

God in Three Persons: The Trinity and the Second Revelation

By ‘second’ revelation I am intending to define the way that Israel, described in the Old Testament—the ‘scriptures’ as the New Testament calls them—reveals the character and being of God. These scriptures, never referred to as either ‘the word of God’ or ‘the word of the Lord’, are the written records of God’s dealing with humanity, but in particular his dealings with his whole creation through his dealings with the tiny nation of Israel. Even though the first eleven chapters of Genesis deal with what some call ‘pre-history’, meaning by that the period before accurate dating is possible,¹ the account of creation and the defilement which followed the sin of humanity is all given in terms set out by the life and experiences of Israel.

THE ROCK WAS CHRIST

Much later than the stories of Israel, the apostle Paul wrote concerning the events associated with the exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wanderings:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ and all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1–4).

This was written in the context of warning the Corinthian Christians against indulging in sexual immorality, putting Christ to the test and complaining (1 Cor. 10:8–10). Twice Paul said that what happened to Israel in the wilderness ‘occurred as examples for us’ (1 Cor. 10:6, 11), meaning that these events actually happened and the Corinthians must not repeat their disobedience. The word ‘example’ translates the word τύπος (tupos), and this word and its associated word αντίτυπος (antitupos see Heb. 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:21) has led to an approach to interpreting the scriptures known as ‘typology’ which sees a direct relationship between persons and events in the Old Testament and persons and events in the New Testament.² Gordon Fee, writing on 1 Corinthians 10:1–2, writes:

¹ I am aware that the use of a term such as ‘pre-history’ may sound heretical to some but it is widely used and, I think, accurately describes the details of Genesis 1–11. But my interest in these chapters does not lie in their historical details but in their historic significance. These stories have been written down not because they happened but because of their importance.

² Compare C. A. Evans, ‘Typology’, in Joel B. Green, et al (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1992, pp. 862–6), with A. C. Thiselton, ‘Hermeneutics’, in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Eds), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1988, p. 294). Thiselton writes:

Many draw a firm distinction between allegory, which depends on a correspondence between *ideas*, and typology, which depends on a correspondence between *events*. Some argue that Paul uses typology but not allegory. However, while it is true that events are given whereas ideas are entertained, criteria for the typological interpretation of such events remains problematic [emphasis his].

In contrast to Davidson, who understands ‘type’ in a more cause-and-effect way, by ‘type’ I mean that after the fact one sees a correspondence between earlier biblical events and the present situation. Sometimes these are viewed as nearly ‘prophetic’; i.e. the earlier event makes the second one inevitable. It is doubtful whether Paul so understood them. He sees the one as divinely given ‘instruction.’ They ‘prefigure’ in this sense, but they scarcely happened so as to demand further ‘fulfilment.’³

The reason for this reference to typology is that there are many who have seen direct correlation between Old Testament events, institutions and persons; and New Testament ideas, even though the New Testament writers do not make that identification. So, some would suggest that there was indeed something sacramental (grace-imparting) about Israel eating and drinking in the wilderness in the same way that the Christian feeds on Christ in the Lord’s Supper.⁴ But I suggest that when Paul used Israel and its failures as a type, he meant it as an example, a pattern, which it was important to observe. He was not saying that Israel is a prophetic type of the Christian church; he was saying that their moral failure and God’s strong judgement (1 Cor. 10:5) was something to be observed as a warning.

So why did he say what he did?

all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ and all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:2–4).

I understand this to mean that Paul was starting with the Corinthians’ understanding (or perhaps only their language, as they seem to have a somewhat muddled appreciation of these observances) of the Lord’s Supper and Christian baptism and using it to present Israel in terms directly relevant to and drawn from the situation of his readers. Questions concerning the ‘spiritual rock’ which followed Israel cannot be answered with any certainty. When he said that ‘the rock was Christ’, we are also a little uncertain, because Paul himself does not provide a further explanation. Possibly he was saying, with apostolic hindsight, that it was always Christ who supplied Israel’s needs and so both Israel and the Corinthians were putting Christ to the test.

