

He Appeared to *Whom*? Another look at 1 Tim 3:16b

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Abstract

There is a strong scholarly consensus that ὡφθη ἀγγέλοις in 1 Tim 3:16 refers to Jesus being seen by angels at his exaltation. However, the arguments supporting this conclusion are insufficient to justify such uniformity. A fresh analysis of the lexical, contextual, and thematic data suggests that this line refers instead to Jesus' resurrection appearances. A lexical examination of ὡφθη ἀγγέλοις reveals a better translation: "appeared to messengers." This translation fits comfortably in its context in 1 Timothy. And thematically it is another witness to the significant NT theme of Jesus' resurrection appearances.

Keywords: Resurrection appearances, Exaltation, Messengers, Angels, 1 Corinthians 15, ὄφθη / ὡφθη

One scholar in 1892, commenting on the third line of 1 Tim 3:16, said "the agreement among exegetes in rendering this clause 'was seen of angels,' is remarkable" (Micou, 1892, 201). No less remarkable is the current consensus among scholars that the phrase ὡφθη ἀγγέλοις in 1 Tim 3:16 ought to be translated "seen by (or, appeared to) angels." Of all the commentaries available to the author, only two

dissented from this rendering.¹ The translators also appear to happily agree with the consensus view. Not a single modern English translation of the Bible differs from the consensus view (cf. ASV, NAS, ESV, KJV, NIV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NET, NJB). Thus, there is little to no controversy surrounding the translation of this phrase.

Despite the consensus, however, one can readily see the confusion and uncertainty of these scholars about the verse in which this line is found. There are questions about the genre of the material quoted.² Disagreement surrounds the number and length of stanzas within the hymn.³ Debate swirls around the intended referents of other lines in the hymn. Even the event alluded to by the consensus translation, “seen by angels,” is in question. Does it refer to Jesus’ triumph over demonic powers? To the angels who saw him at the tomb? Or to the angelic host who now sees him in his exalted state? Unexpectedly then, despite the consensus in translation, a fog of confusion hangs over the hymn.

This paper will argue—in opposition to the consensus view—that ὡφθη ἀγγέλους ought to be translated “appeared to (human) messengers” instead of “appeared to angels.” This paper aims not to turn the whole tide of scholarship, but to present a plausible alternative that inspires renewed scholarly interaction.⁴

This alternative rendering will be argued for lexically, contextually, and thematically. Lexically, considerations of ἄγγελος and ὡφθη, will demonstrate the probability that ἄγγελος is best translated “human messengers.” Contextually, it will be shown that human messengers makes sense in the narrowest context (the

- 1 The translation “seen by (or, appeared to) messengers” is preferred by Johnson (2001, 226-37); and Quinn and Wacker (2000, 295-348). Both consider ὡφθη to be a true passive and largely focus on the potential for ἄγγελος to refer to a human messenger. This paper goes further by demonstrating the force that a correct lexical understanding of ὡφθη carries in arguing for “human messengers.” For a sampling of the majority who prefer “angels,” see Towner (2006, 270-85); Mounce (2000, 212-32); Fee (1988, 91-96); Knight (1992, 178-86); Dibelius and Conzelmann (1972, 60-63); Kelly (1960, 86-92).
- 2 See the extended discussion of the form of the composition found in 1 Tim 3:16b in Quinn & Wacker (2000, 316-28). This small sample seems to defy some rules of every specific literary form. Thus we recognize it to have poetic, hymnic, and creedal elements. For brevity, I will use the language of “hymn” throughout this paper.
- 3 Here, the general lines of debate are seen by comparing the NA28, where 1 Tim 3:16 is rendered in three stanzas of two lines each, and the NRSV, which has two stanzas of three lines each.
- 4 The most significant interaction comes from a few late-19th and early-20th century German scholars who supported the view of this paper based on their examination of ἄγγελος (Hoffmann, 1880; Seeberg, 1903; and Wohlenberg, 1911). One more recent contribution is from Jerome Murphy-O’Connor (1984, 178-87).

hymn itself), and also in the broader context of 1 Timothy. And thematically, a case will be made that the significance of resurrection appearances in the teaching of the early church makes it the more likely referent in the third line of 1 Tim 3:16b.

Lexical Considerations

The first step is to examine the meaning and usage of both words in the line. First, the referent of ἀγγέλοις will require careful scrutiny. The word generically means “messenger,” and in the NT has both natural and supernatural referents.⁵ Second, an examination of the voice and usage of ὠφθη will yield insight into its meaning and thematic connotations.

