

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 2 November 2008

No. T0545

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Old Testament appearances of Jesus: The appearance to Manoah

Today, man's frontier of exploration reaches out towards the stars in the hope of finding life on other planets. Also, there are those who believe that aliens have, in the past, visited this planet of ours. In many Science Fiction movies, such aliens, whether on the home planet or some other, are physical beings. They can be seen, heard and touched. However, the Bible speaks of some aliens (celestial foreigners) who have visited this planet who are, in their normal state, invisible to the human eye and far more powerful than we are. They are, of course, angels!

The latter are the messengers of God who have the job of helping human kind. Whenever they are found in the Bible appearing to humans, they themselves take on a human form and speak in a human language. This form may seem brighter than usual, either because of the clothing they wore or because their skin shone. They normally live in a different dimension to ours altogether.

Greater still, there is One who has visited this earth whose true being is awesome! This being is none other than the Son of God Himself. Prior to His actual birth into this world as the babe of Bethlehem's manger about 2,000 years ago, He appeared as an angel to certain people bearing a divine message specifically for them. Bible students call such occasions "Theophanies".

The word "Theophany" means "an appearance of God". The appearance we will investigate today is that to Manoah and his wife as recorded in Judges 13:2-24. The reading that follows is from the Authorised Version of the Bible. "And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her. And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him? And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him."

The passage holds many lessons for us. We will examine them under the following headings:

- The Messenger;
- The Message;
- Manoah and his Wife.

The Messenger

The messenger is called “the angel of the LORD” which is literally “the messenger of Yahweh”. The latter is the self-existent God who had a special relationship with nation of Israel. In Genesis chapter 16 the angel of the LORD speaks with the rejected Hagar and gave her advice concerning her situation of rejection. Following His advice she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, “Thou God seest me:” for she said, “Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” Hagar believed the angel to have been God revealing Himself to her.

In chapter 17 of the same book, Yahweh appeared to Abraham and spoke with Him. He introduced Himself as the “Almighty God”. Although nothing is said about angels in the section, we know that no man hath seen God at any time. Therefore, it is likely that this was the LORD appearing in the form of a man. This is certainly the case in chapter 18 when the LORD appeared to Abraham in Mamre. When he looked up from his seat he saw three men. One of these visitors acted as the spokesman and the passage reveals that He was the LORD Himself. We then read in verse 22, “And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.” Abraham stood before the third visitor – the LORD. He then pleads with Him for the people of Sodom. Despite the intercession of Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah were judged. We read in Genesis 19.24, “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven...” Here we seem to have two persons called “the LORD”. So although the angel of the LORD may be distinguished from Yahweh, the names that He bears, the power He assumes to use and the honour that is given to Him show that, in the very least, He provides a special presence of God.

These and several other incidents reveal that the angel of the LORD is none other than a distinct Person of the Godhead appearing as a man here on earth. It is an amazing thought! It may be argued that there is only one God and that He is one Person; but when we look at the verse, “The LORD our God is one LORD”, we find that name “God” is “Elohim” – the plural God. The word for “one” is “echad” which is a compound word speaking of a collective unity as used in Genesis 2:24, “These two shall be one flesh...” At the same time, “LORD” is singular. Some Hebrew scholars would say that the words are used in this way to emphasise the majesty of the LORD. This may well be the case; but when we link the thought to the New Testament, we can readily see that the Old, by using this language, indicates that there are three or more “Persons” in the Godhead.

In conclusion of this section, we may claim that this appearing of the angel of the LORD is none other than a theophany. However, there is a far clearer reason for making this claim. As Christians, we know that the Old Testament offerings pointed forward to a suffering Messiah. For example, the meat offering is symbolic of the perfect and devoted Manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The burnt offering rises to God as a sweet fragrance emphasising the perfection of the offering of Christ to God. It is written that the Lord Jesus offered Himself without spot to God by the eternal Spirit. The sin offering speaks of Christ as the holy One who was made sin on our account. The trespass offering speaks of Him as the One who has paid that which He took not away. He paid the debt we owed. The peace offering speaks of the communion we have with God as a result of Christ making peace by the blood of His cross.

In the passage under consideration today, we read, “So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar.” The angel indicates that this was a burnt offering, that is, the offering of Christ in all His perfection rising as a sweet fragrance to God. Furthermore, the accompanying meat offering speaks of the devoted life of Christ to His God. Therefore, the only person who could rise up with such an offering as Manoah’s was the Son of God Himself.

There is a third, more indirect, reason for reaching this conclusion. It is the description of the name of the angel. We read, “And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” Here, the word for “secret” may be translated as “remarkable” or “wonderful”. It reminds us of the glorious name of the Messiah given by Isaiah: “For 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). What a name!

The Message

The message of the angel to Manoah's wife reads, "Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

It was a shameful thing in Israel for a woman to be barren because children were seen as a mark of God's blessing. Initially, the wife of Manoah may have been offended by the directness of the messenger who appeared to be a man: "Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not..." But her concerns were alleviated by the words that followed: "but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son." It was a "bad news - good news" scenario. How her hopes must have rocketed. We don't know anything of the tears, or the prayers, that were prompted by her barrenness; but we do know that God was showing her wonderful grace by allowing her to bear a son who would be a judge, that is to say, a saviour of Israel.