What is clear, though, is that no non-Christian Jew ever thought to find the Messiah as the source of Israel’s sustenance.⁵ Most definitely no non-Christian Jew would ever have suggested that the LORD was in some mysterious way triune. One example of the way educated Jews understood the wilderness events was Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Paul:

Moreover, the soul falls in with a scorpion, that is to say, with dispersion in the wilderness; and the thirst, which is that of the passions, seizes on it until God sends forth upon it the stream of his own accurate wisdom, and causes the changed soul to drink of unchangeable health; for the abrupt rock is the wisdom of God, which being both sublime and the first of things he quarried out of his own powers, and of it he gives drink to the souls that love God; and they, when they have drunk, are also filled with the most universal manna; for manna is

A moderate approach is also found in G. R. Osborne, ‘Type, Typology’ in Walter A. Elwell (Ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 1117ff.

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 443, n. 10 (emphases his).

⁴ I well recall long sermons (at least they seemed long to a ten year old boy) which, with godly passion, drew typological links between minute details of the wilderness tabernacle and Christian truths.

⁵ Messiah, however defined, was always a human deliverer.

called 'something' which is the most primary genus of every thing. But the most universal of all things is God; and in the second place the word of God.⁶

Elsewhere he describes the supply of manna, understood as food for the soul, as 'the reasons which God rains down out of his sublime and pure nature, which he calls heaven'.⁷

It is significant that Philo took the source of the drink and the food as representing the wisdom and word of God. Looking at Proverbs 8:22ff., we see wisdom saying, 'The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago'. This may be an example of latent 'hypostatization',⁸ the principle of attributing a personal independent identity and existence to something which by nature does not possess them. In the Psalms there are occasional statements which seem to indicate that the word of God may somehow be seen acting with some sort of independence. For example, Psalm 107:20, 'he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction', and Psalm 147:15, 'He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly'. Certainly, later writers were more explicit. Wisdom 16:12, for example:

For neither herb nor poultice cured them, but it was your word, O Lord, that heals all people.

and Wisdom 18:14–16:

For while gentle silence enveloped all things,
and night in its swift course was now half gone,
¹⁵ your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne,
into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior
¹⁶ carrying the sharp word of your authentic command,
and stood and filled all things with death.
and touched heaven while standing on the earth.

There is also the conspicuous activity of 'the Spirit of the LORD' (etc.) within the Old Testament, briefly mentioned at creation but prominent in the lives of the judges and the prophets. H. Wheeler Robinson has pointed out that:

Where the Spirit of God is, there is God, and where God is present, God is active, and these are the token of His activity. The primitive and fundamental idea of 'spirit' (ruach) in the Old Testament is that of active power or energy (ἐνέργεια not δύναμις), power superhuman, mysterious, elusive, of which the ruach or wind of the desert was not so much the symbol as the most familiar example.⁹

He points out that there is only one instance where ruach is explicitly used in a personal way in the Old Testament, namely 1 Kings 22:21–22, where 'a lying ruach [is] employed by Yahweh to "inspire" the optimistic prophets'.¹⁰

⁶ 'Allegorical Interpretation', II, 86, in *The Works of Philo*, translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody Mass. 1993, p. 47.

⁷ 'Allegorical Interpretation', III, 162. For a brief discussion of the degree to which Philo was representative of all Hellenistic Judaism, see R. M. Wilson, 'Philo Judaeus', in G. W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. 847ff.

⁸ Whether either wisdom or the word were ever really regarded as having an independent status within the scriptures is doubtful. For 'wisdom', see H. P. Muller, '*chakham*', in G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980, pp. 380ff. For 'word', see W. H. Schmidt, '*dabhar*', in T.D.O.T., vol. 3, (1978), p. 120-125.

⁹ *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, Nisbet, London, 1928, pp. 8–12.

¹⁰ *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, p. 9.