The Meaning and Referent of ἄγγελος

Despite this being “agreed” upon by most scholars, there are a number of questionable aspects not only to the conclusion, but to the argumentation as well. First, while most commentators acknowledge that ἄγγελος “can equally well signify ‘messengers’” (Kelly, 1960, 91), most quickly discard this option based on the great majority of uses in the NT that refer to an angel.⁶ However, D.A. Carson cautions when determining word meaning to be careful about “*falsely [assuming] that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning—a meaning usually derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter’s personal systematic theology*” (1984, 45-46, emphasis mine). This warning needs closer attention by those scholars who may be tempted, in 1 Tim 3:16b, to prematurely leap to the technical meaning “angels.” Quinn and Wacker aptly note, “The Greek term *aggelos* had not yet become simply a technical term for a superhuman spirit. It was a functional noun denoting generically any person who was sent with an announcement” (Quinn and Wacker, 2000, 337). Thus, the most basic sense of the word is “messenger” (BDAG, 8). The two technical meanings that follow are then either: 1) “a human messenger serving as an envoy” or 2) “a transcendent

5 BDAG, 8-9. Cf. D.A. Carson explains the difference between the sense or meaning of a word, and its referent. A referent is a non-linguistic, or extra-linguistic, entity which is being indicated by a word or other linguistic symbol. “The sense or meaning of a word is not its referent but the mental content with which that word is associated” (1984, 64-65).

6 See the example of Knight who says, “The NT nearly always uses ἀγγελοι of supernatural powers (angels) rather than humans, specifically good rather than evil” (1992, 185).

power who carries out various missions or tasks” (BDAG, 8-9).

Moises Silva offers an illustration to help differentiate between a word’s meaning (sense), and its referent (technical meaning). Silva shows that while “the beloved disciple” and “the author of the fourth Gospel” do not have the same meaning, they can have the same referent (1983, 121). Silva argues, quoting Nida, “meaning cannot be identified with the referent or ‘denotatum’; rather, “meaning consists of that particular structured bundle of cognitive features, associated with the lexical unit, which make possible the designation of all the denotata by the lexical unit in question” (Silva, 1983, 134, quoting Nida, 1975, 26).

So meaning and referent must not be equated, and we must not falsely assume a word’s referent based on frequency of usage. At the same time, a proposed option should not be entirely unknown. It is significant then that, although the NT more commonly uses ἄγγελος to refer to *supernatural* messengers, *human* messengers are attested. John the Baptist (Mark 1:2; Matt 11:10; Luke 7:27), John the Baptist’s disciples (Luke 7:24), the spies who enter Jericho assisted by Rahab (Jas 2:25), and people sent to make preparations for Jesus’ stay in a village (Luke 9:52) are all referred to with ἄγγελος. The “human messenger” referent has a strong attestation in Homer (BDAG, 8) and Josephus (e.g. *Ant* 2:344; 4:38; 5:357; *Jwr* 3:400; *Vita* 1:89, 90), as well as throughout the LXX, regardless of date or genre (e.g. 1 Sam 23:27; 1 Kgs 22:13; 2 Chron 18:12; Isa 42:19; Hag 1:13; Mal 3:1 [2x]). Therefore, since the “human messenger” meaning is well attested in both biblical and extra-biblical texts, it is a possible referent in 1 Tim 3:16.

The word ἄγγελος, then, does not mean “angel,” although it can refer to an angel. It may as equally refer to a human engaged in the task of delivering a message. Hence to automatically translate it “angels” is to confuse the categories of meaning and referent, and to make an interpretive decision by choosing a *technical* meaning.

The Voice and Usage of ὤφθη

So far, all that has been shown is that ἄγγελος means “messenger” and can refer to supernatural or human messengers. Context has to determine which it is, and our most immediate context is the line itself: that ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις. So, we must begin by examining the voice and usage of ὤφθη, the Aorist Passive indicative, 3rd person singular form of ὀράω. The root in the aorist passive (the sixth principal part) is οπ– and has an active or middle voice despite being passive in form (BDAG, 719).⁷ This means that the better translation is “he appeared to,”

7 Also see Kremer (1991, 527). For an introduction to the middle voice and deponent verbs see Mounce (1993, 148; 224-226). Also, Wallace (1996, 414-441).

not “he was seen by.”⁸ Recognizing the active/middle voice is crucial, because if someone opts to understand ἀγγέλοις as “angels,” they must ask whether or not it is appropriate to speak of Jesus “appearing” to angels. Does anything or anyone ever suddenly become visible to a supernatural being? It seems not, as there are no examples of this type of usage.

Attestation of ὤφθη in extra-biblical literature is sparse, but confirms our understanding of the verb. All six occurrences of the form ὤφθη in Philo have God as the subject and a human—specifically Abraham—as the indirect object (*Det* 1:159; *Mut* 1:1, 15, 17; *Abr* 1:77, 80). Philo explains his meaning of this occurrence of ὤφθη in *De Abrahamo* 1:80 by using a synonymous verb with the reflexive pronoun ἐαυτὸς, thus saying that he was “revealing himself.” This shows that he is referring not to someone passively “being seen,” but to God’s active self-revelation.

Josephus uses ὤφθη seven times (*Ant* 7:298; 16:21; 18:239; *Jwr* 6:293, 296, 298, 306). All the uses have either no indirect object, or a natural one. Of the seven occurrences, five of them clearly reflect the active voice (*Ant* 16:21; 18:239; *B.J.* 6:293, 296, 298). Of these five occurrences, three have unexpressed indirect objects, like in *Jwr* 6:293, 296, 298, where the focus is that the subject “appeared” or “suddenly was visible.” The other two have dative indirect objects—exactly like 1 Tim 3:16 (*Ant* 16:21 and 18:239). What is crucial to note is that Josephus’ remaining two occurrences that are passive *do not* have dative indirect objects. The passive use in *Ant* 7:298 is followed by ὑπό τινος τῶν πολεμίων with ὑπό clearly functioning to designate the agent.⁹ The remaining use in *Jwr* 6:306 has an unstated indirect object, though the citizens are implied. Josephus’ usage is important because it shows that when ὤφθη is intended as a passive it is not followed by a dative indirect object. This confirms that the best translation of ὤφθη followed by a dative is “he appeared to.”

