

*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. (Genesis 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?

- ✓ Ex 3:20 is a typical anthropomorphism, in that it is obviously symbolic, not literal (God does not mean He will literally stretch out a hand). But the description in Genesis 3:8 does not fit the usual anthropomorphic pattern because it describes God in terms of:

- Space (the garden)
- Time (the cool, or breezy part of the day)
- Energy (they heard God walking—sound is energy)

This is not God describing some action he will take in terms we can understand, it is a description of what certain people actually experienced in relationship with a God who existed with them, in space and time.

- ✓ The God in the space and time with Adam and Eve, the God they saw, and heard walking, and spoke with, was the preincarnate Second Person of the Trinity who later re-entered human history as the man, Jesus.

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... (Genesis 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?

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- ✓ It is a story about God (“the LORD appeared...” verse 1).
 - ✓ As with the story in **Ge 3:8** of God “walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” this story takes place in space and time (“near the great trees...in the heat of the day” verse 1).
 - ✓ The visitors are described as “men” that Abraham can physically see. They “stand” and have dirty feet and eat food, again underscoring their presence in space and time, as well as their apparent humanity (verses 2, 3 & 8).
 - ✓ Yet one of the “men” is referred to as “the LORD,” as was implied in verse 1 (verse 13—note the NIV has “the LORD” in verse 10 also, but it is not in the Hebrew).
 - ✓ As one would expect given His triune nature, the Lord switches points of view from first person (verse 10) to third person (verse 14), and back again (verse 17).
 - ✓ The Lord asks questions although of course he knows the answers (God loves an honest question!—verses 9, 13 and 14).
- ▶ Compare this story to the events of **Luke 24:36-44**. How are they similar? What does this tell you about Abraham’s experience?
- ✓ As the “men” stood near Abraham, so Jesus “stood” among the apostles (verse 36).
 - ✓ As Abraham washed the Lord’s feet, so Jesus asks the apostles to touch his feet—the same proof of physical reality is given (verse 39).
 - ✓ As the Lord ate in Abraham’s presence, so Jesus proved himself by eating (verse 43).
 - ✓ Jesus asks a question although of course he knows the answer (verse 38).
 - ✓ Note also that Jesus points them toward the Hebrew scriptures for proof of his existence as the divine Messiah (verse 44). Undoubtedly, the story of Abraham and the man/Lord at the trees of Mamre is one of the proofs Jesus offered.
 - ✓ It was the preincarnate Second Person of the Trinity (Jesus) who met with Abraham, just as every intimate experience with God on earth has always been with Jesus, right from the beginning.

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." (Genesis 32:24,28&30) NIV

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- ▶ 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.)
 - ✓ This story takes place in real space and time (the river ford, verse 22, and “till daybreak,” verse 24).
 - ✓ Jacob perceives this entity as a “man” at first (verse 24).
 - ✓ The man could have ended the struggle at any time with a mere touch (verse 25) but he was willing to struggle with Jacob, and asks him a question (God loves an honest question!—verses 24 and 29).
 - ✓ The man wants Jacob to release him before the sun comes up (compare, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live,” **Ex 33:20**—verse 26).
 - ✓ He is greater than Jacob (“And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater,” **Heb 7:7**).
 - ✓ He names Jacob “Israel” meaning “struggles with God” (verse 28).
 - ✓ Jacob believed he was God, and considered it a miracle that he survived after seeing his face (verse 30).
- ▶ 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?
 - ✓ It was the Father speaking on Mt. Sinai; it was the Son wrestling at Peniel.
 - ✓ Jesus is the God we can see, hear and touch.

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?
 - ✓ Differences:
 - Seeing God / God hidden in cloud
 - Apparent comfort in God’s presence (they ate and drank) / Everyone trembled (with terror)
 - Approaching God on the mountain / Standing at the foot of the mountain
 - Nourishing experience with God (eating and drinking) / Potential to perish

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- God did not raise his hand against them / God threatened to break out against them
- ✓ Again, we are seeing the difference between the Son and the Father.
- ✓ Note the feet are specifically connected to the material world (they are described as being on a sapphire pavement). Note also the eating. This encounter happened in time and space. (But unlike the feet, which the Torah takes pains to describe as resting on pavement, the reference to an "upraised hand" is an anthropomorphic idiom not meant to be taken literally.)

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 do you see? What do these connections tell you about Jesus?

