

The Word in the Word – Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures

*Even matters which in Torah seem as fruitless as thorns,
are in reality of the highest significance.
—Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah, 1*

Second Person of the Trinity in the Hebrew Scriptures

*Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was
said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27) NIV*

The New Testament says Jesus was not only a Jewish rabbi, but somehow, he was God...fully God, fully man, simultaneously. It is impossible to understand, as of course one would expect in matters concerning God's essential nature. But if such a thing it is true, we should expect to find hints of it throughout the Bible, not just in the New Testament. And indeed, we do. Consider...

1. He was in the Garden of Eden

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was
walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God
among the trees of the garden. (Ge 3:8) NIV*

- ▶ The Bible is filled with metaphorical references to God in human terms, which are not meant to be taken literally (see **Ex 3:20** for example). What's different about this passage? What does this imply about Jesus' role in creation?

2. He was at the trees of Mamre

*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. 2 Abraham looked up
and saw three men... (Ge 18:1-2) NIV*

- ▶ See the rest of the story in **Ge 18:1-19**. What clues can you find to the nature of God in these verses?
- ▶ Compare this story to the events of **Luke 24:36-44**. How are they similar? What does this tell you about Abraham's experience?

3. He was at the River Jabbok

*24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak... 28
Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because
you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome..." 30 So
Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face,
and yet my life was spared." (Ge 32:24,28&30) NIV*

- ▶ See the rest of the story in **Ge 32:22-30**. What clues can you find to the nature of God in these verses? (Compare **Ex 33:20** and **Heb 7:7** for just two of many clues.)

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- ▶ How can we reconcile Jacob's explanation for naming the place "Face of God" (*Peniel*) with God's warning in **Ex 33:20** that no one can see His face and live?

4. He was on Mt. Sinai

9 Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up 10 and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. 11 But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. (Ex 24:9-11) NIV

- ▶ Compare this story to God's earlier self revelation in **Ex 19:16-22**. What are the most striking differences? What clues do these differences offer about the nature of God?

5. He was near Jericho

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" 15 The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15) NIV

- ▶ Compare this passage to **Ex 3:5** and **Rev 19:14**. What connections to you see? What do these connections tell you about Jesus?

6. He was the Angel of the Lord

11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son...." 15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you... (Ge 22:11-12 & 15-17) NIV

9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." (Ge 16:9,10&13) NIV

11 The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' 12 And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel...' (Ge 31:11-13) NIV

2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does

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not burn up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Ex 3:2-5) NIV

20 "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. 21 Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. (Ex 23:20-22) NIV

- ▶ See the **Ge 22** verses above. To whom was Abraham about to offer his son as a sacrifice, and what does this mean? What great irony do you see in these verses? (Hint: see **John 3:16**.)
- ▶ Compare **John 8:14-18** to the **Ge 22** verses, above. What is the parallel? What does this teach us about Jesus?
- ▶ Read the **Ge 31** verses above in connection with **Ge 28:11-19** and **John 1:51**. What new insight does this shed on "Jacob's ladder"?
- ▶ Note the connection between the **Ex 3:2-5** verses above and Joshua's experience before the battle of Jericho in **Joshua 5:13-15**. What insight does this lend on the nature of the "burning bush" incident?
- ▶ Compare the **Exodus 23** passage above to **John 3:18**; **10:25** & **20:31**. What does this comparison suggest about the meaning of the passages in John?

7. He was symbolized by the Tabernacle

God with us

"...the New Testament portrays Jesus as the 'Word,' which 'became flesh and made his dwelling among us.' (John 1:14) The use of the phrase 'dwelling among us,' focuses my attention on the tabernacle...because of its connection with this verse: 'I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you.'" (Lv 26:11) NIV (TGAM)

A personal God

"...the tabernacle was the physical establishment of a means of worship, signifying a shift from Israel's passive role to a more active, personal relationship with God. I believe it is no coincidence that Jesus is my means of encountering God in an even more active, personal way." (TGAM)

Head of the body

"...the tabernacle provided the focal point for the entire Hebrew community and became a symbol of unification for a people. ...Jesus is the head of a body of believers spanning all centuries, nations, and races. ...a stockbroker in twenty-first-century New York City and a slave in a first-century Roman household are united across time as brothers and sisters by their faith in Jesus." (TGAM)