On top of the extra-biblical usage, all 55 biblical uses (excluding for now 1 Tim 3:16) in the LXX and NT have a human, natural, or unexpressed indirect

8 Cf. Towner (2006, 281). Kremer agrees that it is best treated as an aorist middle, and translated as either “appeared” or “let himself be seen” (1991, 528).

9 An agent is the person or thing that is responsible (either ultimately or as an intermediary) for the action expressed by the passive verb. The agent is generally indicated with a preposition such as ὑπό διὰ or ἐν. Agency can be expressed by a dative without a preposition, but only in cases where the means are impersonal. This makes it unlikely that the dative ἀγγέλοις without a preposition is functioning as an agent of a passive ὤφθη in 1 Tim 3:16 (Wallace, 1996, 431-35). If ὤφθη is indeed a middle or deponent as argued here, it makes sense that line 3 is the only one without the preposition ἐν, because it does not need to state agency. The absence of ἐν has surprisingly puzzled scholars such as: Fee (1988, 94), Knight (1992, 185), and even Mounce (2000, 228-229).

object.¹⁰ There is not a single occurrence of this form having a supernatural indirect object—meaning, nothing ever appeared to a supernatural being. Supernatural beings are the ones who do the appearing. Most of the occurrences have a supernatural being as the *subject*.¹¹ Many of these are scenarios when God “appears” to a person (E.g., Gen 12:7; 35:9; Exod 16:10; Lev 9:23; Num 14:10; 1 Kgs 3:5; 2 Chron 3:1; Jer 31:3; Acts 7:2). This confirms that it would be highly unexpected—indeed completely unattested—to combine the active “he appeared to” with a supernatural indirect object.

So, what is expected? In the NT ὤφθη is regularly used to describe Jesus’ resurrection appearances. Kremer sees it to be formulaic, “The appearances of the risen Christ were in the oldest texts indicated exclusively by ὀράω” (Kremer, 1991, 528). This is seen in a number of examples. In Luke 24:34 the two men on the road to Emmaus report that “The Lord has risen indeed and ὤφθη Σίμωνι.” In Acts 13:31, Paul says that after God raised Jesus from the dead he “ὤφθη to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.” Luke uses two other passive forms of ὀράω in relation to Jesus’ resurrection appearances. In Acts 9:16, when Ananias comes to the blinded Paul he uses the adjectival passive participle ὁ ὀφθεὶς σοι in apposition to Jesus, meaning “the one who appeared to you.” In Acts 26:16 Paul tells the story of his conversion and puts the same aorist passive form of the verb that is in the first person on the lips of the risen Jesus, “I have appeared to you” (ὤφθην σοι). Significantly, the only use of ὤφθη in the Pauline¹² corpus outside of 1 Tim 3:16 is found in the four occurrences in 1 Cor 15:5-8, all talking about Jesus’ resurrection appearances to humans. This text will be discussed more later. What is important to see now is the association in the NT writings of the verbal form ὤφθη with resurrection appearances.

Lexical Conclusions

The following points have been made:

The referent of ἀγγέλους must be demonstrated from context, not frequency

- 10 The grammatical terms used here reflect my understanding that ὤφθη carries a middle/deponent voice in its passive spelling (see n12 above).
- 11 The three exceptions with a natural subject are: Gen 1:9 where the subject is “dry land,” Song 2:12 where the subject is “flowers,” and Acts 7:26 where Stephen refers to Moses appearing to the two quarreling Israelites.
- 12 Those who argue that the 1 Timothy is authored by a Pauline school inherently recognize at least some continuation of the Pauline tradition. Thus, for 1 Timothy “the Pauline corpus is assumed to be the appropriate comparative context” (Johnson, 2001, 98).

of usage, since both supernatural and human referents are attested.

The most immediate context is the line, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοι.

ὤφθη, though passive in form, with a dative indirect object is active, best translated “he appeared to.”

ὤφθη is never found with a supernatural indirect object.

ὤφθη is often used to describe Jesus’ resurrection appearances.

Thus, the lexical data points towards understanding ἀγγέλοις not to refer to “supernatural messengers” (i.e., angels), but rather to “human messengers.” These messengers are those people who saw the resurrected Jesus and began to tell others (See Matt 28; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1 and 9; 1 Corinthians 15). Thus, these people fit the description of the word “messenger” (Johnson, 2001, 233).

