

The Holy Spirit Angel

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Who or what is the Holy Spirit? Is it a power or a person? Was the Holy Spirit just a New Testament thing? What is the *Name of the Holy Spirit* that Jesus said we should be baptised into? These are all questions I had never found satisfactory answers for – until now...

The Holy Spirit is normally associated with the New Testament because the words *holy spirit* occur many times more in the New Testament (94) than in the Old (2). But I believe that a beautiful, continuous theme throughout *both* Testaments has been lost in translation: the theme of *God's presence* with his people through a special, sanctified angel, who is called the Holy Spirit.

The Hebrew word for *spirit* in the Bible (*ruach*) has many different meanings. It can mean breath, character, wind, or power, and sometimes it just means *a spirit being*, that is, a person made of *spirit*, as opposed to *flesh*. Here is an Old Testament example,

Finally, a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord... (1Kings 22:21)

And here is a New Testament example that uses the equivalent Greek word *pneuma*,

Are not all angels ministering spirits... ? (Heb 1:14)

It was this reference that sowed the seed of the idea which I would like to share in this article.

Angels as spirits

While looking at the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, I noticed that *an angel of the Lord* talked to Philip, yet later it says *the spirit told Philip...*, and then, *the spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away*.¹ Since angels *are* spirits, could these verses be talking about the angel *as* a spirit being? (i.e. *the 'spirit being' told Philip...*) And if so, what about other places in the Bible? Amongst the verses where we take the word *spirit* to mean either God's power or God himself, could we be missing references to angels *themselves*?

¹ Acts 8:26, 29, 39

It was just a thought, but when I found Isaiah 63, I was hooked on researching this! Here in Isaiah we read about the *Angel of God's presence* who saved Israel from Egypt, and then accompanied and guided them to the Promised Land. Isaiah calls this angel, God's *Holy Spirit* whom he had put within Israel,

... the angel of his [God's] presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.

Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people – where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown... (Is 63:9-12)

To find out exactly what had happened, and just in case this *angel* was somehow an impersonal messenger, I went to the Exodus account. Here God explains that he is going to send *an angel* to guard the people of Israel, and to guide them to the Promised Land.

Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say... (Ex 23:21-22)

This is clearly a real angel, a being separate from God himself, because God is talking about him. God says, *Do not rebel against him*, in case they feel they can get round him because he is just an angel, rather than God. But this particular angel carries both the Name and the authority of God! He is, in effect, a channel through which God can act, meaning that God can be right there with them, through him. He is God's *glorious arm of power* according to Isaiah, who informs us that unfortunately they *did* rebel against him.

In the New Testament, Stephen says of the Judaic leaders of his time,

You are just like your fathers! You always resist the Holy Spirit! (Acts 7:51)

Stephen has just referred to the angel who appeared to Moses in the bush, as well as the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai. His accusation echoes that of Jesus, who warns the people not to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, as this is far worse than blaspheming against himself, because it is, in effect, blasphemy against God.

My Name is in him

God says of the angel, *My Name is in him*. This angel speaks on behalf of God, speaking in his Name. So here, I believe, we are being told the *Name of the Holy Spirit* that Jesus refers to when instructing about baptism.² It is not the Holy Spirit's personal name, but God, the Father's name.

Jesus was also given God's name, and came in God's name.³ He also prayed,

... protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one... (John 17:11)

... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us... (John 17:21)

So, when we are baptised into *the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, it is all the *Father's* name, not three separate, individual, personal names. As Paul says,

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:3)

Otherwise, what do you think this phrase means? I must admit that at my baptism, I was worried I was being baptised into the Trinity!

I will be with you

God often assures people, *I will be with you*, and I believe he does this through the Angel of his presence. God says to the Israelites, *My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest*, and then we find that *they were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord*.⁴

I began to look back at other places where an angel *represents* God. An angel representing God's *presence* explains how God can talk to people like he was stood right there with them, because the angel would be! It explains *the sound of the LORD God as he walked in the garden*, and later, how Cain *left the presence of God*.⁵ It would be this angel talking to Cain.

² Matthew 28:19

³ Philippians 2:9, John 5:43

⁴ Exodus 33:14, Isaiah 63:14

⁵ Genesis 3:8, 4:16

Isn't it wonderful that the Angel of God's presence came out of the garden with Adam and Eve, and stayed with them! This is an amazing glimpse into God's loving care for those who belong to him by trusting in him, whatever mistakes they might make on their way. I believe the Angel of God's presence continues to be with God's people. And that this is what the Holy Spirit is all about. As we read in the Psalms,

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
(Ps 34:7)

One angel can't really camp *around* someone, but one angel in charge of a whole host of angels can! Elisha experiences this angelic deliverance, and his servant even sees the host of angels. Similarly, at Jericho, the *Captain of the host of the LORD* appears to Joshua just before the city's conquest.⁶ If we continue reading, we find that

... the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands..." (Josh 6:2)

It makes perfect sense for this to be the Captain of the Host talking to Joshua here, representing *the LORD*. In fact, Joshua has just been told to take his shoes off – the very thing Moses was told to do when he talked with the Angel of the LORD who represented God in the burning bush. I believe this Captain is the same special authorized angel – the Holy Spirit.

