

THE WORD OF INCARNATION – THE WORD MADE FLESH

The Word Preincarnate

1. Ps 139:6-7; Rom 11:33; Job 42:3 This doctrine is the most confounding and mysterious reality – and in my opinion, the greatest miracle of all! God once rhetorically asked Abraham, “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” That was God’s rhetorically stated assurance that even an impossible feat of procreation accomplished via husband and wife well beyond child-bearing years could be performed by Him.
2. But the birth of Ishmael seems mere child’s play compared to the infinite God entering His own creation limited by time, matter, and space. John Murray stated it well: “The infinite became finite, the eternal and supratemporal entered time and became subject to its conditions, the immutable became mutable, the invisible became visible, the Creator became the created, the sustainer of all became dependent, the Almighty infirm. All is summed up in the proposition, God became man.”⁷¹ 1
3. Such was the indispensable means of our salvation as we’ll consider in our subsequent and final main point (The Word of Salvation).
4. In (arguably) the oldest book in the Bible; Job, in the midst of his turmoil he proclaimed a profound prophesy about his Redeemer. Read *Job* 19:21-27.
5. In this passage begins a motif that finds its end in Rev. 22:4.² Physically seeing the almighty YHWH was impossible for God is spirit (Jn. 4:24) and invisible (1 Tim. 1:17) and thus “seeing” Him is a euphemism for perceiving His presence, not unlike today e.g. “I ‘see’ what you’re saying.” In the OT (and NT) God would manifest His presence via theophany e.g. burning bush, storm thunder/lightening, earthquakes, etc. But what is astonishing is that Job proclaimed not that he would see God but that he would see God in his flesh i.e. with his eyes. First let’s not overlook the resurrection factor i.e. after his flesh is destroyed he’ll see God in his (Job’s) flesh. Job presumes that there is life after death and it involves the flesh! Secondly, what only his mind and heart long for will be manifest before his fleshly eyes!
6. Now since God is spirit and invisible, how could Job expect to see God with his physical eyes? It seems the Spirit of God was alluding to both resurrection *and* incarnation.
7. Surely it is apparent that when prophets encountered the word of the LORD that it was either audible and/or visionary. However, there are times when the “Word of the LORD” appeared and thus we can determine something unique was going on.
8. After Job came another man who knew God and yet he saw a bit more than the theophany of a storm which Job experienced. The man Abraham (formerly Abram) had eventually seen the LORD in the image of man. In his first encounter with the LORD (YHWH), we are told that YHWH ‘appeared’ to Abram (Gen 12:6-7).
9. Later in Gen. 15:1-6, we are told that the “Word of YHWH came to Abram in a *vision*” (1). How does a word come via vision and not mere sound? In v. 4 the “word” is mentioned again and then “he brought him outside” (v. 5). How does a ‘word’ bring a person outside? This is known as an anthropopraxism, which we will consider subsequently.
10. Later Abraham would be visited by the LORD in an astonishingly yet common manner. Read Gen. 18:1-5. Then in v.8 the three men partake a snack prepared by Abraham. In v. 25 Abraham

⁷¹ J. Murray 1977: 132.

¹ Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 165). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

² The motif of “seeing God” encompasses understanding/perceiving His essence or character in a profound way. We cannot physically see the invisible almighty Spirit but when God cloaked Himself in flesh, they could see Jesus and we’ll see Jesus face to face – although Rev. 22:4 means more than this physical greeting.

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acknowledges the man among the angels as “Judge of all the earth.” Now either the Judge is a mere man or He is God who can do the impossible (14).