The angel then gave her a personal warning: "... Beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing..." The baby was not to be defiled in any way by what she drank or ate. It would seem from this that the diet of a potential mother does have an effect of an unborn child. It was also a test of obedience. If you wish to follow this up, then read about unclean and clean creatures in Leviticus chapter 11.

The second part of the message stated: "For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb..." The hair of the child was to be allowed to grow because this was the sign of one who was a Nazarite. According to Numbers 6:1-21, Nazarites could be of either sex. They were to be bound by a vow to be devoted to the LORD for a specified period of time. During this period, they were to abstain from drinking wine and all strong drink, and even from all products of the vine in any form. During the same period, their hair must be allowed to grow as a mark of holiness. The Nazarites were forbidden to approach any corpse, even that of their closest relatives, because of possible defilement. In the case of Manoah and his wife, their child, Samson, was to be separated to God even while still in the womb.

Again, the last part of the message is prophetic: "...And he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Samson was to commence the deliverance of Israel from the burden of Philistine supremacy. He did this, but not without failures on his part.

Manoah and his Wife

As already indicated, Manoah's wife was favoured by God to bear a son who would grow to become one of the saviours of Israel in a difficult day. She must have been a faithful servant of the LORD to qualify for such a role.

After her meeting with the angel of the LORD, she came and told her husband, the news. She told him about the man who had the appearance of an angel and relayed the message she had been given. However, she did add to the message by saying that the child would be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death." The angel had said nothing concerning the duration of Samson's separation.

She was aware of her husband's prayer as he asked the LORD that the man of God might appear again. God allowed the angel to return and he appeared to Manoah's wife as she sat in the field. She raced away to inform her husband. There was an urgency in her action that showed she was submissive to her husband. This kind of submission is right and proper in Christian marriages today. Furthermore, she led him to the stranger. This reminds me of the disciple called Andrew leading souls to Christ in His days on earth. May the Lord give us all the grace to lead souls to His Son.

Later, when the angel had ascended in the flame of the offering, Manoah was afraid because he realised the man had been an angel of the LORD. He said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." But in the wisdom of faith, she said to him, "If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." Her faith proved to be greater than that of her husband. So even though she was a submissive wife, that submission was "in the Lord". In other words, the LORD took precedence when her husband failed and she, temporarily, became his teacher. How good it is when the marriage relationship is balanced in this way because, as Christians, we all have our weaknesses and failings. How good it is to help and support one another during such times.

The fact that Samson was conceived and born and later became a saviour of Israel reveals that Manoah's wife was obedient to the commands of the angel. God appreciates faithfulness. He knows that those who are faithful in little will be faithful in much. How important it is for Christians of today to serve the Lord faithfully in little things. If we

desire to be used mightily for the Lord, then we must prove ourselves fit for the Master's use by ensuring that the little things are done conscientiously.

Finally, concerning Manoah's wife, we read, "And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him." Here she is instrumental in naming her son "Samson". This was again an act of faith. "Samson" means "the strength of the sun". She named him relative to the LORD God who was known in Israel as a sun and a shield. Secondly, she gave him a name that emphasised strength. It was the God-given strength that came through his being a Nazarite. Manoah himself does not excel as a man of faith in the passage. Nevertheless, it seems that he did believe his wife's report, because he turned to the LORD and sought further information concerning what ought to be done concerning the child.

Praying for a further understanding of God's word can only be a good thing for us today. Manoah's prayer ran as follows, "O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born." The use of the pronoun "us" indicates that he was praying alongside his wife. In the family situation, the man, as head of the home, takes the leadership in prayer. This is still true today. Of course, each believer in a family is to have his or her own quiet time before God. Each Christian in a family has his or her personal time with the Lord because we are all priests. Yes, all Christians make up the holy priesthood mentioned in 1 Peter 2.

God heard the prayer of Manoah and responded positively. We may reason from this that Manoah was, generally, a righteous man. We know that unjudged sin separates us from God – it breaks our communion with Him - so that He will not hear our prayers. God heard Manoah and the angel again appeared to his wife as she sat alone in the field. It is likely that she was thinking about the events that had occurred.

Again, she fetches her husband and leads him to the angel. Approaching the man he asks, "Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman?" This being confirmed, he then seeks to know more, saying, "Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" This is a picture of a cycle of true communion with the Lord. We pray! We ask questions! We listen for the answers!

The angel of the LORD repeats his message to Manoah. At that point, Manoah sought to show the man hospitality; but the angel of the LORD would not receive it. Instead, he suggested that if anything was to be offered, then it should be a burnt offering presented to the Lord Himself. The text tells us that, even at this point, Manoah still did not recognise this man as being an angel.

It was then that Manoah asked for the man's name. His motive for so doing was that when these things had happened, he and his wife could honour the messenger. As already mentioned, the angel describes his name as being "wonderful" or "remarkable". Manoah did not pursue the matter. Instead, by faith, he took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock to the LORD. His faith was rewarded for the angel did wondrously. When the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar."

Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell down with their faces to the ground. The angel disappeared. It was then that Manoah realised that the man had been an angel of the LORD. In the heat of the moment, he was afraid and said, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." He is comforted and strengthened by the wisdom of his wife. However, his faithfulness to the Lord is proved by his attitudes and actions afterwards. This was a real turning point in his life. There may be a variety occasions of spiritual strengthening that are turning points in our own lives as Christians today. But, let us remember, above all, the Lord would have us be obedient to His word and faithful in all our ways.

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