

Christ-the Uncreated Word' ch.1:1-18

by Charles Alexander

The Prologue of John reveals God's eternal purpose in creation and redemption, and the relationship between creation and redemption.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Matthew 11:28, Mark 9:24, John 1:1-14, Ephesians 6:12, 2 Thessalonians 2:3

Topics: "Divine Nature", "Jesus Christ"

Description

Charles Alexander delves into the Prologue to the Gospel of John, emphasizing the significance of knowing verses 1-18 by heart for every Christian. The Prologue is divided into three periods, each revealing the divine nature and purpose of the Godhead through our Savior Jesus Christ. It introduces the Uncreated Word, the ministry of John the Baptist, and the public identification of Jesus Christ as the Eternal Word. The history of the earthly manifestation of the Word unfolds, highlighting the transition from John the Baptist's ministry to the increasing presence of Christ. The sermon also explores the context of Imperial Rome and its significance in the divine plan.

Transcript

The Prologue to the Gospel of John, consisting of verses 1 - 18 of the first chapter, ought to be known by heart to every Christian.

This Prologue is in three periods, each complete in itself and together forming an arch bridging the entire expanse of the unveiling of the Godhead as touching the divine nature and purpose, in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Our translators have very properly marked the three periods with the usual paragraph signs.

1. Verses 1-5 introduce the Uncreated Word, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, through whom the Eternal God reveals Himself and by whom all the wisdom of God in time and in eternity is brought forth.
2. Verses 6-14 begin at that point of Old Testament prophecy where the Old Testament terminates that is, the return of Elijah (not in person, but in the spirit and power of the great prophet) in the ministry of John the Baptist, who announces publicly the entry into the world of that Eternal Word through whom grace and favour, light and truth and life eternal, are brought back to our fallen race as a new creation and a new beginning of the world.
3. Verses 15-16 record the public identification by John of that Eternal Word in the Person of Jesus Christ, here named for the first time (verse 17) and shown to be (in words proceeding not from the Baptist but

from the apostle) the only begotten Son, He who dwelt in the bosom of the Father, who from all eternity had looked upon the Father's face and now, coming in human flesh, declares and unfolds the mystery of the Godhead.

Thereafter the history of the earthly manifestation of the Word proceeds, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist subsequent to the Baptism (upon which the forerunner is looking back) in which the first of the apostles is introduced to Christ as the Baptist points Him out in the words, "Behold the Lamb of God". Thereafter John the Baptist begins to fade from the picture. His short ministry nears its end. His task is done. Martyrdom awaits him. While Christ increases he must decrease. He has heard the bridegroom's voice, and his joy is fulfilled (chap. 3: 29-30).

IMPERIAL ROME AND ITS GHOST

We return to the first part of our Prologue to consider John's inspired doctrine of the Eternal Word (the Logos as it is in the Greek, in which language John wrote).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God".

The time was significant when John took up his inspired pen.

The Kingdom of Christ (the mystic Church) was in collision with the power of this world, represented then by Imperial Rome. There were no visible means by which the testimony of Christ and the people of Christ were to be preserved. Divine omnipotence assumes strange forms, for earthly events are not the realities. Behind them are the forces of which earthly powers and events are but the means to the end, and sometimes only the pawns. We war not with flesh and blood but with the unseen principalities and powers which operate in the realm of the spirit (says Paul, Ephesians 6:12). The cruel Domitian under whom John suffered at Patmos was the first of a long line of oppressors and usurpers who would raise up all power against the confessors of Christ. The wearer of the imperial purple of Rome would be taken out of the way in the course of the centuries to make way for that full development of the antichristian kingdom which would masquerade as God and truth (2 Thess. 2: 3-12). The beastly Roman Empire which had sprawled across the world far so long in its exercise of iron power over the nations, would have served its purpose, and would make way for that far more subtle and dangerous delusion, the Roman apostasy. The last head of imperial Rome would receive its fatal wound, yet its very death would be the signal for its resurrection from heathenism in a new, more terrible antichristian form, more outlasting, more cruel, more blasphemous, more bloodthirsty in its oppression of the saints of the Most High - and all the world would wonder and be deceived when the deadly wound was healed, and the ghost of the Roman empire would appear on the grave thereof, exercising all the power of the first beast, creating an image thereof (a kingdom and an empire like unto that which it supplanted) and cause all men to receive its mark and bow before it (Revelation 13).