The language of the psalmist in Psalm 51:11, ‘Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me’, is a notable use of parallelism. His spirit is his presence. To grieve his holy spirit (Isa. 63:10) is to offend his holiness. When Psalm 139:7–10 acknowledges the omnipresence of God it plainly equates the spirit of God with his personal presence, expressed by him leading the psalmist by his (that is, God’s) hand:

- ⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

It cannot be proved that the Old Testament scriptures ever understood anything or anyone to stand beside the one God of Israel. I want to contend that Paul’s comment that ‘the rock was Christ’ does not come from reading back a trinitarian understanding into puzzling Old Testament statements. The Old Testament statements were not puzzling in that way! Neither were events or persons ‘types’, in some mysterious and controlling way. The issue is that in Christ, in the incarnation of the Word, God has done something new. Apart from a personal confrontation with the Word himself, the triune nature of the ‘one LORD’ (Deut. 6:4) would never even be considered. Doubtless this lies behind John’s observation that Isaiah had seen the glory of Christ (John 12:39–41). He knew that it was Christ’s glory that Isaiah had seen because he, too, had seen the glory (John 1:14). As Moltmann put it, ‘it is only christology that makes the knowledge and concept of the triune God necessary’.¹¹

THE CREATION STORY

The creation story (some would say ‘stories’) needs to be briefly examined. Because the understanding of God as triune is a specifically Christian way of thinking, we can see how the New Testament presents the action of creation:

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants . . .’ (Matt. 11:25).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being (John 1:1–3).

. . . for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor. 8:6).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him (Col. 1:15–16).

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, SCM London, 1981, p. 97.

By faith we understand that the worlds¹² were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible (Heb. 11:3).

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created (Rev. 4:11).

In summary, the picture is of creation being the action of the Father, through and only through the Word, which means through the Lord, Jesus Christ, and for him, as he is the image of God. This action is from no other source than the determined will of ‘our Lord and God’. But when we examine the Old Testament account of creation, many of these features are obscure if not absent:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.³ Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light (Gen. 1:1–3, NRSV).

The NIV has:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.³ And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.

The NRSV uses ‘wind’ and the NIV the more traditional ‘spirit’. Both are correct, though the NIV by its traditional use probably is the more obscure, since by its using a familiar word we are less likely to ask what the text means.¹³ But first we note that both translations use the word ‘God’, which translates the Hebrew word *elohim*. While some want to argue that, since *elohim* is a plural word, this must imply that hidden under the apparent simplicity of the words lies a hint of trinity, or at least plurality within God.¹⁴ However, this need not be the case. Wenham offers this evaluation:

The first subject of Genesis and the Bible is God . . . The word is the second most frequent noun in the OT. It is derived from the common Semitic word for god *il*. As here [Gen. 1:1] Hebrew generally prefers the plural form of the noun, which except when it means ‘gods,’ i.e., heathen deities, is construed with a singular verb. Though the plural has often been taken to be a plural of majesty or power, it is doubtful whether this is relevant to the interpretation of [*elohim*]. It is simply the ordinary word for God: plural in form but singular in meaning.¹⁵

¹² Lit. ‘the ages’, αἰῶνας, *aiōnas*. ‘Age’ and ‘world’ may be used interchangeably at times, but they may also retain their distinct meanings. ‘Age’ I would see as implying a ‘sphere of existence’, so that, as in 1 Cor. 10:11, there may be a number of ‘ages’ all running at the same time. A similar problem lies in the use of the word ῥῆματι (*rhēmati*), translated as ‘by the word’. It may often be synonymous with λόγος (*logos*) but here, I suspect, refers to the spoken utterance of God. Finally, this statement in Hebrews does not support the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). The phrase *ex nihilo* is used in the Latin Vulgate but the Greek says that what is seen came out of what does not appear. Of course, that does not deny the doctrine, but should ensure that we are careful in our defence of it.

¹³ The opening clause of the NRSV highlights this principle; the traditional, ‘In the beginning God created . . .’ is not the only way the Hebrew text can be translated. While favoring the traditional translation, Gordon J. Wenham provides a good summary of the issues that have been addressed since the rabbinic period. See *Genesis 1–15* (WBC vol. 1), Word, Milton Keynes, 1987, pp. 11ff.