11. See **Appendix 3**. Because I copied and pasted a chart, which alters this document’s formatted outline and for homiletical and other reasons, I didn’t insert the chart inside this outline.
12. In 1 Sam. 3, young Samuel is visited by the Word of YHWH and it is through speech to where Samuel thinks it is Eli (vv. 6-7). However, verses later, the LORD “appeared” to him (21).
13. Not unlike in Isaiah’s vision (ch. 6) where an angel takes tongs and touches Isaiah’s lips with the burning coals, Jeremiah is initiated with a touch to the lips (Jer. 1:9) when the “Word of the LORD” came to him. However, unlike Isaiah’s vision, this was the Word come to Jeremiah and personally touched his lips as “YHWH put out his hand.” Here is another incident where the invisible God is described in human form i.e. with a hand. Now there are theological figures of speech which describe these biblical recorded realities. Let’s pause to consider a word on such. I’ve mentioned theophany and anthropopraxism and here are a few more classifications of figures of speech found in Scripture:
 - a. Personification e.g. Ps. 24:7; Isa. 1:2; 44:23; Prov. 1:20
 - b. Anthropomorphism: anthros ‘human’ and morphe ‘form/shape’ indicates the use of language which personifies the LORD w/ regard to human form e.g. His hands, feet, arm, etc. e.g. Ps. 27:8 & Jer. 1:9 (mentioned above).
 - c. Anthropopathism pathos = emotion e.g. anger, grief, affliction, mourning. When we speak of the “heart of God,” we are using an anthropopathism figure of speech.
 - d. Anthropopraxism involves human actions e.g. standing, walking, ruling, fighting, or “bringing” (Gen. 15:5). Certainly, when the psalmists wrote of the “voice of the LORD,” which “breaks the cedars” in Ps. 29:3-5 (a hyperbolic anthropopraxism) we are not to take such literally.
 - e. Zoomorphism: There are even instances where God is described as having wings/feathers (Ps. 91:4)
14. {Excursus (from xiv. to xvii.): There are many OT occasions where the LORD comes as a theophany such as the “Angel of YHWH” or where the “Spirit of YHWH” is revealed. Thus the one and only living God is seen in plurality. In fact Elohim (often used of God) is plural. Though our focus is specifically the Word of the LORD, here are a few examples of the Angel of the LORD and the Spirit of the LORD.
 - a. Angel of YHWH Gen. 22:11-15 cf. vv. 1-2; 31:10-13; Exod. 3:1-3; Judg. 2:1; 6:11-23, 34.
 - b. Spirit of YHWH 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 24:20; Isa. 61:1; Mic. 3:8; Zech. 4:6.
 - c. Note: the Spirit of YHWH who is seen in Gen. 1:2 is assoc./w the spoken Word of God who is the agent of creation (cf. Jn. 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2-3).
15. Nevertheless, we are focusing on the unique reports of when the manifested Word seems to have appeared in human form in the OT. There are hints at a triune God though such remained a mystery till the advent of Jesus as proclaimed by Paul in 1 Tim. 3:16. In a verse, Paul sums up the “mystery of godliness” in Jesus’ incarnation, vindication, observation, proclamation, affirmation, and exaltation. And it is this Jesus who is affirmed as the “Word” of the LORD and thus many have concluded such OT occasions are actual Christophanies viz. appearances of the Preincarnate Christ. But such may be better described as anthropomorphic theophanies. Hold on →
16. Here we find ourselves in deep theological waters where distinctions are useful for accuracy. I concur with John Calvin’s insight and articulation: “I willingly accept what the old writers teach, that when Christ appeared in those early times in the form of a man, it was a prelude of the mystery

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which was revealed when God manifested in the flesh. But we must beware of imaging, that Christ then was incarnate; for we do not read that Christ was incarnate; for we do not read that God sent his Son in the flesh before the fullness of time.”⁶⁵ ³ [See Gal. 4:4 and Jesus’ birth accounts in the Gospels.]

17. The early church father and “Golden-tongued Preacher” John Chrysostom dealt with such biblical metaphors when he “wrestled with the question ‘Does God have feet?’ There were some in his context who appeared to take Genesis 3:8 with a naive literalism. Chrysostom asks: What are you saying—God strolls? Are we assigning feet to him? Have we no exalted conception of him? No, God does not stroll—perish the thought. How could he, present as he is everywhere and filling everything with his presence? Can he for whom heaven is his throne and earth a footstool be confined to the garden? What right minded person could say this?²⁵ ¶ Having dismissed literalism, what positively can be said according to Chrysostom? So what is the meaning of this statement, ‘They heard the sound of the Lord as he strolled in the garden in the evening?’ He wanted to provide them with such an experience as would induce in them a state of anguish, which in fact happened: they had so striking an experience that they tried to hide from the presence of God.²⁶ ¶ Significantly Chrysostom’s doctrine of God trumps a literalist hermeneutic: ‘Have we no exalted conception of him?’ He seeks to protect the idea of the divine transcendence with his question.”⁴ In other words, The Biblical authors are left with options of communicative tools such as hyperbole, metaphor, symbolism, idiom, personification, and other figures of speech in order to convey the supernatural realities of e.g. God “walking” in the garden. End of excursus.}
18. The OT anthropomorphic theophanies, types, motifs, events, and people who point to the antitype who is Christ prove vital to the NT’s understanding of the person of Christ. Likewise, having the NT in view, our theological hindsight awakens us to see the cryptic hints provided in the OT.
19. Graham Cole observed: “A good way to ascertain the dogmatic rank of a theological proposition is to ask what would be lost if the claim were untrue. In the case of the incarnate Son of God’s humanity a whole host of other key claims fall to the ground. If the Son of God had not become truly human, then he could not have served as the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15–18, nor as the messianic Davidic king of Psalm 2, nor as the servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53, nor as the cursed substitute of Galatians 3:13, nor as our representative great high priest of Hebrews 4:14–16, nor as the role model of 1 Peter 2:18–25. In other words he could not have been the mediator of whom Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5–6, where Paul accents Christ’s humanity”⁵
20. Without the incarnation, the OT is incomplete – it is left unfulfilled. Griffith Thomas stated that the prophecies in the OT are left unfulfilled. The ceremonies in the OT are left unexplained. And the longings of promises in the OT are left unsatisfied. However, in the NT the unfulfilled prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus’ life. The unexplained ceremonies are explained by Jesus’ death. And the unsatisfied longings are satisfied in Jesus’ resurrection.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Greidanus 1999: 142.