Our readers will perceive at once that we dismiss that strange imagination, born of the evangelical aberrations of the early 19th century, that the Book of Revelation has naught to do with Christian history, but that all its pages with very few exceptions relate to a fragment of time actually and literally to consist of 1260 DAYS whereas for that period of YEARS and more, the Christian church (that is, the true saints of God) was to be harried and slain, persecuted and scattered, by the power of this world and of Satan.

We cannot reiterate too often, in view of the sad delusion now infecting the evangelical world, that both Paul and John were prophets of the Church and of no-one else, and spoke of that which should befall the Church in the course of history.

This was clearly seen by all our forefathers in unbroken succession. It is not we who are innovators but those who have thus compressed all the warnings (and the comforts) of Paul and John into a fragment of time not yet reached - a time which it is claimed will be irrelevant to the Church of Christ. The evil which this theory has done to Bible exposition, is incalculable, and the present state of the evangelical pulpit owes more than we can ever say, to this false system of handling the Word of God.

But not only was the Church of our Saviour Jesus Christ trembling on the brink of vast events in the political world when John wrote his Gospel, but she was also assaulted by devilish and blasphemous errors, the target of which was Christ Himself. He was being degraded from His Godhead, dragged down from His essential deity, reduced to creaturely status and made the figment of a purely human philosophy. "Even now," writes John in his first epistle, "there are many antichrists" (1 John 2:18) - by which we know (adds the apostle) that THIS time, (that is the time of the Church), is THE LAST TIME (after which there can be no other time, only eternity).

CHRIST - THE ANSWER TO ALL ERROR

In view of what the future held, a future already being unfolded to John in the errors and oppressions even then troubling the people of the Lord, John was commissioned to write the Gospel which bears his name, as well as the other four writings which are from his hand.

He begins the Gospel, as he begins the first Epistle, and the Book of Revelation, with an exhibition of the supreme glory of Christ, and the clearest of all statements elucidating the mystery of that Godhead which was veiled in flesh which he had seen with his eyes, his ears had heard, and his hands had handled, even the Word of Life. The supremacy and sovereign omnipotence of Christ are always the answer to every foe.

The term LOGOS which John uses to describe the mystery of Christ's Person (translated 'WORD' in our version, there being no other available term in our language by which the Greek word and its deep, subtle meaning could be expressed) can only be explained by its usage and by the collateral descriptions given elsewhere in the Bible.

John derives the doctrine of the LOGOS direct from the Holy Spirit who speaks from the depths of Old Testament prophecy. It is from Solomon and from Moses and the prophets that John takes his doctrine, as we shall presently see.

When the apostle Paul writes of "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1: 24) he is describing by extended expression what in John is THE LOGOS. The term means more than REASON, more than EXPRESSION OF A THOUGHT, more than WISDOM and more than POWER, but all these things combined, personified, deified and presented in the All-Glorious form of the eternal and only begotten of the Father. This is John's doctrine of the LOGOS. He could find no other single word to express his inspired thought - there is no other such word, and the word he used must be understood not by lexicography, not by manipulation of the dictionary, but by deep study of the Divine Word, the Scriptures of Truth.

The Gospel of John is no ordinary book. None of the Books of the Bible is that, but John is the last of the divine penmen and who writes for all, Christ's last word to His church during the long ages of waiting till all His foes are made His footstool.

That last word of Christ is about Himself - His eternity, His place in the Godhead, His constant care of His Church in the ceaseless ministration of the Holy Spirit. The object is not merely to write a history, but to go behind history so that the people of God in their age-long tribulation and conflict with evil powers, seen or unseen, might know who is with them, what His name is, how supreme in all creation, how unchallengeable His omnipotence to deliver and save and preserve, how faithful and true in the direst hour.