If the “human messenger” view is accepted, one must ask why the potentially ambiguous word ἄγγελος is used. Why not use a word that more clearly refers to human agents, such as μαθητής or ἀπόστολος? First, not all those who saw the resurrected Jesus and proclaimed the message had the title “disciple” or “apostle.” Though the apostles are prominent in the accounts, they are not the only ones. Women were the first to encounter the risen Lord (Matt 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 23:55–24:11; John 20:11-18). Jesus “appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time” (1 Cor 15:6). Consider also the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31) and Jesus’ appearance to “those who were with [the eleven] gathered together” (Luke 24:33-51).¹³ These texts show that the group of people who Jesus appeared to after his resurrection is broader than the apostles. Thus, to refer to them all, an inclusive term was required. This term also highlights the function of those to whom Jesus appeared – a theme continued in line 4. A second reason is the possible musical or poetic nature of the hymn. Even though the nature of the hymn’s genre and origin is debated, if it is a type of poetic literature, one would expect word choice to be affected by rhythm, euphony and other similar constraints.

Contextual Considerations

While the lexical evidence is strong, this issue cannot be solved by lexical data alone. There is a cliché among interpreters: “context is king.” It has been shown that the most immediate context, the line, favors the translation “appeared to

13 Luke also reports in Acts 1:1-15 that Jesus appeared regularly for a time period of 40 days to a group that likely did not consist only of the 11 remaining apostles (cf. Acts 1:15,22-23).

messengers.” But does this fit in the broader context? Unfortunately, the earliest context is unavailable, because the line is part of a quote from preexistent hymnic material.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there are a few clues in the quote itself, as well as within the broader context of the letter, that lend credence to our view.

Context: the Quote

As mentioned in the introduction, there is disagreement among scholars about the referents of several lines within the hymn and how they relate to one another. Is the relationship between the lines thematic, chronological, or both? The consensus view generally understands ὡφθη ἀγγέλους to allude to Christ’s exaltation. However, this view struggles chronologically to fit this event after the resurrection (line 2) and before the proclamation of the gospel to the nations (line 4). This view also struggles thematically, since line 6, “taken up in glory,” would be repeating the theme of exaltation. This chronological discrepancy and thematic redundancy seems to be what has sparked many of the dissenting opinions over the number and size of stanzas in the hymn, as interpreters try to discern the relationship of one line to another.¹⁵

Our alternative rendering “appeared to messengers” helps alleviate some of the confusion within the hymn. It is agreed that line 4 refers to the preaching of the early church. If line 3 refers to Jesus’ resurrection appearances to human messengers who then proclaimed the resurrection, then there is a sensible relationship between the two lines of this stanza, a relationship consistent with the pattern of appearance and proclamation found in connection with resurrection appearances in the rest of the NT. Though there are many passages where this can

14 On the form of 1 Tim 3:16b, see n2 above.

15 For example, in a two-stanza rendering of the hymn, a reference to the exaltation follows naturally from the incarnation (line 1) and resurrection (line 2) and completes the three line stanza. However, this simply kicks the thematic and chronological problem into lines 4-6. Knight is an example of another kind. He argues for the translation “angels,” based on a rather disputed structure, and thus makes his argument circular. His understanding of the meaning is based on the structure, but his understanding of the structure is dependent upon his presupposed meaning of line 3. His three-stanza structure, is based on the supposed contrast between lines 3 and 4 where ἀγγέλους is opposite of ἕθνεσιν. He says, “That angels are intended here as well is suggested strongly by the contrast in lines 3 and 4 between ἀγγέλους and ἕθνεσιν, the one heavenly, supernatural and angelic, the other earthly, natural, and human” (Knight, 1992, 185). The pattern of contrast which drives the three-stanza view is also seen in stanza one between σαρκι, and πνεύματι, and in stanza three between κόσμῳ and δόξῃ.

be seen,¹⁶ it is most clear in Acts 13:30-32, where Paul says, “But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news. . .”¹⁷ When Jesus appears to someone they respond with proclamation. It is fitting that the mention of proclamation in line 4 is preceded by a reference to resurrection appearances in line three.

I now offer my understanding of the entire hymn, as a way of showing how my proposed interpretation could fit in the context of the quote, though my overall argument does not hinge on an acceptance of this understanding. It seems best to see three stanzas of two lines each, due to the progressive parallelism between each pair of two lines.

Stanza	Line	Author’s translation	Event/Referent
1	1	<i>who was manifested in the flesh</i>	Incarnation
	2	<i>justified by the Spirit</i>	Resurrection
2	3	<i>appeared to messengers</i>	Resurrection Appearances
	4	<i>was proclaimed among the nations</i>	Early church preaching
3	5	<i>was trusted in the world</i>	Spread of the gospel (Response on earth)
	6	<i>taken up in glory</i>	Ascension/Exaltation (Response in Heaven)

This chart displays the referents of each line (each event), which brings to light the aforementioned problem of chronology within the hymn. While our view

16 In Matt 28:17-20 the disciples see Jesus and then are commissioned to disciple and teach all nations. In Acts 1:1-8 Jesus appears to the disciples for forty days (v. 3) and then commissions them to be witnesses to the ends of the earth (v. 8). In Acts 9:1-18 Jesus appears to Saul, then God tells Ananias that Saul will carry God’s name to the nations (v. 15). Though Jesus’ appearance to Paul on the Damascus road is different from the others, in that it was post-ascension, Paul includes it in the group with the pre-ascension resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 where he is demonstrating the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Its inclusion there demonstrates the validity of considering it a resurrection appearance in the same manner as the others.