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Creator in creation

“Everything science understands about the composition of the universe begins with time, space, energy, and matter. ...God used the tabernacle to sanctify these universal building blocks. ...he sanctified them in relationship to humanity so we could later understand the complete holiness of a human being named Jesus.” (TGAM)

God protection

A Chever Torah Jew once called the tabernacle a ‘portable cleft’...just as the tabernacle protected Israel from the sheer power of the Lord’s presence, Jesus was a touchable God, a kissable God, a God whose face could be safely seen, a God who did not sterilize the unclean with holy fire, but healed instead with a holy touch.” (TGAM)

Focal point for faith

“...as the Hebrew slaves in Egypt had been forced to build structures that meant nothing to them, the tabernacle’s meaning was concealed at the time of its construction. But the Israelites willingly provided the materials and labor for it anyway. Only after this communal act of faith did the Lord enter their midst in a cloud of fire. In the same way, before I encountered Jesus personally, I could not understand the true potential of his presence in my heart. To experience him, I had to accept his death and resurrection in faith. Only then did his Spirit fill my heart in ways as clear and undeniable as any pillar of smoke and fire.” (TGAM)

One and only way

“Any attempt to draw near to the tabernacle apart from the strict rules set forth in the law of Moses would result in the fiery fate of Aaron’s sons.... In that sense, the tabernacle symbolized the doctrine known by Christians today as ‘one way.’ ...So long as Israel respected the holiness code God had established, anyone was welcome to approach. Jesus continued this oddly contradictory tradition, formally establishing himself as the one and only means to approach God, yet publicly offering himself to anyone, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile.” (TGAM)

► What other hints of Jesus can you find in the tabernacle?

8. He was foretold in the Akeda, or “Binding” of Isaac (Genesis 22:2-18)

“The parallels between the akeda and the New Testament account of the Passion of Jesus are striking. For example, consider that both stories begin with an angel’s announcement. Both involve a miraculous birth. Both revolve around the idea of a father’s only son being sacrificed at God’s command. Since Mt. Moriah is where Jerusalem was later established, the location of both events is the same. In both cases, the central character in the drama approached the place of his sacrificial death on a donkey. Both stories include the idea of resurrection on the third day (since it is the third day of the story when Abraham tells the servants to wait at the bottom of the mountain until both he and Isaac return). The son in both tales carries the wooden means of

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his own destruction. Both involve the idea that one life can be sacrificed for another (a ram for Isaac; Jesus for me). In both cases, the son faces death voluntarily. And the final result of both stories is said to be the same: all nations are blessed, and the son lives on.” (TGAM)

- ▶ What is the deepest message of faith taught by the Akeda? (Hints: **Nu 23:19** and **Job 9:32**.)
- ▶ If the Akeda is a prophesy of Jesus’ Passion, why doesn’t the Bible specifically say so?

9. He was symbolized by the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:4-9)

6 Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. (Num 21:6-9) NIV

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14–15)

- ▶ In the story of the Bronze Serpent, the Bible says “the Lord sent venomous snakes among them.” Why would a loving God do that? (Hint: see **Mark 9:43-47**) How does this compare to the story of Jesus? (Hint: see **Mt 23:29-34**)
- ▶ The Hebrew word for the “pole” on which the Bronze Serpent was lifted is *nes*. This word is used in 18 other places in the Hebrew scriptures, and nowhere else does it mean a thing on which something else is mounted. On the contrary, everywhere else it means “banner,” “ensign,” “standard” or “sail,” all of which are mounted *on* something. Yet here *nes* is the thing on which something else is mounted. Think of this in terms of Jesus’ words in **John 3:14-15**. What added meaning does it give?

One reason to believe in Jesus that cannot be denied

“...After placing God above even the law (a remarkable leap of faith), the Abraham who descended Mt. Moriah had a certainty about the Lord that the man who climbed that mountain could not know. My choice to believe in Jesus—even at the risk of idolatry—has given me the same assurance, because when I accepted the gift of Jesus’ sacrifice for me, the sin-addicted man I used to be died with him, and together we rose again.” (TGAM)

- ▶ Think back to the person you were before you climbed the mountain of belief in Jesus. Can you recall the miraculous changes has Jesus made in your life since then? If you could remember everything the Lord has done since you believed in Jesus, would following Him be an “act of faith,” or might it become something more like “knowing”?

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