¹⁴ Among others, see Donald Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1995, pp. 168f.) and Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth* (InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1982, pp. 59f.). Of the Old Testament material, Milne says: ‘This clearly does not amount to the full doctrine of the Trinity, but in presenting *plurality within God’s unity* these OT passages anticipate the fuller NT teaching’ (p. 60, emphasis mine).

¹⁵ *Genesis 1–15*, p. 14.

As we have seen above, the Old Testament really does not distinguish between the wind from God and the spirit of God. Both are ‘the breath of his mouth’ (Ps. 33:6), the ruach of his mouth. The phrase ‘and God said’, in this context, means no more than the speech of God. The focus is not on the distinctions of God, spirit and word, but on the God who breathes and speaks.

The phrase in Genesis 1:26, ‘Let us make man . . .’ is decidedly odd and has given rise to a number of interpretations.¹⁶ Among them, this is the discussion by Philo:

I imagine it is, that when Moses was speaking philosophically of the creation of the world, while he describes everything else as having been created by God alone, he mentions man alone as having been made by him in conjunction with other assistants; for, says Moses, ‘God said, Let us make man in our image’. The expression, ‘let us make’, indicates a plurality of makers. Here, therefore, the Father is conversing with his own powers, to whom he has assigned the task of making the mortal part of our soul, acting in imitation of his own skill, while he was fashioning the rational part within us, thinking it right that the dominant part within the soul should be the work of the Ruler of all things, but that the part which is to be kept in subjection should be made by those who are subject to him. And he made us of the powers which were subordinate to him, not only for the reason which has been mentioned, but also because the soul of man alone was destined to receive notions of good and evil, and to choose one of the two, since it could not adopt both. Therefore he thought it necessary to assign the origin of evil to other workmen than himself—but to retain the generation of good for himself alone.¹⁷

This may appear convoluted and then even humorous, but we should treat Philo with some respect. Whatever else, he was attempting to answer the question of the meaning of ‘Let us’ seriously. And we should observe he did not see any plurality in God; there was, to his mind, plurality with God. At the least, this was a view held within Judaism at the same time as the New Testament documents were being written.

Do we, though, need to find this phrase to be an example of latent trinitarian thought? Could there be a way forward within the parameters of the revelation within the Old Testament? Perhaps Philo was pointing in the right direction. It does seem plain that there was in Israel a notion of the ‘divine council’. It is seen in 1 Kings 22:19–23, where the LORD and the host of heaven are seen deliberating about the fate of King Ahab. This imagery shows the absolute rule of Israel’s God, Yahweh, the LORD, but also ‘articulates a world in which the governance of the gods has a real and decisive effect on public human affairs’.¹⁸ A similar picture emerges in Job 1–2. There is no questioning the LORD’s total authority, but there is much that is not seen of the way it is effected. While it is not clear how widely this view prevailed in Israel, it certainly makes sense of the language of Genesis 1:26 and also of Genesis 3:22 and 11:7.

If this suggestion is possible, then it also fits with the earlier suggestion that the description of creation is in terms already familiar to Israel. Some come readily to mind. First there is the structure of Genesis 1, the first creation account. The regular refrain ‘And there was evening and there was morning, the . . . day’ well fits the needs of memorisation and oral tradition within a worshipping community.¹⁹ The word

¹⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 27f. Mention has been made of this in the previous paper.

¹⁷ ‘On Flight and Finding’ in Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, p. 327.

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2002, p. 56.

