**1 Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: “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. 2 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? 3 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.’ ” 4 So it was, when the Angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.**

But we also see that the Lord (**Josh. 24:17,18**) and God’s presence (**Dt. 4:37,38**) are also said to have brought them out of Egypt.

**Josh. 24:17,18**

**17 for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. 18 And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”**

**Dt. 4: 37,38**

**37 And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day.**

**These three terms: Lord, the Presence, and the Angel of the LORD are different ways of referring to the same figure: God. But the angel is in human form.**

If we want to see this point made in a more compelling way, there is passage that does so, but it can be a little obscure if we aren't paying attention. Prior to his death, Jacob wants to bless Joseph's boys. In Gen. 48: 15, 16, Jacob invokes certain episodes of his life where he had encountered God directly. Let's look at what he says.

**Gen. 48: 15,16**

**And he blessed Joseph, and said:**

**“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,  
16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil,  
Bless the lads;  
Let my name be named upon them,  
And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;  
And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”**

In verse 16, he prays that this “angel” would bless the boys. The verb is in the singular, not the plural – meaning that God, the shepherd, and the angel are all fused into one being. Going back to Judges 6: 22,23, both the Lord and the Angel of the Lord are found in the same scene. Even in the OT, God was more than one person and one of those persons came as a man.

### **The Word, the Name and the Angel**

These three terms should be familiar to most Christians. They’re all OT versions of how the NT

talks about Jesus. Abraham met the word of God in human form. In John 1:1 we read:

### **John 1:1**

**1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

Now look at verse 14 of the same chapter.

### **John 1:14**

**14 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.**

Whenever a first century Jew read the Gospel of John, his or her mind would hyperlink back to the OT where God Himself came as the Word. Jesus made this point when He said that Abraham had “seen that day” in “(Jn 8:56 – 58).

Moses met the Angel of the Lord, God in human form in the burning bush and also afterwards. That same Angel brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Look at how Jude refers to this.

**Jude 1:5 (ESV)**

**Now I want <sup>m</sup>to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that <sup>n</sup>Jesus, who saved<sup>3</sup> a people out of the land of Egypt, <sup>o</sup>afterward destroyed those who did not believe.**

The “Angel” was God in human form.

The terms we’ve seen: the Presence and the Name, made this “Angel” distinct from all others.

In the NT, Jesus uses the term, “name” when praying to the Father.

**Jn 17: 5-6, 26**

**And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.**

**Jesus Prays for His Disciples**

**6 “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.**

**John 17:26**

**26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”**

Now, you may be saying He simply declared God's name to the people but look at to whom Jesus was declaring the name. They were Jews. They already had the OT. They knew the name of God. It was YHWH. They could have looked it up and seen it thousands of times in their Bibles. When Jesus said He had declared the name of God to the people, He had manifested God Himself to the people. **He was God before their very eyes – God in the flesh. He was the Name made flesh.**

I hope things are at the very least beginning to come together for you. All of the stories we read in the Bible take place within the larger context of the over-arching spiritual battles/ war in the unseen realm.

**So why does all this matter?**

In this worldview God has serious enemies. Some of Gods' council, the Elohim He created went their own way. They rebelled and are described by Paul as dark, malevolent powers, rulers, authorities and thrones of a realm we don't see (**Eph. 6:11; Col. 1:16**) They live to oppose God's plan and to deprive Him of an everlasting reunion with His human family through the Gospel.

We've seen that one of the divine rebels is now known as the lord of the dead. He now has a rightful claim over humanity since he deceived Adam and Eve which resulted in the loss of immortality on the earth. His goal was to exterminate God's people. This is also what the evil spawn of the sons of God had in mind when the Israelites encroached on the borders of Canaan – the Promised Land. It was kill or be killed. It was either the Nephilim giants or the people of Israel. Once Israel had entered the Promised Land and quashed the threat of the Nephilim, the strategy changed. You've heard the expression, **"If you can't beat 'em, join 'em?"** Well, the dark powers altered



that a bit and said, **“If we can’t beat ‘em, we’ll get them to join us.”** So, they began to seduce the Israelites into worshipping the gods to whom they weren’t allotted. Their thinking was that YHWH would get rid of the Israelites for them. They had seen God’s track record. Adam and Eve sinned and were exiled from the garden. The flood of Noah’s day purged the earth of virtually everyone. The dispersion at Babel whittled down God’s people and gave the sons of God their own people. And they would eventually see Israel exiled from the Promised Land. They thought they were winning. But in the backs of their minds, something had always loomed large. They remembered something YHWH had said way back in Genesis 3. He said that one day a descendant of Eve would come and reverse the effects of the fall in Eden. They knew that someday this promised one would appear, but as Paul explained, they didn’t know who, what, why, when or where. **(1 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 3:10, 6:12)**. These things, the most crucial details of God’s plan were a mystery. They had only been mentioned in cryptic ways. And that was intentional on God’s part. What we read in the Gospels is about to make

much more sense to us. We'll pick up on this next time.