17 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from NRSV.

solves the problem in line 3, there is a second challenge for interpreters that seek any sort of chronology: the ascension (line 6) occurs after the apostolic preaching (line 4) and the peoples' response (line 5). While our proposal appears to share this chronological problem, it actually offers a more responsible reading: Firstly, the reference to the exaltation is an appropriate conclusion to a hymn that began with him "departing" glory by coming into flesh. In this way lines 1 and 6 function as "bookends" for Jesus' earthly impact. Secondly, a reference to the exaltation of Jesus is a fitting end to the hymn because it declares his present state—that he is presently seated at God's right hand in glory. And lastly, this reading makes sense of the third stanza by paralleling the response to Jesus in heaven with the response on earth. Both are positive responses: his message was received on earth with faith; and he was received into heaven in a glorious manner (ἐν δόξῃ). Thus, this rendering makes sense of lines 1 through 5, and views line 6 as a fitting chronological ending point because it refers to his current state of glory.

Context: the Letter

The hymnic quote has been set within a new context in 1 Timothy. Its context in the letter lends some minor support to the interpretation above. The letter was written directly to Timothy, instead of to the congregation at Ephesus, to encourage him to stand firm as a gospel witness in both doctrine and life against false teaching (1:3, 18; 3:14-15). The letter extends Paul's God-given authority (1:1, 12) to Timothy. The source of Paul's authority was his appointment by Christ Jesus (1:14). Note that Paul's apostolic appointment occurred when the risen Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). This resurrection appearance is alluded to in 1 Tim 1:12-16. Because of his own experience with the risen Jesus, resurrection appearances are never far from Paul's mind. Therefore, a reference to resurrection appearances is contextually appropriate in line 3.

Thematic Considerations

Thus far it has been shown that lexically the most defensible reading is "appeared to human messengers," and that this reading fits well into the context.¹⁸ The consensus view, however, is certainly not argued along lexical lines, and does not often take context heavily into account. What consensus view scholars do emp-

18 I will be looking at one type of NT theme: a constellation of ideas, thoughts, texts, and traditions present in the NT meant to refer to a specific event or concept.

hasize is the “rich tradition” of Jesus’ resurrection appearances to angels. So the first question to be answered is: can the theme about Jesus’ exaltation be connected lexically or conceptually to 1 Tim 3:16?

The Lack of Lexical and Conceptual Connections for Allusion

Because most scholarship has concluded that ἀγγέλοις refers to angels, they must search the NT for an event where Jesus appears to, or is seen by, angels. These scholars have largely agreed that line 3 of 1 Tim 3:16 must refer to the ascended Jesus being worshipped by the angelic host, an “event” evidenced throughout the NT. This exaltation and worship is mentioned in many places,¹⁹ and it is presented both as a current reality, and the final goal of history in Revelation 4-5. Kelly is a fair representative of this view when he remarks, “illuminating parallels [to 1 Tim 3:16] are furnished by Phil 2:9f; Col 2:15; Heb 1:6, where his exaltation is represented as a triumph over the world of spirits which elicits their adoration. . . . what [ὡφθη ἀγγέλοις] is in fact stressing is the worship accorded by angelic powers to the ascending, glorified Christ” (Kelly, 1960, 91).²⁰

Although a majority of scholars have arrived at this view, it is *without* a great deal of textual support. Their attempts to find the event that corresponds with Jesus appearing to angels are not well supported. See, for example, Gordon Fee, who acknowledges that what is present in line 3 of 1 Tim 3:16 is the “regular formula in the NT for resurrection appearances. . . . In this case, however, it more likely refers to the worship given by angels to the ascended, glorified Christ” (Fee, 1988, 94). Unfortunately, he gives no reason as to *why* his option is more likely. Consider also Philip Towner, who also agrees that it could be a “reference to human witnesses of the resurrection,” but continues “this is a far more likely reference to the rich tradition of Christ’s resurrection appearance(s) before angelic powers” (Towner, 2006, 281). Unfortunately, the only support he offers for his view is his opinion about how “rich” the tradition is.

Knight comes closer, saying, “All other NT occurrences of ὡφθη with reference to Jesus refer to his resurrection appearances. Probably, therefore, the word refers here to the resurrection appearances rather than to the ascension only, though the ascension need not be ruled out” (Knight, 1992, 185). However, he argues that Jesus’ resurrection appearances in question are those to angels, rather than

19 These texts will be discussed below.

20 For those who hold a two stanza structure, this third line is then the climax of the first stanza demonstrating the glorification of Jesus after his resurrection—mentioned in line 2 (So Mounce, 2000, 229).

human messengers. We cannot accept this conclusion for two reasons: First, he is mistaken in his rendering of ὤφθη. Knight renders it “was seen.” A better translation of “appeared” has been argued for in the lexical section above, along with its important implications for understanding this line. Second, Knight’s interpretation is too ambiguous. He wants to take the resurrection appearance theme from ὤφθη, but still understand ἀγγέλοις as angels. He wants it to refer to the angels seeing him at the tomb, as well as when he is seated victoriously in heaven. These are, however, two distinct events and themes in the NT. This is simply a case of trying to “have his cake and eat it too.” But lack of a clear event as a referent is unsatisfactory and does not make sense of the hymn.