We have seen that this is how Christ appeared to John in the Patmos vision when He made the fullest revelation of Himself to the beloved apostle in the time of the church's greatest peril.

For the chief consolation of the suffering saint is Christ Himself, and John was supremely chosen to give the fullest, widest, most glorious unveiling of Christ as the Only Begotten, the Eternal Word, that we all might know our full comfort and security in Him.

"IN THE BEGINNING"

There is a very profound connection between the opening words of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) and the commencing words of the Fourth Gospel -

"In the beginning".

"In the beginning God, created...." tells us something of surpassing importance about God. It is this: that God's eternal purpose is to express Himself and make visible and intelligible His glory. In this sense Creation was an inevitable thing (for whatever God does He does in an eternal sense, as a requirement of His Being and wisdom). It is impossible for God to be in Himself all - wisdom and all-power, without exercising that wisdom and power. Without that field in which to exercise His attributes and without a "theatre" of intelligent and moral beings capable of applauding those works and perceiving in them the fullness of the divine perfection, it would be as though God were not. It is not without very profound meaning that the Scriptures tell us that in the day of creation "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38: 7).

Because God is light He must create light as the glorious pattern of what He is. Because He is wisdom and power there must be a universe which, in the marvelous construction of all its parts from the least to the greatest, provides a means of displaying and discerning those infinite qualities of God.

Thus the Psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge ... their sound is gone out to all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world"(Psalm 19).

How quickly the thought in that majestic psalm passes to the moral creation where the Word of God reigns: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple...."

The eighth psalm, displays the same transcendent philosophy: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth". As with the rush of cherubim wings, the psalmist is instantly transported above the

natural creation into the firmament of redemption. He meditates on the creation of MAN, the peculiar treasure of God - the masterpiece of God's holy wisdom - yet not man in himself so much as man in his true head and pattern ... the Son of Man, the Emmanuel, God with us: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him (for a little while) lower than the angels: and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalm 8: 4-5).

Paul completes the thought of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2, where he tells us that the dominion over creation originally given to man, is realised in, Christ Jesus, the God-man, through the atonement. "We see Jesus made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour".

Returning to John we find the same principle observed and enlarged upon. On the obvious pattern of Genesis, the inspired apostle writes: "In the beginning...." But there he breaks off and his thought travels immediately to that which lies beyond creation - beyond time - that which is the origin and the end of creation - "the WORD".

God reveals Himself. The commanding word of Creation is not just a created word. It is God putting forth Himself. He tells us what He is, but not in natural speech. The Word is a Person; that Person is One who was always His companion and partner. That Word is more. It is God Himself.

Now is our thought carried beyond time and beyond the natural and the physical to that of which the outward creation is only the garment. Here is the Reason behind all things, the Cause of all created being, the full and final and utter disclosure of who and what God is, in that glorious Second Person of the Godhead, the Eternal Son, the Only Begotten, "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God".

This eternal Word which stands forth is not a Word about God, but a Word which is God, which dwelt with God in the timeless eternity which subsisted before the beginning, that Word which truly never was and never will be, but always IS, and which in the full development of the grand design of the Godhead "became flesh and dwelt among us", that in Him and by Him we might behold the eternal glory - "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1. 14).

CREATION AND ITS REDEMPTION

It is thus that the uncreated Word transcends creation, and through creation takes form, uniting the visible to the invisible and the created to the uncreated, that in and through Himself the purpose of God from the beginning should be achieved and the fullness of God's wisdom love and power, light and grace and truth, be displayed to the adoring wonder of redeemed creation to all eternity.

But there is a limitation implied. We are now in the moral sphere. Angels have fallen without prospect of redemption. Man has fallen, yet in hope of redemption (Genesis 3. 15), though redemption is not co-extensive with the race.

As in natural creation, the glory of God is perverted and denied by the blindness and hardness of fallen and rebellious man, so in the spiritual creation or regeneration in which God is engaged, there is a blind incomprehension and obstinate refusal to see and know.

