

penal, directed towards mutual support and encouragement and towards the reclamation of sinners rather than their exclusion.”

Excommunication would expose any offender again to the world outside, a world **without** Christ, into the realm of Satan “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4.4), so that he might be moved to repent and return to Christ. As Käsemann well says, “Excommunication cannot annul the event of baptism, by which a person is united with Christ, yet handing over to Satan as being severed from Christ is the antithesis of baptism. Restoration of the person is the primary concern of all the writers of the New Testament.”

What is to be destroyed is not the body, but the tendency which binds the offender to sin.

NOTES

Who is the “Angel of the Lord”?

As the Bassa people of Liberia translated the book of Genesis, it was difficult to handle the “angel of the Lord” passages (Gen 16.7-14; 21.17-21; 22.9-19; 31.10-13). It not only was hard to determine the meaning of this expression, but once we arrived at a meaning, it also was hard to express it in Bassa.

From our study of Genesis and other passages in the Bible, we came to the conclusion that “the angel of the Lord” refers to the Lord himself appearing as an angel. More than an angel or messenger from the Lord is in view in these passages. The Lord himself comes as an angel, just as he could come as a man in Gen 18 and 31.22-32.

There were several ways in which the passages in Genesis supported this. First, when a person saw the angel of the Lord, that person recognized him as divine. After Hagar saw the angel of the Lord in Gen 16, she asked, “Have I really seen God and lived to tell about it?” (verse 13). (This and other quotes that follow are from GNB except where noted differently.) Other passages in the Old Testament like this are Jg 6.22,23 and 13.22. This type of reaction is not seen with other angels in the Bible.

Second, the biblical writers often refer to the angel of the Lord simply as "the Lord" or "God" when he is referred to later in a text. In Gen 16.13 the writer says, "So she called the Lord . . ." Other passages like this are Ex 3.4-22 and Jg 6.14-24. It is also true that in other passages the angel of the Lord is simply referred to as "the angel" after the first reference (2 Sam 24.17 and 1 Chr 21.15-19). However, never is an angel other than the angel of the Lord referred to as "the Lord" by the writer.

Third, the angel of the Lord openly identifies himself as the Lord at times. In Gen 31.13 he says, "I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel . . ." (Another passage like this is Ex 3.6. And another passage which may also fit this case is Jg 13.18, where the angel of the Lord puts off Manoah's question for his name, just as the Lord did to Jacob in Gen 32.29.) So the angel of the Lord can claim to be the Lord. Even though prophets and other angels spoke for the Lord, they never made this claim.

Finally, Jacob in his blessing on Joseph's sons identified the angel with God himself (Gen 48.15,16). The parallelism in Hebrew poetry here ties in God with the angel. Probably the angel of the Lord is in view here.

One other argument that might also be used to identify the angel of the Lord with the Lord himself is that the words of this angel often come across as the Lord speaking directly. (See Gen 16.10; 21.18; Num 33.32-35; Jg 2.1-3 and Zech 3.4.) However, other angels and prophets can speak the same way. (See Gen 19.21-26 and Hos 4.)

In some of the speeches by the angel of the Lord, he refers to the Lord or God in the third person. In Gen 21.17, he says, "Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy crying." Other examples are Gen 22.12; Jg 5.23 and 2 Kg 1.4. These examples may seem to indicate that the Lord is distinct from the angel of the Lord. However, often when God is clearly speaking in the Old Testament, he will refer to himself in the third person as if he were not speaking. This is a feature of speech in Hebrew. For example, in Gen 9.16 God says, "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth" (NIV). Other examples are Lev 6.2 and Am 2.4.

In some passages the Lord addresses the angel of the Lord or vice versa. In 1 Chr 21.15 the Lord tells the angel of the Lord to stop killing the Israelites. This is found in the parallel passage in 2 Sam 24 also. In Zech 1.12 the angel of the Lord addresses the Lord. These passages seem to imply that the angel of the Lord is not the Lord himself. However, these passages could be a reflection of the Trinity.

On the whole Scripture makes it clear that the angel of the Lord is a manifestation of the Lord himself. E. A. Speiser in his comments on Gen 16.1-16 supports this same conclusion by saying, "In association with a

divine term, the noun refers to a manifestation of the Deity, but not necessarily a separate being. In the present chapter, for instance, the angel is later identified with Yahweh himself (verse 13). For one reason or another, an angel is interposed, in human form as a rule, to avoid direct contact between Yahweh and mortals.” (*Commentary on Genesis*, page 118.)

Once our translation team came to the conclusion that the angel of the Lord was a manifestation of the Lord himself, it still was a problem to express it in Bassa. An old Bassa translation of Genesis simply put “angel” in a possessive relationship with the Lord as most English translations do (“Yahweh’s angel”). However, that caused misunderstanding. When the people read it, they only understood it as an angel sent out by the Lord.

Knowing this, we first translated the angel of the Lord as “the Lord in the likeness of an angel”. This was accepted until someone stated that the nature of the Lord would have to change if he took on the “likeness” of an angel. By using the Bassa word for likeness, we were saying that he had become like an angel and was no longer God.

So we had to look for another expression. Presently, it is stated in Bassa that “the Lord miraculously turned into an angel” when the angel of the Lord first occurs in a story. Later on in the story the angel of the Lord is simply referred to as “the Lord” or “the Lord who miraculously had turned into an angel”. This means that the Lord looked and acted like an angel, but he was still God. This word for miraculous transformation is used by the Bassa for a person who can turn into an animal and roam about while he is sleeping. They believe that some people can undergo such a transformation even while awake. The person can act and look like an animal, but he is still human. This same expression is used for what happened to Christ when he became a man (Jn 1.14).

There probably is yet a better way to express “the angel of the Lord” in Bassa. As the Bassa people study God’s Word more fully, they may find a better expression. Even in Western countries we have struggled for centuries in our terminology on how God can be God and yet an angel or man. We are reminded of Is 55.8-9. “My thoughts,” says the Lord, “are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours.”

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