Another significant deficiency in the argumentation for the majority view is that, although they cite a number of texts to demonstrate the certain fact of Christ’s exaltation, they fail to show that the early church used the language of ὤφθη or ἀγγέλοις to talk about exaltation. The texts cited to support the consensus view will be surveyed below. The purpose of this survey is *not* to argue that the theme of Christ’s exaltation is unimportant, that he is not worshipped by angels in heaven, or that angels do not see him. These are clearly demonstrated in the NT. Rather, the purpose is to show that when the NT writers describe the exaltation, the language and concepts they utilize are far removed from the language used in 1 Tim 3:16. This discrepancy makes it unlikely that someone composing a hymn would use ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις to refer to this theme of exaltation. The following texts are representative of those used to support the view that Jesus “appeared to angels.”

Texts describing the empty tomb. As mentioned above, Knight suggests that 1 Tim 3:16 may include Jesus’ resurrection appearances to angels, particularly those at the empty tomb scene. A closer look at the gospel accounts does not support this conclusion. The scene in Matt 28:5-7 does not mention angels in the plural (as in 1 Tim 3:16), but a singular angel – namely ἄγγελος κυρίου (Matt 28:2). Additionally, the focus is on the appearance of the *angel* (v. 3) to Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” (v. 1), and says nothing of the angel seeing Jesus. However, it does say that the women, along with the disciples, should go to Galilee and “there *they will see* [Jesus]” (v. 7). That the *disciples will see him* is then repeated by Jesus in v. 10. Thus, the emphasis is not on angels, but on disciples seeing Jesus.

The same event recounted in Mark 16:5-7 does not speak of angels at all, but of a single νεανίσκον (v. 5). While many understand this man to be an angel, it is again singular and there is no lexical tie to 1 Tim 3:16. In addition, Mark also records the fact that *the disciples will see Jesus* in Galilee.

Luke’s resurrection account (24:4-7) similarly omits mentions of angels, but only has the presence of ἄνδρες δύο (v. 4). Later, there is the striking report that “The Lord has risen indeed, and ὤφθη Σίμωνι” (24:34). So again, there is no lexi-

cal connection to ἄγγελος, and the only ones who see Jesus are disciples.

The same event is recorded in the last two chapters of John's Gospel. It records the interactions between Mary and δύο ἀγγέλους (20:12-13), as well as with a supposed gardener (14-18). This is the first Gospel account that has multiple angels, but again, the emphasis is not on the angels seeing anything. In fact, when Mary Magdalene leaves the tomb she announces (note the participial form ἀγγέλλουσα from the root αγγελ-) that *she has seen the Lord* (18). In fact, all of John 20:19-29 emphasizes that Jesus appeared to the disciples and that they saw him, in the story known for Thomas' unbelief.²¹ So while there is a mention of plural angels, they are a minor part of the story and the focus is on the disciples seeing Jesus.

Thus, in all four gospels, the empty tomb narratives focus on humans seeing Jesus. When angels are mentioned, they are there to communicate with the women, not to see Jesus.

Texts describing Jesus' exaltation. Several texts from the book of Ephesians that describe the exaltation of Christ are suggested by scholars as "illuminating parallels" for 1 Tim 3:16. Ephesians 1:20-23 is often cited as a parallel as it speaks of God seating Christ at his right hand above all (1:20; cf. 2:6-7). While it mentions Christ's authority and supremacy over all, there is no explicit mention of angels. In fact, the supernatural beings ἀρχη, ἐξουσία, δύναμις, and κυριότης in Ephesians (cf. Eph 6:11-12, 16; 4:8, 27) most likely refer to demonic or evil supernatural beings rather than angels (Hoehner, 2002, 279-80. Cf. O'Brien, 1992). Further, there is no hint of any "sight" by those placed under his feet. The point is merely that Jesus has been glorified. No lexical or conceptual parallels exist with 1 Tim 3:16.

Ephesians 3:9-11 is also cited, although using the same lines of argument as above, it is clear that the supernatural powers here are also demonic. In addition, what is being seen is the σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ (v.10) and it is seen through the church! There is no reference at all to exaltation or to Jesus being beheld by anyone. Thus, the letter to Ephesians is not seen to support the consensus view.

Philippians 2 is a more interesting text because it clearly speaks about Jesus' exaltation and also employs a poetic/hymnic form (2:6-11). Verses 9-11 describe God exalting Jesus and making him superior to all living beings resulting in their confessing him as Lord. Again, ἄγγελος does not occur. The only intimation of angels comes in verse 10: "every knee should bow, *in heaven* and on earth. . . ." But there is no specific mention of angels or of them seeing him. The focus is on Jesus' superiority to *all*. The concept of "sight" is again not introduced in any way. Thus, though it is a hymn and it certainly speaks of Jesus' exaltation, there is nothing in ὧφθη ἀγγέλους that would call to mind this event as described by

21 See the repetition of "seeing" and "appearing" in 20:20, 25 (2x), 27, 29. Also in 21:1 (2x), 14.

Phil 2:9-11.

The final Pauline text is Col 2:15. However, just like the Ephesians texts, there is no mention of angels or any concept of sight. Also, as with Ephesians, the supernatural powers—described as τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας—are again, likely evil and demonic, not God’s heavenly host.