³ Cole, G. A. (2013). *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*. (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 120). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

²⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 17:3–4*, quoted in Louth 2001: 82.

²⁶ Ibid.

⁴ Cole, G. A. (2013). *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*. (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, pp. 36–37). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

⁵ Cole, G. A. (2013). *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*. (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 159). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

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21. Therefore, it should be plain to see that the entire canon of Holy Writ hinges on the incarnation of the Son of God – the Word made flesh!
22. Another way to see this reality of Jesus as the crux and fulfillment of all the Scriptures (Jn. 5:39; Lu. 24:27) is the following outline of the Bible:
 - a. Genesis – Malachi = Jesus Predicted
 - b. Matthew - John = Jesus Revealed
 - c. Acts = Jesus Preached
 - d. Romans – Jude = Jesus Explained
 - e. Revelation = Jesus Expected
23. Therefore, seeing the metanarrative of Jesus’ person and work as the message of Scripture, we can look back to the OT and find the Preincarnate manifestations of the Word of the LORD and know that it is the same eternal, personal, righteous Word who was “with God, and was God,” and would become flesh to take up our sins for our redemption (e.g. Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Appendix 3

Interpreting the text is challenging because by the time one has read both Genesis 18 and 19 the visitors are described variously as ‘the Lord’ (Gen. 18:1, 13, 17, 20, 22, 26, 33), ‘three men’ (Gen. 18:2), ‘my Lord’ (*’ādōnāy*, Gen. 18:3), ‘the men’ (Gen. 18:16, 22; 19:10), ‘two angels’ (Gen. 19:1) and finally, ‘two men’ (Gen. 19:12). The following catena displays the diversity:

Genesis 18:1

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

Genesis 18:2

Abraham looked up and saw *three men* standing nearby.

Genesis 18:3

He said, ‘If I have found favour in your eyes, *my lord*, do not pass your servant by.’⁸

Genesis 18:13

Then *the Lord* said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Will I really have a child, now that I am old?” ’

Genesis 18:16

When *the men* got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

Genesis 18:17

Then *the Lord* said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?’

⁸ Friedman (1995: 10) observes that ‘my Lord’ (*’ādōnāy*, Gen. 18:3) ‘elsewhere in the Bible refers only to God’. Friedman is a Jewish scholar and so when he refers to the Bible it is the Hebrew Bible that is in view.

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- Genesis 18:20* Then *the Lord* said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ...’.
- Genesis 18:22* *The men* turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before *the Lord*.
- Genesis 18:26* *The Lord* said, ‘If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.’
- Genesis 18:33* When *the Lord* had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.
- Genesis 19:1* The *two angels* arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground....
- Genesis 19:10* But *the men* inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door.
- Genesis 19:12* The *two men* said to Lot, ‘Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out ...’.⁹⁶

PC: the Word of the LORD is a person but before the incarnation of the Word, God’s people experienced the Word manifested in various ways (Heb. 1:1-2). Samuel heard the audible Word. Abraham saw, sat with, spoke with, and ate with the Word. Jeremiah was touched by the Word! Hence the OT cryptically revealed that the Word of the LORD is more than a spoken or written Word. Although a handful of godly men encountered the Word of the LORD in the OT, such encounters were temporary manifestations of the Preincarnate Word. But even though such were types and shadows of the incarnation to come; the experiences were real, tangible, sobering, and transformative. Nevertheless, such real manifestations could not compare to the eternal Son of God’s actual incarnation (Heb. 1:1-3)! For such is a hidden yet simultaneously revealed glory (2 Cor. 3:14-18; 4:4-7, 16-18; 1 Cor. 13:12; Isa.

⁹ The emphases in italics are mine.

⁶ Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, pp. 51–52). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

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53:1-3). Likewise in the OT, the same hidden glory of the Word came to occasionally reveal Himself before He took on flesh at the “fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4).