"The light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1: 5).

"He came unto his own and his own received him not". The moral creation does not respond to the law of God as does the natural creation in its perfect union with the divine will. The moral creation, by the very

fact that it is moral and not merely physical, manifests itself in revolt and repudiation of the holy Law which in its intention confers upon man his greatest dignity, privilege and glory, but which in the outcome is the instrument by which man rises up against his Creator.

"Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2).

The fatal result is death - spiritual death, of which the death of the body is but the awful symbol. This is a death which is in trespasses and sins, a region of death where the overlord is the prince of darkness and death, himself a fallen spirit in revolt against, and in defiance of, the divine holiness (see Heb. 2: 14-15).

Let no man in his perversity assume that redemption is the creative right of all created beings. The devil knows the answer to that and his implacable hatred of all good and consecration of his perverted powers to all evil, is only too sure a token that there is a region of evil from which there is neither repentance nor return, but which, in the judgment thereof, shall eternally declare the holiness and righteousness of God, just as the region of redemption will eternally display the treasures of His mercy and love.

Let him who revolts against that take care lest his rebellious thought harden at the last into that final condition to which Satan and his kingdom are already arrived: "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is (already become) a devil?"

There are, then, those who "receive him not" and among these the most privileged of mankind (the Jewish race), who by birth and descent, by the advantage of light and truth bestowed upon them through their own prophets and righteous men down the centuries, ought to have been "a people prepared for the Lord". They "received him not". But their unbelief could not make "the faith of God" of none effect (Romans 3:2).

The divine wisdom decreed that the purpose be worked out in the widest possible field. A people was reserved by the Lord and for the Lord in whom His original and full purpose of manifesting His glory must be realised, for:

"To as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God".

John 1: 12-13.

THE DIVINE WILL AND MAN'S WILL

It is unthinkable - indeed subversive to faith - to suppose that the supreme object of creation, namely, the incarnation of the Word and the bringing forth of a new creation by means of redemption from sin and death and renewal by the Spirit of God - should be left to the accident of the human will, that same will which had already turned the old creation into chaos.

The now order must clearly be founded upon that which is in its nature unchangeable. John names it - "the will of God" (John 1. 13).

Paul's word is, "the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved ... having made known the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself"

(Eph. 1. 5-9)

This "will of God" is not suspended on the fallibility of human choice or instrumentality. It is hinged eternally and irrevocably on the obedience of the Son.

"Then said I. Lo, I come: in the volume of the book (that is, in the decrees of the everlasting covenant of grace) it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea thy law is within my heart".

Psalms 40. 7-8.

In the divine commentary upon this statement, the apostle Paul (Heb 10: 9-10) tells us that by this "will of God" the first covenant (of works) is taken away, that the second (of grace) might be established, and that all the elect might be "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all".

Rising to the highest pinnacle of that which is revealed, the apostle John records the New Covenant prayer of Christ (John 17) in which the Son reckons with the Father on the terms of that contract by which the life of the triune God is pledged and conditioned. For the so-called "High Priestly prayer" of Christ is that and very much more than that. It is the declaration and exposition of the New Covenant, in prayer form, in the presence of selected human witnesses, at the most solemn moment in all Creation - the night the Son of God was betrayed; the night when the symbols of the New Covenant were presented and ordained in bread and wine. John 17 records the declaration by Christ of that same Everlasting Covenant for which the world was made and for which the Son came into the world. These are His words:

"Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."

(John 17: 2-3).

The new creation which issues from the tomb of Christ is founded upon the bedrock of Christ's righteous obedience to death and hence is beyond the possibility of another fall. A new order came in with the resurrection and exaltation of Emmanuel, and in that new order the grace and power and gift of God assemble from mankind, those whom His mysterious wisdom has sealed so that the Father's gift of the Kingdom to the Son is in no part founded upon the fallibility of the creature or exposed to the perversity of fallen nature.