The Catholic Epistles also include several depictions of Jesus’ exaltation, which scholars defending the consensus view point to as parallels. Hebrews 1:3-4 and 6 speak of Christ being seated at God’s right hand after his work on the cross and thus τοσοῦτω κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων. Verse 6 continues to demonstrate his superiority over the angels by quoting Deut 32:43, “Let all God’s angels worship him” to reiterate God’s command that the angels worship Jesus. Much of Heb 1 deals with Jesus’ superiority to angels, and both are mentioned throughout. However, there is no suggestion of sight, or of angels *now* being able to see him as opposed to some prior time when they were not able. In fact, the temporal marker in the citation of Deut 32:43, “when [God] brings the firstborn into the world, he says. . .” (6), rules out a reference to the resurrection. Thus, this text also lacks a significant connection to 1 Tim 3:16, and the chronology seen in Heb 1:6 suggests it is discussing a different event altogether.

1 Peter also refers to Christ’s exaltation. The notoriously difficult passage in 1 Pet 3:18-22 refers to Jesus’ proclamation of victory over the “spirits in prison” (19) and also of Jesus having all supernatural powers subjected to him, including ἄγγελοι (22). While Peter does use the same word, it is only in passing. He is arguing for Jesus’ supremacy over any other supernatural powers: either good or evil, as is evidenced again by the phrase ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων. There is no mention of sight.

The final passage used is Rev 5:8-14: John’s description of his heavenly vision. In it, the elders, the four living creatures, and many thousands of angels along with every created being are worshipping the Lamb. As with the other passages, this worship may imply that the worshippers see the One they are worshipping, but there is again no emphasis on or mention of this sight.

So while the consensus view correctly identifies Christ’s exaltation as a prominent theme throughout the NT, they wrongly understand it to be the referent of ὥφθη ἀγγέλοις in 1 Tim 3:16. A survey of the passages put forth as “illuminating parallels” reveals the lack of lexical and conceptual connections between these texts which build an exaltation tradition and 1 Tim 3:16. The early church had language to describe Christ’s exaltation, and it did not include ὥφθη ἀγγέλοις. Instead they emphasized Christ’s ongoing supremacy over all things and worship by all things. In 1892, Micou pointed out that “Christ’s headship over all spiritual beings cannot be meant, for that is a permanent relation which could not be described by ὥφθη” (Micou, 1892, 203). Thus, after a survey of the texts it appears

that not much has changed in 120 years. We can still agree with Micou that scholars “fail to suggest any [ideas] of sufficient import to justify the prominence here given” to the rendering, “he appeared to angels.” (Micou, 1892, 203).

The Significance of Resurrection Appearances in the Early Church

The above survey demonstrates that there are only some minor points of similarity between the exaltation of Christ and ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις. If no better option for a referent existed, the exaltation could be accepted. But there is a better option. The early church had language they used to talk about resurrection appearances—and it included ὤφθη. The use of ὤφθη to describe resurrection appearances was documented in the lexical section above. In this section, we will show that the NT depicts the resurrection appearances as a very significant theme in the teaching of the early church—a theme of such importance that it warrants inclusion alongside incarnation and resurrection. The more significant the theme is in the early church teaching, the more likely it is to be included in a hymn that is intended to summarize the content of the faith.

The significance of the resurrection is clearly described in 1 Cor 15. As with the use of the hymn in 1 Tim 3:16, 1 Cor 15:3-8 presents a summary of core Gospel tenets, focusing on the death and resurrection of Christ. What may seem odd to a contemporary reader (who regularly hears only about the death and resurrection) is that while the death, burial, and resurrection are summarized in verses 3-4, more space is given to the resurrection appearances (v. 5-8). This emphasis, along with Paul’s own words conveys that these resurrection appearances are of “first importance” (1 Cor 15:3).

Several scholars have recently reasserted the importance of the resurrection appearances in early church tradition. Clayton Croy supports his argument for the mutilation of Mark’s manuscript in part based on the repeated anticipation within the Gospel that the disciples will see Jesus after the resurrection—and the omission of this expected scene. Further, he argues, later scribes recognized its importance and added multiple scenes (Mark 16:8b-20) where Jesus appeared to disciples after the resurrection. These early additions demonstrate the significance of the resurrection appearances within the plot of the Gospel and the early preaching of the church (Croy, 2003).

Jake H. O’Connell argues for the reliability and accuracy of the resurrection narratives of the Gospels based on a widespread agreement that the Gospels are reliable in reporting *at least* the most significant Jesus traditions (O’Connell, 2010). He then attempts to demonstrate that the traditions of the resurrection appearances were indeed significant for the early church, and thus widespread. His argu-

ment for the “tremendous significance”²² of the resurrection appearances is based on the following four reasons:²³

