

Week #:	166	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Judges 2:1 – The Angel of Adonai
Scriptures:	Judges 2:1-5; Exodus 23:20-22; Genesis 16:7-12; Exodus 3:2-6; Genesis 22:9-18John 10:27-30;				
Songs:	You Are Holy (Prince of Peace) (4:18)				
	Holy Spirit – Francesca Battistelli (5:02)				
	PRAYER:	Spirit Break Out – Kim Walker-Smith (12:03)			

## The Angel of Adonai [the Lord]

The Bible contains many interesting characters throughout, but on that is probably the most enigmatic and contradictory is the one called the *angel of Adonai [the Lord]*.

The term *angel of Adonai [the Lord]* is a hotly debated term in Rabbinical and Christian circles. The word in Hebrew is **MALACH**, and is often translated as *angel*, however, it is better translated as *messenger*. A messenger could be a spiritual being, such as an angel or it could be a human being, such as a prophet of God.

In Judges 2:1 we see this character being come with a message:

<sup>1</sup> Now the angel of *ADONAI* came up from Gilgal to Bokhim and said, “I brought you up out of Egypt, led you to the land I swore to your fathers and said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you; <sup>2</sup> you, for your part, are not to make any covenant with the inhabitants of this land but must tear down their altars.’ However, you have paid no attention to what I said. What is this you have done? <sup>3</sup> This is why I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will be on your flanks, and their gods will become a snare for you.’” <sup>4</sup> When the angel of *ADONAI* spoke these words to all the people of Isra’el, they began crying and wailing at the top of their voices. <sup>5</sup> So they called the name of that place Bokhim [crying] and sacrificed there to *ADONAI*.

So, what, or who, is this messenger in this section of scripture? We have a few clues to look at that may help us determine their identity.

The word that is given is spoken in first person format:

“*I* brought you up...”

“*I* led you to the land I swore to your fathers...”

“*I* will never break *my* covenant...”

Would an angel speak in first person? Probably not, as this would mean the angel is referring to itself as God, and we know what happened when Lucifer tried to take over God’s position. He was kicked out of Heaven, along with 1/3 of the angels who also wanted to rebel along with him. And so, for this reason we can easily see that it is probably not an angelic messenger.

Is this a human messenger? It’s possible. It was not uncommon for prophets to speak God’s word in first person. However, the prophets would always preface the message with, “this is a message from Adonai [the Lord].” In this instance we do not see anything like this coming from this messenger.

It is because of this conundrum that some scholars lean towards this referencing a physical manifestation of a spiritual messenger. Since angels will never refer to themselves as God, many believe this could be Jesus, or even Holy Spirit, in messenger/human form, coming down to give this message from God to the people of Israel. Either of the Godhead – Jesus or Holy Spirit – would have the right to speak in first person without referencing it back to God the Father. So, it makes sense in that regard.

So, was this Jesus giving this message? Possibly. We cannot say for certain, but it is a good possibility that it is. Wherever you and I fall in this debate, we can attest to one thing – God had a word for His people and He needed it to be said, so He sent a messenger. When it comes to the spirit world we are so limited in our insight, ability to comprehend, and to find words that are adequate in describing and illustrating the spiritual. And so, we are thusly limited in our knowledge of who, or what, this **messenger of Adonai [the Lord]** truly is.

Let's look at some other scriptures where we see this phrase **angel of Adonai [the Lord]** appear:

Exodus 23:20-22

<sup>20</sup> "I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared. <sup>21</sup> Pay attention to him, listen to what he says and do not rebel against him; because he will not forgive any wrongdoing of yours, since my name resides in him. <sup>22</sup> But if you listen to what he says and do everything I tell you, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

Here we see a few clues, but one in particular is: "**my name resides in him.**"

There is an overlap here of the identity of this messenger and God himself. It even says that God's name resides in this messenger. The angel even has authority to pardon (or not to pardon) transgressions. So, we see that this angel is separate from God, and yet equal to God in authority. God even promises prosperity if they will follow the directives of this representative.

Is this messenger Jesus? It's possible. We do not know for certain, but there are a few clues that lead us to believe that it is a great possibility.

Another place we find an **angel of Adonai [the Lord]** is in Genesis 16 with the story of Hagar. She is a slave woman who has become pregnant by her master, abused by her master's wife, and has now fled to the desert to meet her likely death.

Genesis 16:7-12

<sup>7</sup> The angel of Adonai found her by a spring in the desert, the spring on the road to Shur, <sup>8</sup> and said, "Hagar! Sarai's slave-girl! Where have you come from, and where are you going?" She answered, "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai." <sup>9</sup> The angel of Adonai said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her authority." <sup>10</sup> The angel of Adonai said to her, "I will greatly increase your descendants; there will be so many that it will be impossible to count them." <sup>11</sup> The angel of Adonai said to her, "Look, you are pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. You are to call him Yishma'el [God pays attention] because Adonai has paid attention to your misery. <sup>12</sup> He will be a wild donkey of a man, with his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, living his life at odds with all his kinsmen."