Whence then man's moral responsibility for his continued impenitence and unbelief, if his repentance and faith are guaranteed on other grounds than his own disposition to be saved?

Let all men beware of making the Holy One the cause of sin and unbelief. The cause is in ourselves. On the other hand, let all men beware of giving to man the last and sovereign act by which the purposes of God are realised. This would be to destroy the world and fill creation with confusion.

As darkness does not comprehend light and ignorance cannot conceive knowledge, and as heaven is higher than earth, so the recesses of divine wisdom are not accessible to human exploration. We may know the fact revealed, but the processes of that holy will which governs all, we may not know.

What we do know is the fact of that grace which alone makes the difference, and those who hang upon grace shall not believe in vain, nor be disappointed at last of their hope. It is equally a fact revealed that the wicked shall be turned into hell and their condemnation lies only in themselves, for "this is the

condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil". (John 3. 19).

The election of grace is the assurance of Christ's reward under the Everlasting Covenant. It is underwritten by the decree of God in the atonement: "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied". (Isaiah 53:11)

Let us bow heart and intellect before the mystery of this divine grace, and (like Christ) be "satisfied".

"God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'. (2 Cor. 4: 6).

Light in the soul is as much a creative act-of God as the shining of the firstborn light into the blackness of ancient, primeval night.

THE LOGOS OF PLATO AND THE BIBLE LOGOS

We must now clear from all imputation the integrity of that word "LOGOS" which John uses to describe that mystery of godliness; the Person of the Only Begotten Son.

There have never been wanting those enemies of the truth who allege that John borrowed the word from the Greek classics, either direct from Plato or at least secondhand from the Alexandrine Jew, Philo, a first century philosopher who traded in the speculations of the Greek.

The answer to this false charge is twofold. First, the Logos of Philo, and of Plato, bears no resemblance whatever to the Logos of John - "In the beginning was the Word (Logos)". Secondly, John goes much further back than Philo or Plato or any previous philosopher. He goes right back to Solomon for his word - 1,000 years before Philo and four centuries before Plato. Further, he goes back to Moses, more than five centuries before Solomon and a thousand years before Plato.

John's doctrine of Christ rises only in the sanctuary. We refer in the first instance to the famous "Wisdom" passage in Proverbs 8, especially verses 22-31. Wisdom is here personified and is the equivalent in meaning of John's word LOGOS.

Dr. Hengstenberg dismisses the objection that in Proverbs wisdom is introduced only as an attribute of God, poetically represented.

"Opposed to such a view is the fact that what is pronounced here of the Second Person of the Godhead sharing in the creation of the world, coincides with the distinction occurring elsewhere (in the doctrine of the Angel of Jehovah) between the hidden God and His revealer. Add to this that it could not be declared of Wisdom, as an attribute of God, that it had been formed and brought forth from eternity".

(Prov. 8:22-23) Dr. Hengstenberg.

Hengstenberg also dismisses the objection that as "wisdom" in Proverbs is a feminine word it could not properly represent the Second Person of the Godhead. "But the divine Mediator of Creation appears as personal wisdom (feminine) because here He is considered according to His wisdom unfolded in creation, as similarly in Ecclesiastes, Solomon is represented as incarnate Wisdom (feminine)" - in the word "Kohelah" (or "the Preacher", "Ecclesiastes").

Christ also designates Himself as Wisdom

(compare Matthew 23: 34-35 and Luke 11: 49-51).

That John's doctrine of the Word (LOGOS) is deeply rooted in Proverbs 8 there can be no doubt when Solomon's passage is carefully considered. There are 10 verses. The first five (22-26) describe the existence of the Word (Wisdom) before creation, and the remaining five (27-31) of the participation of the Word in creation itself.

The first three verses of John's gospel are but a condensation of this passage in Proverbs. Verse 22, Proverbs 8, declares that He (Wisdom, or the Word) was possessed by God before the works of creation. Again in verse 23, Wisdom is 'set up from' everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was".