¹⁹ Even if Moses was indeed the original author of Genesis, the written account would have been composed well after the exodus and the establishment of the worshipping community at Sinai. Walter Brueggemann notes:

‘day’ itself is just that, a period of twenty-four hours, even though the possibility of such a period did not occur until ‘day’ four, and so the language of ‘day’ would be readily accessible to all hearers of the story, especially to those already familiar with a seven-day cycle in their own lives.²⁰ Eden is described as a garden-sanctuary and Adam as the priest in the sanctuary. Adam was to lead the whole of creation in its intended worship. The significance of that for Israel itself was directly expressed in Exodus 19:5–6.²¹ The presence of the evil snake in the story fits well with the understanding of the community life of Israel. Wenham puts it:

[I]t may be noted that according to the classification of animals found in Lev 11 and Deut 14, the snake must count as an archetypal unclean animal. Its swarming, writhing locomotion puts it at the farthest point from those pure animals that can be offered in sacrifice. Within the world of OT animal symbolism a snake is an obvious candidate for an anti-God symbol, not withstanding its creation by God . . . So for any Israelite familiar with the symbolic values of different animals, a creature more likely than a serpent to lead man away from his creator could not be imagined.²²

None of this is even a suggestion that creation did not take place; ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth’. It is, though, a suggestion that the way creation is described is intentionally in terms with which the community of Israel should already be familiar. The story, then, does not even contain a vague hint of plurality in God, far less trinity.

To my mind, Genesis 2:4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16 etc. confirms this, by its use of the phrase ‘the LORD God’ (יהוה אֱלֹהִים, YHWH, *Elohim*). While it was once treated as an indication of a different literary source, this phrase is simply an indication that the story resonates with Israel. The *Elohim* of Genesis chapter one is the covenant God, Yahweh, of Israel. And here is the point: Israel knows and is defined by the declaration that שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד (the ‘*Shema*’): ‘Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one’ (Deut. 6:4, NIV).

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

‘Angel’ means messenger.²³ Sadly, most people conceive of angels as beautiful winged beings, but these are not angels at all; they are the seraphim of Isaiah chapter six or the cherubim of Genesis 3:24, which were human-headed winged lions, traditional guardians of holy places in the ancient Near East, whose images appeared on the walls of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Israel (Exod. 26:31; 1 Kings 6:29; etc.). Nonetheless ‘angels’ appear with some frequency in the Old Testament, that is, in the history of God’s dealings with and revelation through Israel.

Malachi 3:1 (AV) says:

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 of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

‘As liturgy, this poetry invites the congregation to *confess and celebrate* the world as God has intended it’ (*Genesis—Interpretation*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1982, p. 30, emphasis his).

²⁰ A seven-day cycle is well attested in literature far older than Genesis. See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 19.

²¹ See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, pp. 61, 67; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Apollos, Leicester, 2004), pp. 81ff.

²² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 73.

²³ There are almost 200 use of the word ‘angel’ in the Old Testament.

The word here translated ‘messenger’ is the same as that translated elsewhere as ‘angel’ (מַלְאָכִים, malachi), but the New Testament understands this prophecy to refer to John the Baptist (Mark 1:2). So we should be very hesitant before assigning various interpretations to the word.

However, we must attempt a brief examination of one of the events in the story. The event is the meeting of Abraham and the ‘three men’ in Genesis 18:1–19:1, which commences with three men standing near Abraham (v. 2); without explanation, it is ‘the Lord’ who responds when Sarah laughs at what the three men had said to Abraham (v. 13). Verse 17 possibly has ‘the Lord’ as one of the three (cf. v. 16). However, verse 22 has ‘the LORD’ as distinct from ‘the men’. In Genesis 19:1, again without any explanation, the three men are simply described as ‘the two angels’. E. F. Kevan strongly suggests: (i) that one of the three was ‘the angel of the LORD’; and (ii) that ‘the fact that the story opens with the categorical affirmation that it was “the LORD” who appeared lends strong support to the suggestion that the “angel” may be identified with the second person of the Trinity’.²⁴ But in the Old Testament, ‘the LORD’ is the name of God himself. It is the name explicitly belonging to the one God of Israel (cf. Exod. 3:13–15; Deut. 6:4). Against Kevan’s suggestion, others regard the theophanies not as the presence of God or of Christ, but as ‘signs’ of the presence.