- 1) *The early church regarded Jesus’ resurrection as the climax of Jesus’ life and Israel’s history.* Israel’s narrative was one in which God was working redemption for his people and, as the climax of the story, the resurrection would have obviously and rightly been proclaimed and circulated along with the stories of those who witnessed it.
- 2) *Paul considered the resurrection appearances to be part of the foundation of the faith and all the other apostles (including Peter and James) agreed with him on this.* When Paul lists what he proclaimed as being of “first importance” in 1 Cor 15:3-8, he includes a generous portion devoted to the resurrection appearances. Because it was “of first importance” to Paul in his Gospel preaching, he would have certainly taught them in the other churches he founded as well, and it was also the same Gospel that was preached by the other apostles (v. 11). Therefore, these stories of the resurrection appearances would have been a consistent part of the apostolic preaching throughout the entire church. In O’Connell’s opinion, this passage alone could establish the significance of the resurrection appearances even if all his other arguments failed (O’Connell, 2010, 145).
- 3) *The resurrection claim thrust the Christian movement into the midst of a Jewish theological debate in which the eyewitnesses would serve to support the Christian claim.* The Christian claim that the resurrection was certain and Jesus was the first-fruits of it would have placed the church on one side of the on-going debate between different first-century Jewish sects over whether or not the resurrection would occur. This debate would have made the testimony of the eye-witnesses of the resurrection appearances crucial. The prominence of the eye-witnesses and their testimony would then serve to elevate the tradition to a significant place in Christian teaching—if it was not already.
- 4) *Resurrection appearances had an apologetic effect for potential converts, who would be reluctant to be associated with a man who was subjected to the incredibly shameful execution of crucifixion.* Paul’s mention of those who had seen the resurrected Jesus and were still alive would have been persuasi-

22 O’Connell does not fear overstating the importance of these traditions. Throughout his article he repeatedly describes them with phrases like: “tremendously significant,” “extremely important,” “very significant,” “tremendous importance,” “primary importance,” and “great significance.”

23 What follows is my summary of O’Connell’s four points in “The Reliability of the Resurrection Narratives.” In order to best represent his argument I use his phrasing and language as closely as possible without directly quoting.

ve evidence for those scrutinizing the faith. The resurrection appearances then functioned as valuable evidence in claiming the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, which itself is evidence for the truth of Christianity (based on the flow of the argument in 1 Cor 15).

Based on these four premises, O'Connell has convincingly shown the “tremendous significance” of the resurrection appearances in the first-century church. He has also given theological, evangelistic, and apologetic reasons for why mention of them would have been so widespread. This significance in early teaching and doctrine makes the resurrection appearances very likely to be included in the hymn quoted in 1 Tim 3:16. Indeed, it would seem odd if such a significant theme were omitted.

Thematic Conclusions

After examining the theme of Christ's exaltation in the NT, it is clear that there are only very weak conceptual and lexical similarities to 1 Tim 3:16. The weakness of exaltation as the referent of ὠφθη ἀγγέλοις is amplified when measured against the much more likely theme of resurrection appearances. The prominent place of the resurrection appearances in early Christian tradition, along with the conceptual and lexical similarities, makes the resurrection appearances the more likely referent in 1 Tim 3:16. Those who dismiss it seem to have underestimated its importance in early church preaching, and downplayed the formulaic usage of ὠφθη in the accounts of the resurrection appearances.

Conclusion

In the face of over a century of near scholarly consensus, this paper has argued that ὠφθη ἀγγέλοις does not refer to Christ's exalted state in the sight of angels, but rather to his resurrection appearances to humans. Lexical considerations established the possibility that ἄγγελος refers to human messengers, and that combined with the active voice of ὠφθη this is indeed the better reading. Contextually this reading gives clarity in the immediate context of the hymn, and makes sense in the broader context of the letter and its historical situation. Thematically, our survey of the texts used to support the consensus view revealed the lack of lexical and conceptual similarities between ὠφθη ἀγγέλοις and the theme of Christ's exaltation. Also, the accounts of the resurrection appearances not only share great similarities, both conceptually and lexically, but are also so significant to the early church that it would be expected to be included in this hymnic material that is intended to summarize the Gospel. Micou said that the arguments in favor of

rendering it “messengers” or “heralds” were “overwhelming” (Micou, 1892, 201). Our research leads us to the same conclusion. After 120 years, it is time to give the phrase ὄφθη ἀγγέλους a fresh look.

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Kevin Walker

Ukazao se... Kome? Još jedan osvrt na 1 Tim 3,16b

Sažetak

Među teolozima postoji snažan konsenzus da se pojam ὡφθη ἀγγέλους u 1 Tim 3,16 odnosi na događaj kad su anđeli vidjeli proslavljenog Isusa. Međutim, argumenti koji govore u prilog ovom zaključku nedostatni su da bi opravdali takvu uniformnost. Nova analiza leksičkih, kontekstualnih i tematskih podataka sugerira da ovaj redak zapravo govori o Isusovim ukazanjima nakon uskrsnuća. Leksičko ispitivanje ὡφθη ἀγγέλους otkriva bolji prijevod: “pojavio se pred glasnicima.” Ovaj prijevod se lijepo uklapa u postojeći kontekst u 1 Timoteju, a s tematske strane predstavlja još jedno svjedočanstvo u prilog značajnoj novozavjetnoj temi o Isusovim poslijeuskršnim ukazanjima.

Ključne riječi: poslijeuskršna ukazanja, proslavljenje, glasnici, anđeli, 1. Korinćanima 15, ὀφθη / ὡφθη