In Revelation 3, verse 14, Christ describes Himself as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God", that is, Christ is the "living beginning" or source from whence all creation proceeds. The errorists who allege, from this verse that Christ was the product of the first act of creation do not deserve an answer.

"When the creation began, God already possessed Wisdom, the LOGOS was already with Him, so that He was before all things and only by Him do all things consist (Col. 1:17)". Dr.Hengstenberg

We add to our celebrated exegete's comments the description of Christ as given by Paul in 1 Cor. 1:24 - "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God". This is Paul's interpretation of the LOGOS - that He who bears that description bears it in view of His complete identification with the Godhead as the full expression of the omnipotence and eternal wisdom of God. He who thus expresses God must be God Himself - which is precisely what John is saying.

It is thus that John introduces the Saviour in all His supremacy as the great Creator, the Wisdom of the Eternal, or to borrow from Isaiah his description of the LOGOS - "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH

The second Old Testament source from which the doctrine of the LOGOS is derived is the appearance of the Angel of the Lord who throughout the history of the people of God in the Old Testament acts for God as the protector and redeemer of His people.

That the Angel of the Lord was none other than the Eternal and Only Begotten Son in His pre-incarnation manifestation to Israel, there has never been any doubt. The rabbis have always recognised the Messiah in this mysterious Angel, though they deny the identity of the Angel with the Lord Jesus.

From Genesis 18 when He first appeared to Abraham, till the announcement of Malachi 3:1, this mysterious One constantly emerges. To Abraham in the plains of Mamre He appeared with two angelic companions, to announce the destruction of Sodom and to foretell the birth of Isaac. The chapter begins with the statement, "The Lord (Jehovah) appeared unto him"

When Sarah, behind the tent door, heard the announcement of the

forthcoming birth of Isaac, she laughed inwardly - and incredulously. "And the Lord (Jehovah) said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh...?"

At the close of the interview we read, "and the Lord (Jehovah) went his way as soon as he had left off communing with Abraham" (Gen. 18:33)

From that time forth the "Angel of the Lord" constantly appears in the history of the Old Testament people, leading, guiding, rebuking, delivering, preparing the way for His own Incarnation at Bethlehem.

Jacob - that great and glorious man - wrestled with this Angel at Peniel

("the face of God") and held Omnipotence in his ten fingers

(Gen. 32: 24-30). For that Angel was the Lord God, as Hosea the prophet

later confirms:

"By his strength he (Jacob) had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed. He wept and made supplication unto him. He found him in Bethel and there he spake with us: even the Lord God of hosts: the Lord is his name". (Hosea 12: 3-6).

THE GOD OF BETHEL WAS CHRIST

The angel with whom Jacob wrestled at Peniel was none other than Jehovah in His manifestation as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, for Jacob named the place PENIEL which means ("The face of God" because said he, "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."

(Genesis 32: 30; compare Hosea 12: 3-5)

Of this Angel of the Lord's Presence, he later speaks when blessing the two sons of Joseph: "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day; the Angel which redeemed me from all evil...." (Genesis 48: 15-16).

Jacob's vision at Bethel of the heavenly ladder with the Lord (Jehovah) standing above it, is claimed by Christ to be a picture of His own divine glory as He says to Nathaniel:

"Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". (John 1: 51)

"I am the God of Bethel" declares the Angel of God to Jacob when warning him to flee from Paden Aram (Genesis 31: 11-13). So Christ (significantly recorded in our Gospel of John) shows to Nathaniel that his (Nathaniel's) confession that He was "the Son of God, the King of Israel" was to be crowned with the knowledge that He was none other than that Jehovah, that God of Bethel, that Redeemer of Israel who appeared at that most critical period of the nation's history when at Bethel the Lord proclaimed Himself the God, the Saviour, the Redeemer of His people.

It was this Angel of the Lord who went before. Israel in the wilderness to keep and guide the people of God and bring them into their inheritance.

"Behold, I send an Angel before thee to keep thee in the way and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice, provoke him not for he will not pardon your transgressions,

for my name is in him". (Exodus 23: 20-23)

"They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them," says Paul "and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). (In the margin, the words underlined read "that went with them"). So the Angel of the Lord's Presence was Christ.