G. A. F. Knight writes:

These three men had ‘appeared’ to Abraham as a ‘sign’ of the appearance or presence of the Lord. Even though they conveyed His word, they were certainly not the Lord himself . . . In a word, the O. T. regards its own theophanies in terms of the idea of ‘sacrament’.²⁵

Does it? It certainly never says so. We should keep in mind that the Old Testament writers were evidently not at all puzzled by what they had written. While there may have been prophets who did not understand the intended goal of all they had written (1 Pet. 1:10–12), for the author of Genesis 18 this was, evidently, not a difficult story nor one conveying ‘sacramental’ mysteries. I suppose, if I may put it simplistically, I cannot understand, on the one hand, a ‘pre-incarnation incarnation’ or, on the other hand, how the presence of men (who ate the food which was prepared—Gen. 18:8) could be other than a literal presentation of what actually happened. God was speaking—through human beings. They are his ‘messengers’, and so have real power for their tasks, but they are not ever regarded as intimations of some mysterious plurality in God. What is clear is that the story asserts that the promise of the LORD is being fulfilled and that the LORD is intimately and personally involved in that fulfilment. The ‘angels’ of Genesis 19:1 are his messengers to Lot in Sodom, just as they are his mouthpieces to so many in the Old Testament revelation.

If we are to get an answer to the question concerning the angel of the LORD, we will not find it in the Old Testament. Israel knows that there are angels, but offers no explanation concerning their identity. In fact, as a medium of God’s self-revelation, Israel seems not in the least concerned to offer an explanation. It is the New Testament, the apostolic revelation in the light of Christ, which deals with the matter, albeit without clear definitions.

Hebrews chapter one asks a series of questions concerning the angels. After asserting the great majesty of the Son, through whom God has spoken in a way that supersedes the prophets of the Old Testament, the writer asks:

²⁴ ‘Genesis’ in F Davidson (Ed), *The New Bible Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Fellowship, London, 1954, p. 91.

²⁵ ‘Theophany’, *I.S.B.E.* Vol. 4, p. 829.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,
 ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you’? Or again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son’?
⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
 ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’
⁷ Of the angels he says,
 ‘He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire.’
⁸ But of the Son he says,
 ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.’
¹⁰ And,
 ‘In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; ¹² like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end.’
¹³ But to which of the angels has he ever said,
 ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’?
¹⁴ Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:5–14).

The writers under the previous revelation told things the way they were. What is quite plain from them is that they do not see anything mysterious about these messengers of God. However, and I would stress this, those living under the revelation of Christ would never see the person of the incarnate Son in these angelic visitations. Given the opportunity here, the writer of Hebrews prefers to make a sharp distinction between angels and the Son. Angels may not readily be identified (Heb. 13:2), but they are not the pre-incarnate Son of God; they are ‘spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation’.^{26 27}

CHRIST IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES

In Luke 24:44–48, Jesus spoke to the disciples after his resurrection:

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,⁴⁶ and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things’.

Earlier, Jesus had ‘interpreted to [the two on the road to Emmaus] the things about himself in all the scriptures’ (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament spoke of him; but in what way?

I have already tried to demonstrate that there is nothing in the Old Testament which functions as a hint that God may be triune, or even simply plural in his being

²⁶ Within the framework of the letter to the Hebrews, I suggest that the reference to angels fits the argument concerning the Son being superior to Moses, and thus to the Law. The background lies in such statements as Galatians 3:19 and Acts 7:53. For a slightly more detailed explanation see my *The Shadow and the Substance*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2004, p. 3f.

²⁷ It is worth referring to the section, ‘Righteousness and the Law of God’ in the previous paper which allows that the Law given to Israel, especially in regards to relationships within the people of God may provide an indication that the being of the LORD does provide a basis for understanding true living within humanity.