Michael the Archangel

Scripture indicates that there are ranks of angels. Jude mentions Michael the Archangel, and Daniel tells us Michael is *one of the chief princes and the great prince who protects your people*.⁷ Maybe Michael is this Captain. If we connect Jude with the likely parallels in Zechariah 3 and Nehemiah 4, Michael *is* the angel who opposes Israel's adversaries during the rebuilding of the temple. Interestingly, in Hebrew his name means, *Who like God*.

Looking back, there is plenty of evidence for this special angel in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham entertains three angels, one of whom is called *the LORD*, and Hosea tells us that when Jacob *struggled with God, he struggled with the angel*.⁸ When Jacob is blessing Joseph's sons he says,

⁶ 2Kings 6:17, Joshua 5:13-15

⁷ Jude 9, Daniel 10:13, 12:1

⁸ Genesis 18, Hosea 12:4

May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm – may he bless these boys. (Gen 48:15-16)

Moses is told by God,

I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty (Ex 6:3)

So, now we have another trail of evidence for this angel, under the name of *God Almighty* – *El Shaddai* (burly, powerful one). Remember, Isaiah 63 tells us that the Holy Spirit was sent as God's *arm of power*.

But continuing with Moses, we read that God talked with him *face to face*.⁹ The word for *presence* in Hebrew also means *face*. So, the Angel of God's presence is the face of God – his interface – because God's face cannot be seen, as Moses was told, and as Paul also affirms:

God... whom no man has seen or can see. (1Tim 6:16)

Early in Judges we read,

The angel of the LORD went up... and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant...'"
(Jud 2:1)

So, the angel, representing God, is still with them at the time of the Judges. At the time of the Kings, God affirms to Israel that he himself had gone camping with them,¹⁰ but we know it was actually the Angel of his presence travelling with them.

After the return from captivity, the Levites declare, *You [God] gave your good Spirit to instruct them [Israel]*, and, *By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets*.¹¹

And God himself says

I am with you... my Spirit remains among you (Hagg 2:4,5)

And so he does, right to the end of the Old Testament.

⁹ Numbers 12:8, Deuteronomy 34:10

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 7:6

¹¹ Nehemiah 9:20, 30

New Testament

The language changeover from Hebrew in the Old Testament to Greek in the New now causes some confusion. In Hebrew, the miraculous power that God gives people is called *the spirit* (*ruach* again), or *the spirit of God*, which fills people like Bezalel.¹² In the New Testament, the same miraculous gift which fills people, is called *holy spirit*. There is no definite article (no ‘the’) in the Greek in these occurrences of the words *holy spirit*. But other occurrences in the New Testament do have the definite article in the Greek – *The Holy Spirit*. I believe these refer to the Holy Spirit Angel, which Isaiah named as *the Holy Spirit* back in Isaiah 63.

Unfortunately, in our English translations, both *holy spirit* (without ‘the’) and *the Holy Spirit* (with ‘the’) are generally translated as *the Holy Spirit*, whether the Greek has the definite article or not. This makes the Holy Spirit sound sometimes like an impersonal power and sometimes like a person, because both power and person are in the text. This can be confusing!

To show what a difference it makes when we accurately distinguish between these two uses, two lists are provided as Bonus Material, for you to peruse at your leisure. When the verses are separated out, the Angel of God’s presence named as *the Holy Spirit* jumps back into the text! You will see that ‘holy spirit’ is *power* inside people, while ‘the Holy Spirit’ *person* is an outside influence.

This Holy Spirit angel is specially commissioned by Jesus to work with the disciples, doing the same job he did for Israel. He lives with God’s people, teaching, guiding and protecting them, just like he did for Israel. He is even called an *advocate* (comforter) like he was for Moses.¹³ Suddenly, verses such as, *The Holy Spirit said: “Separate for me Barnabas and Saul,”*¹⁴ make perfect sense. Here he is, representing God, again!

In conclusion

I am passionate about this idea of recognizing that The Holy Spirit is an Angelic Being because it solves so many textual problems, and throws light on so many verses. It binds the whole Bible together in one consistent story – that of God being right here with us – his people –

¹² Exodus 31

¹³ To be at Moses right hand (Isaiah 63:12)

¹⁴ Acts 13:2

willing us on, helping, guiding and protecting us, being the caring, loving and compassionate God we know he is, always has been, and always will be.

There are many more facets to this fascinating idea, including the suggestion that the Holy Spirit angel himself distributed holy spirit gifts.¹⁵ Or how about a direct correlation between these verses?

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (John 16:13-15)

and

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev 1:1-2)

There is so much to explore!

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:11, Acts 1:8