It was He who gave the Law to Moses on Sinai (see in Acts 7, verse 38, where the Lord is described as "the angel which spake" to Moses). It was He who led the Israelites through the wilderness.

"Behold I send an angel before thee ... Beware of him and obey his voice. Provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions, FOR MY NAME IS IN HIM ... For mine angel shall go before thee and bring thee in...." (Exodus 23: 20-23)

In Exodus 33:2 God promises to send "an angel" before His people to drive out the Canaanite and in Deuteronomy 7: 21-24 Moses tells the people that it is "the Lord thy God, mighty and terrible" who should be the One so promised in the form of the Angel.

CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

The One who appeared to Joshua with drawn sword (Joshua 5: 13-15) was this same Angel whom Moses foretold would drive out the heathen from before the tribes of the Lord. He claims from Joshua divine honours: "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.... Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy".

The language which this Exalted One uses to Joshua confirms that he is the identical Person who appeared to Moses at the Burning Bush, and that Person was Jehovah. Thus Stephen:

"Then appeared to him (Moses) in the wilderness of Mount Sinai an Angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground".

(Acts 7: 30-33)

THE ASCENT IN THE FLAME

It was Christ as the Angel of Jehovah, the Eternal Word or Logos of God, who appeared to Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson (Judges 13) and "did wondrously" by ascending in the flame of Manoah's offering.

"Then Manoah knew that he was an Angel of the Lord ... and Manoah said to his wife, We shall surely die because we have seen God".

Manoah desires to know the Angel's name, and the reply of the Angel is of high importance - "why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" (Judges 13:18). That word "secret" is the same word in the Hebrew, translated in Isaiah 9, verse 6, "His name shall be called WONDERFUL..." Likewise Jacob inquired of the Person with whom he wrestled at Peniel "What is thy name?" and received the same reply as Manoah: "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?"

For the Name of God is incommunicable. It is secret and wonderful and it is the name of the Angel, the Sent One, the Eternal Word, the Son of God, the Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

The true identity of Manoah's Angel as being Jehovah Himself, the Redeemer of His people, is marvelously portrayed in the sequel, when the Angel ascends to heaven in the flame of the altar. We quote from an 18th century writer whose name we do not know but whom we have reason to believe is Ambrose Searle:

"The Angel enjoined Manoah to make (his) sacrifice to Jehovah, and when the flame was ascending, the Angel ascended in it. This signified to Manoah and the Church that He was Christ who thus appeared; and that this Christ, by the oblation of Himself, would pacify the divine wrath and be that true sacrifice of His people, by which not only their offerings should be accepted but that Himself also would ascend from them to plead their cause before the throne of glory. This gracious revelation perfectly corresponds with His name Wonderful; for surely this act of Christ in atoning for poor sinners is the most admirable of all the works of the Lord. It was this which caused Manoah and his wife, when they saw the figure of their Redeemer entering the flame and ascending in it as the true propitiation with God, to fall down upon their faces in humble adoration and to say concerning this Angel Jehovah Himself, that they had seen God".

GIDEON AND THE ANGEL

Gideon likewise recognised this Angel as the Redeemer of Israel, Jehovah Himself (Judges 6). "The Angel appeared unto him and said, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said, O my Lord, if the Lord be with us why has this befallen us? ... And the Lord (Heb. Jehovah) looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel: have not I sent thee".

MICHAEL IS CHRIST

There is formidable proof that the great Angel of Daniel 10 was "Michael the Archangel" and that Michael is Christ in His office as ruler of the angelic host, "the great Prince who stands for the children of thy people" (Daniel 12).

MALACHI

The title "Malachi" given to the last book of the Old Testament is derived from the character of the Book and not from the supposed name of a prophet, for "Malachi" is the Hebrew for "My Angel" or "My Messenger" and Malachi (the Book) is supremely that portion of the Old Testament specially written as God's last word to the O.T. Church, before the coming of Christ, heralded by John the Baptist:

"Behold I will send my messenger and he shall prepare, the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger (i.e. Malachi, angel) of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3: 1).