and that with clever reasoning the truth of God can be discovered. There are sections of the Old Testament which are clearly speaking of Christ, but we see this because we know Christ and not primarily because the Old Testament scriptures lead us there. A significant example of this is Isaiah 52:14–53:12. I think a good case can be made for arguing that the primary reference to the ‘servant’ within Isaiah is to Israel itself (Isa. 41:8), but the only example we have of a non-Christian response to this passage is from the Ethiopian eunuch. His significance is that he is obviously a Jew or possibly a proselyte, since he had been to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27). His title ‘eunuch’ may even have become a formal one and not an indication of physical castration, though it was once.²⁸ If that is so, then there would be no question of him being excluded from the worship in the Temple because of his physical condition. He was not a Gentile, simply because Luke is careful to show that Gentiles are not believers in Christ until Peter preaches to Cornelius in Acts 10. Richard N. Longenecker states that ‘he was returning with a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah in his possession, which would have been difficult for a non-Jew to get’.²⁹ With all that, the man’s only response to the words of Isaiah 53:7–8 is one of bewilderment:

The eunuch asked Philip, ‘About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ (Acts 8:34).

Peter could say to Cornelius, ‘You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all’ (Acts 10:36). The material which Cornelius knows may well extend to the end of verse 38. So even with the wide dissemination of the stories of Jesus (cf. Acts 26:26) the eunuch could not see a reference to Jesus in the Isaiah passage.

When Jesus said to the two on the road to Emmaus: ‘Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ (Luke 24:26), he was speaking not to their powers of investigation but to their failure ‘to believe all that the prophets have declared’ (v. 25). Had they been people of faith (contrast Simeon in Luke 2:25–35) they would have understood. ‘Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures’ (Luke 24:27).

He did the same thing to the eleven and their companions, in the words quoted above. He made it plain that he had been teaching them these things since the beginning, but they had not understood. So now he opened their minds to understand the scriptures:

... he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’ (Luke 24:46–47).

He was not showing them the secret meaning of the scriptures. I doubt that clear prophecies concerning the suffering of the Messiah (Christ), noting the use of the word ‘Messiah’, can be found in the scriptures. Neither can a verbal prophecy of his rising again on the third day.³⁰ Yet both Jesus and the Apostle Paul said that these things were ‘according to the scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

²⁸ See Johannes Schneider, εὐνοῦχος, εὐνουχίζω, in T.D.N.T. vol. 2, p. 766.

²⁹ *Acts* (Expositor’s Bible Commentary), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, p. 159.

³⁰ I have developed this in more detail in my paper, ‘The Cross, the Resurrection and the Gospel’ in the 1998 New Creation Teaching Ministry Pastors’ School, *The Apostolic Faith in Today’s World*. See <www.newcreation.org.au/books/covers/323.html>.

‘According to the scriptures’ does not need to mean ‘according to chapter and verse’. It was not a deeper meaning in the texts of the scriptures but the whole purpose of God which those scriptures revealed which was central. In other words, men and women of faith would have been one with all that God was doing in history, just as the prophets were, even without a clear understanding of the details of future events. Christ was in the scriptures, not because there were hints to be uncovered, but because he was the one to which it all pointed. He was the goal, the telos of the law (Rom. 10:4). The place of scripture is therefore quite different from their being a source of proof texts. Scripture was the written revelation of the character and purpose of God through Israel, but always with Christ in view. Given the sin within Israel, the Law was always a disciplinarian until Christ came (Gal. 3:24). And when Christ did come—in the fulness of time (Gal. 4:4), that is, at the time of God’s choosing—all the movement of history became clear.³¹

There were men and women of faith in Israel (so Heb. 11). They knew God personally and were secure in his love and sovereign purposes, being confident in his covenant promises:

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect (Heb. 11:39–40).

The rock was always Christ:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth.
² May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew;
like gentle rain on grass,
like showers on new growth.
³ For I will proclaim the name of the LORD;
ascribe greatness to our God!
⁴ The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just.
A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he . . . (Deut. 32:1–4).

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³¹ Richard B. Gaffin Jr (*Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, 1978) put it: ‘The center of Paul’s teaching is not found in the doctrine of justification by faith or any other aspect of the *ordo salutis*. Rather, his primary interest is seen to be in the *historia salutis* as that history has reached its eschatological realisation in the death and especially the resurrection of Christ’ (p. 13).