- ✓ Connections:
 - Joshua fell face down / Moses hid his face
 - Holy ground / Holy ground
 - Commander of the army of the Lord / Armies of heaven were following him.
- ✓ This is the Son again.
 - Jesus is so awesome even righteous men fear to look at him
 - Jesus renders everything around him holy (as does the Father)
 - Jesus will defeat evil in the universe

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

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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...' (Genesis 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 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." (Exodus 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. (Exodus 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**.)
 - ✓ Isaac was about to be sacrificed to the Angel ("...you have not withheld from me..."). This proves the "Angel" is God, since Abraham would never sacrifice to a created being.
 - ✓ Since the Angel is in fact the Son, the irony is in a sacrifice being offered to the Son, when the Son will be offered Himself as a sacrifice for Abraham and Isaac and everyone else.
- ▶ Compare **John 8:14-18** to the **Ge 22** verses, above. What is the parallel? What does this teach us about Jesus?
 - ✓ "I swear by myself declares the Lord..." when considered in light of Jesus words in **John 8:14 & 18** indicates God's triune nature.
- ▶ 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"?
 - ✓ Jesus' words explain Jacob's strange vision as a prophecy of Jesus' role as the "stairway" or bridge connecting Creator and creation. He is that aspect of the triune God who can penetrate his own creation.
 - ✓ Note the connection between the Son and angels again. In the *Tanakh*, the Lord is often initially assumed to be an "angel," before His true identity is realized.
- ▶ 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?
 - ✓ Moses came in contact with the "Commander of the Lord's army," and Joshua came in contact with the Angel of the Lord. Although

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Moses understood Him as a angel, and Joshua as a man, both were actually meeting the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son.

► 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?

- ✓ God's "Name" is "in" the angel, who is the Son. The word "name" in this context means God's reputation, or glory, or manifestation of Himself on earth. (Similar to the way a man's "good name" is the manifestation of his actions in life.)
- ✓ To fail to believe in the "name" then, is to fail to believe in God's actions, including the Son's graceful provision of Himself as a substitute in our place on the cross to satisfy justice. When the Bible says the Angel "will not forgive rebellion," it means those who will not believe in the Name are condemned by their unbelief, as in John 3:18. This is not a sign of wrath so much as it is simple cause and effect: if we will not believe, how can we accept the gift, and if we cannot accept, how can we be saved?

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)

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)

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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 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)

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- ▶ What is the deepest message of faith taught by the *Akeda*? (Hints: **Nu 23:19** and **Job 9:32**.)
 - ✓ Like Abraham obeying God by being willing to murder Isaac (and thus willing to disobey) we must be willing to put God above everything, even our obedience to God's Law. This is proven when we put our faith in Jesus, risking idolatry since Jesus is a man, yet believing he is somehow also God, even though that contradicts what God's own Law says.
 - ✓ "It seems to me that anyone who is in awe of God and is considering faith in Jesus is in exactly the same position as Abraham standing with his knife lifted over Isaac's breast. To drive the knife home is to commit murder if Abraham's vision is untrue, just as belief in Jesus is idolatry if Christianity is a lie.... Why would God require such a bizarre test of me? He wants me to have a full-circle faith. Faith enough to fear the Lord, and faith enough to forget my fear and rush into his arms." (TGAM)
- ▶ If the *Akeda* is a prophesy of Jesus' Passion, why doesn't the Bible specifically say so?
 - ✓ If the Bible specifically spoke of Jesus in the context of the *Akeda*, it would void this test of faith for us, much like telling Abraham a ram would be substituted for Isaac would have made his test of faith meaningless.

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**)
 - ✓ God sent the snakes to drive the people back into His arms, because it is better to suffer earthly trials than to be estranged from God.
 - ✓ The Jews were beset by hypocritical religious leaders (snakes). Just as Israel was saved from snakes by ignoring them and looking to the

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Bronze Serpent even though they might be bitten if they looked away from the snakes, so the Jews were saved by ignoring the false teachers and looking to Jesus, even though their hypocritical leaders warned they would be condemned as idolaters if they believed.

- ▶ 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?

- ✓ The *nes* (“pole”) symbolized the cross, of course, but the cross itself is a symbol of the Lord’s gift of salvation. In a time when people honestly believed wood and stone carvings had godly powers, this strange use of the word *nes* was a reminder that the Bronze Serpent itself had not power, but was instead merely a symbol of a symbol, designed to test their faith. It was meant to prepare the Israelites for yet more difficult test to come, when a man who somehow died on their behalf while hanging from a pole would claim that he was God.
- ✓ “Idols are evil, but look at the man-made serpent and be healed. Jesus is a man, but look to him and be reconciled with God. The message of the snake and pole is the message of the man and cross.... Do not fear questioning God. Do not fear idolatry. Fear the Lord instead.” (TGAM)

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 Jesus has 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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