John the Baptist, who knew his commission so well and was as great as the greatest of all who went before him, sent disciples to Jesus to ask him

"Art thou he that should come?" (Matthew 11: 3).

This question was derived from Malachi 3: 1.

HENGSTENBERG'S SUMMARY

Hengstenberg, summarising the teaching of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, well remarks:

"The angel of God, or of Jehovah, is represented as far exalted above the sphere of the inferior angels. Of him are predicated all the attributes of the true God, who speaks in His name, claims for Himself the honours due to the Eternal and is addressed and treated as God. In Exodus 23: 21 He is designated as the Angel in whom is God's name: i.e. His nature is historically unfolded and attested. In Isaiah 63: 9 He is spoken of as the Angel of His Presence (or face) i.e. the Angel in whom God Himself appears, in opposition to the inferior, created angels. In Joshua 5: 14 He appears as Captain of the Lord's host, on account of His Godlike majesty and glory. He attributes Divine honours to Himself, commanding Joshua to loose his shoe from his feet because the place was holy. In Joshua 6:2, He is called Jehovah. The powers of heaven, material and spiritual, the stars and angels, are subject to Him. He appears surrounded by the latter, who are attentive to His words, in the first vision of Zechariah where he is represented as the Protector of the covenant people, the Mediator between them and God, their Intercessor at the throne of grace".

HE WHO WAS SENT

All the revelatory appearances of God in the O.T. are by means of His angel, that is, through THE WORD, through Christ, the Eternal Son, the LOGOS.

That John's mind dwelt very considerably on the O.T. doctrine of the Angel (the Sent One) of the Lord is clear from the unique place the word "sent" has in his gospel. Whereas in the other three gospels the word occurs only once in this connotation (see Matt. 10: 40; Mark 9:37 and Luke 9:48, in which the three share the same quotation as in John 13:20) John has the expression no fewer than 30 times, each of them highly significant and unmistakably joined to the doctrine of the Angel - LOGOS, the theme of this glorious Book.

Note particularly:

My meat is to do the will of him that sent me (John 4:34)

He that believeth on me believeth on him that sent me (5:24).

The works that I do bear witness that the Father hath sent me (5:36-37).

No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him. (6:44).

I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day (9:4).

He that seeth me seeth him that sent me (12:45).

This is life eternal, to know Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (17:3)

Says Hengstenberg of this phenomenal feature of John's gospel: "By this expression is everywhere intimated the personal identity of Christ with the O.T. Angel or Messenger of the Lord. John rests on the doctrine of the Angel of the Lord when here and in verse 11 (chapter 1) he designates the covenant people as the property of Christ; and when (in 12: 41) he says without further explanation, that Isaiah saw the glory of Christ, while in the O.T. it is the glory of Jehovah which is spoken of (Isaiah 6)".

Thus, He who is the Angel, the Sent One, of the Lord, is also Himself of the same Essence as the Father and the doctrine of the Logos is thereby fully unfolded - that the WORD is the Revealer of God, the WISDOM that ever dwelt with God, the GLORIOUS IMAGE of the ETERNAL, the Bearer of His NAME and LIKENESS and at the same time is Himself GOD, in a sense most absolute and true.

By this likewise we are permitted to see in the otherwise inaccessible regions of the Divine and Holy Being of God, a filial love, a perfect harmony, a glorious society, an intimate and most sacred communion, a holy joy, an accord, a triumphant wisdom, an ineffable peace.

Such is our Saviour, the Uncreated, the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the sum total of all wisdom and knowledge, the beginning and the end of all things, for whom and by whom all things are created, the Royal Heir to the Throne of the Universe, the One who by His proven merit, is fit and worthy to bear the rule of all things and who can and will bring all things to their predestined end.

"Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things." (Psalm 45:3-4)

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-alexander/christ-the-uncreated-word-ch11-18/>

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