<sup>13</sup> So she named Adonai who had spoken with her El Ro'i [God of seeing], because she said, "Have I really seen the One who sees me [and stayed alive]?"

The **angel of Adonai [the Lord]** found her by a spring and intervened, and then a strange exchange takes place.

<sup>10</sup> The angel of Adonai said to her, "I will greatly increase your descendants; there will be so many that it will be impossible to count them."

Adonai is the one who typically issues this kind of a blessing. If we keep going, we also notice that she believes this to be God, because she names the God who met her there El Ro'I [God of seeing]. If this were an angel, would it have allowed this name to be given it? So obviously she is talking to Adonai, but remember, this is a physical form – it is not just a spiritual apparition.

This story illustrated the complex way the authors portray this figure as both Adonai and distinct from Adonai. If we flip over to a few other scriptures, we find a few more instances where this complexity of juxtaposition is seen as well:

Exodus 3:2-6

<sup>2</sup> The angel of Adonai appeared to him in a fire blazing from the middle of a bush. He looked and saw that although the bush was flaming with fire, yet the bush was not being burned up. <sup>3</sup> Moshe said, "I'm going to go over and see this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't being burned up." <sup>4</sup> When Adonai saw that he had gone over to see, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moshe! Moshe!" He answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> He said, "Don't come any closer! Take your sandals off your feet, because the place where you are standing is holy ground. <sup>6</sup> I am the God of your father," he continued, "the God of Avraham, the God of Yitz'chak and the God of Ya'akov."

The angel of Adonai appears to Moses in the midst of the burning bush. Then it says that Adonai spoke to Moses. He accepted worship (Moses taking off his sandals), and he gave instructions, stating that he is God. So, in this instance **Adonai** and **the angel of Adonai** are one and the same.

Genesis 22:9-18

<sup>9</sup> They came to the place God had told him about; and Avraham built the altar there, set the wood in order, bound Yitz'chak his son and laid him on the altar, on the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then Avraham put out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

<sup>11</sup> But the angel of Adonai called to him out of heaven: "Avraham? Avraham!" He answered, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> He said, "Don't lay your hand on the boy! Don't do anything to him! For now I know that you are a man who fears God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup> Avraham raised his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. <sup>14</sup> Avraham called the place Adonai Yir'eh [Adonai will see (to it), Adonai provides] — as it is said to this day, "On the mountain Adonai is seen."

<sup>15</sup> The angel of Adonai called to Avraham a second time out of heaven. <sup>16</sup> He said, "I have sworn by myself — says Adonai — that because you have done this, because you haven't withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will most certainly bless you; and I will most certainly increase your descendants to as many as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and by your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed — because you obeyed my order."

Here the **angel of Adonai** calls out and stops Abraham's hand, saving the life of Isaac. In this instance, however, we see that it is not a person in physical form, but is instead a voice from the heavens.

When Abraham stops at the sound of the voice, he looks up and there in the bushes is a ram. The angel of the Adonai then says: ***“I have sworn by myself — says Adonai...”***

Swearing by himself makes it clear this is God. What is unclear is what part of the Godhead this is. Could this instance be God the Father Himself? Or is this Jesus – the one who, two thousand years later, would be the lamb instead of that ram that was found in the bush? I lean towards the latter, as do a lot of Biblical scholars.

There are numerous other stories in which we find this character, the ***angel of Adonai*** appears. One is a few chapters ahead in the story of the judge Gideon. However, we see through these stories a pattern occurring, and we can conclude from that pattern that this angel of Adonai is carefully and intentionally depicted as a complex being, sometimes in human form, sometimes not.

In a strange way though, this angel of Adonai helps us understand a bit more the complexity of the Trinity. God is: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus claimed in John 10:27-30

<sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice, I recognize them, they follow me, <sup>28</sup> and I give them eternal life. They will absolutely never be destroyed, and no one will snatch them from my hands. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and no one can snatch them from the Father’s hands. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

Jesus clearly states not only that He and the Father are one – thus the Godhead – but also that He has the authority here to give eternal life and protect us from being snatched from the Father’s hands.

God created us for relationship, and the angel of Adonai is a window into the character of God that will come down to us, meet us where we are, just to interact with us in our lives:

sometimes in the desert – as with Hagar

sometimes in the quiet time when He needs us to do something – as with Moses

sometimes in the chaos and difficulties of life – as with Abraham

God is willing to take on an embodied form to relate with humanity, ultimately taking on human flesh to restore humanity to right relationship as partners with Him. This complex portrait of the angel of Adonai uniquely communicates truths about the character and identity of Adonai – that He is a complex unity, one who is both unified and diverse, near, and above all. What we see in the angel of Adonai is brought to culmination in the person of Jesus, who draws near to humanity in order to draw us near to God.

God wants relationship – above all else.