



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

20th October, 2023

You may find this weekend's Biblical 'walk-on' character/s rather thought-provoking, because there are four of them (perhaps more!), but they may really be one! Bear with me....

Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.

Genesis 28:16

In Genesis 18 we have two uses of an Old Testament word: 'LORD' and 'Lord'. The first signifies the way Hebrew scriptures name God, because his true name ('I am' [Exodus 3:14], YHWH, Yahweh/Jehovah), was deemed too holy to utter. (I had a Messianic Jewish friend who still wrote 'G*d' instead of God.) The difference gives us a clue.

In Genesis 18:1 we're told "*The LORD (i.e., God). appeared to Abraham...*" Since Abraham does not at first realise who the mysterious figure (one of three) is, he uses the polite term, "*Lord*" (v.3), the equivalent of 'Sir'. But throughout the chapter the writer holds the tension between Abraham's (growing?) understanding of who this figure is, and the "*LORD*" he is actually encountering.

Going back, this is not the first time Abram (before the 'ha' was added!) had encountered a mysterious figure. From Genesis 14 our second 'walk-on' character is Melchizedek. He is unusual in that there is no mention of his ancestry (the usual Old Testament introduction). He is named only in v.18, and we're told that (1) he blessed Abram (v.19), and (2) Abram gave him a tithe (v.20); both are significant. Then he vanishes! Were it not for Psalm 110:4, and the Hebrews writer's amazing commentary on him (Hebrews 5:6, 5:10, 6:20 and all of Ch. 7) Melchizedek might have been only a 'walk-on'. But no, he is understood as an archetype of Jesus Christ.

Two generations on from Abraham we find Jacob wrestling with another mysterious figure (Genesis 32:24-30). What he was thinking through his overnight ordeal (v.24) we cannot know. What we can know is that the 'man' allowed Jacob to survive the encounter, and be left only with a limp (v.25) and a name-change which recalled the encounter ('Israel', meaning 'he struggles with God'). The 'man' will not give his name (v.29), but he blesses Jacob (see Hebrews 7:7). Only afterwards does Jacob realise he has seen God, and "*did not know it*" (v.30).

Our fourth 'walk-on' (or 'walk-in!') is in Daniel 3:24-25. Nebuchadnezzar "*leaped to his feet in amazement*" at seeing not just Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but "*four men walking around in the fire, ... and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.*" In that fourth ("*angel*" v.28) figure -and in the survival of the three- this pagan king saw something, some one, that caused him to acknowledge the God of Israel (v.29-29).

Four mysterious Old Testament 'walk-ons'. There may be more, but the question is: *Are they all actually one person?*

Here's the thought for the weekend: Is it not possible that the Second Person of the Trinity, present from the dawn of time (Proverbs 8:22-31) entered the world before His incarnation as Jesus Christ? Was God's presence with His people only ever 'spiritual' until the Incarnation?

Could He not -did He not- appear in visible human form at key moments in history? And might He still *"...and I did now know it."* (cf. Hebrews 13:2)?