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Bombadil and Bible Stories: A Biblical Function for Tom Bombadil within Frodo's Quest

Cover Page Footnote

In fond memory of my father Vernon Shergold, who gave me *The Hobbit*, and read aloud to me *The Lord of the Rings*. Those gifts are not forgotten, nor has the flame ever been extinguished.

**Bombadil and Bible stories:
A Biblical Function for Tom Bombadil within Frodo's Quest**

The origins and nature of Tom Bombadil are a well-known puzzle and subject for debate in Tolkien scholarship. Jane Beal supplies an admittedly incomplete but wide-ranging list of suggested answers;¹ other Bombadils are also available.

However most readers, like Frodo and his companions, first encounter Tom Bombadil as just another new character. He is no more unexpected than Gildor or Strider, and less strange at first sight than Treebeard or Ghân-buri-Ghân. Tolkien himself felt similarly:

... I met a lot of things on the way that astonished me. Tom Bombadil I knew already, but I had never been to Bree. Strider sitting in the corner at the inn was a shock, and I had no more idea who he was than had Frodo.²

I shall not attempt to identify Who or What is Tom Bombadil. Rather, I shall explore Why: why is Tom Bombadil part of Frodo's journey? I shall first consider the many influences of the Bible on Tolkien's writing, and argue for the likelihood of a specifically narrative influence. In the light of narratives from the Bible which record angelic or divine interventions in the lives of Bible characters, I shall propose an understanding of Tom's place and actions in Tolkien's narrative and in Frodo's quest. Finally I will discuss parallels between Tom and Christ. (An Appendix listing relevant passages from the Bible follows the essay.)

Why is Tom Bombadil part of Frodo's journey?

The day that they leave The Shire, and within a few miles of their own familiar country, Frodo and his companions meet the completely unknown Tom Bombadil. Tom later reveals his acquaintance with Farmer Maggot, whom they know and have met, and Tolkien later wrote that 'the Bucklanders knew Bombadil' and 'probably gave him this name',³ but despite this even Merry Brandybuck, son and

1 Beal (2018), 15-17. The list is not as extensive as the page numbers would suggest, but the footnotes are truly comprehensive.

2 *Letters*, 216

3 *Adventures*, 33 and footnote.

heir to the Master of Buckland and the most knowledgeable of the four about the Old Forest, does not seem to remember Tom or recognise his name.

Having rescued them from Old Man Willow, Tom invites the hobbits to his home where they stay for two nights, enjoying his hospitality and hearing his stories. In response to Tom's wide knowledge and cunning questioning, Frodo speaks to him of the Ring, and even hands it to Tom, who treats it as if it were no more than an insignificant trinket; it has no power to make Tom invisible, nor to conceal Frodo from him.

On the third day, Tom sends the hobbits off unaccompanied (even though they will be travelling some distance through 'Tom's country') and they are caught by a Barrow-wight. Frodo calls for help using a song that Tom taught them, and Tom releases all four from the barrow, reviving the three younger hobbits from a death-like state. He also chooses daggers for them from the barrow-hoard.

Finally, Tom accompanies them the rest of the way to his own border, and recommends an inn to stay at in Bree, before turning back and vanishing from the hobbits' experience. He is mentioned in Rivendell, and Gandalf heads off to see him after the war ends, but no hobbit is recorded as seeing or visiting him again.

Tom Bombadil could have done more for the hobbits. He could have joined them as they travelled across his country and thereby not only protected them from the Barrow-wight, but also enabled them to reach Bree a day earlier. He could have greeted them on their return, and helped to restore the Shire.

Or he could have done rather less. If he had treated them merely as passing strangers, he could have given them a bed for the night and then hurried them off to take their own chances with the Barrow-wights. In the rain, they would not have incurred the fateful delay on top of the barrow, and may have made it to Bree two days earlier.⁴ Why does Tom Bombadil occur when he does, do the things he does, refrain from doing other perfectly possible things, and disappear so completely from the hobbits' story?

4 Or perhaps not. In Marquette MSS 4/2/36 (*The Hunt for the Ring*), cited in Hammond and Scull (2005), 145, Tolkien wrote "[The Witch-king] now visits the Barrowdowns and stops there some days (probably until late on 27)." If this were true, then the two nights with Bombadil kept the hobbits from the Barrow-downs until the 28th and saved them from a more terrible encounter.

Tolkien and the Bible

Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic, having been raised as such from an early age by his mother and then (under the terms of her will) by his guardian Father Francis Morgan, a Roman Catholic priest.⁵ He attended Mass daily when he could,⁶ and was attentive to the preaching.⁷ He was in particular thoughtful about the relation between his *Legendarium* and Catholic teaching.⁸ He was familiar with both Old and New Testaments.⁹ He provided the original draft translation of the Book of Jonah for *The Jerusalem Bible*.¹⁰

In addition to his personal and devotional interest in the Bible, Tolkien's professional attention as a professor of Anglo-Saxon (and later periods of English) would have been drawn to the biblical texts and stories underlying and embodied in the documents that he studied and taught. There are AS glosses on an eighth-century Latin Psalter in the British Museum, and on the Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels (a copy of both of which he possessed)¹¹, and there are AS translations of the gospels (Wessex Gospels) and parts of the Old Testament.¹² Other AS texts, such as the *Exodus* poem, paraphrase bible stories and include biblical themes. Perhaps the best-known to students of Tolkien is the couplet from the poem Christ I: 'O Earendel, brightest of Angels, sent to men above Middle-earth'¹³ which may refer to John the Baptist, but inspired the character and story of Eärendil in his *Legendarium*.

Later texts in Tolkien's area of study also deal with biblical matters. He prepared an edition of the *Ancrene Wisse*, a 13th Century manual for female religious contemplatives.¹⁴ The fourteenth-century poem *Pearl* is not only Christian in context, but it also explicitly cites the bible in its arguments:

5 Duriez (2012), 24

6 *Letters*, 338

7 *Letters*, 99

8 *Letters*, 286 footnote

9 *Letters*, 109-110 In the course of a single letter, Tolkien refers to the beauty and historicity of [the Garden of] Eden 'myth' (Genesis 2-3), "the itinerary of Israel from Egypt to the Red Sea" (Exodus 13:17-14:4), and "the 'story-value' ... of the whole Chr[istian] story (NT especially)."

10 Carpenter (1977), 274

11 Drout (2007), 63

12 Bruce (1961), 7-9

13 Shippey (2000), 257

14 Carpenter (1977), 273

Stanza 39 In courtesy we are members all
 Of Jesus Christ, Saint Paul doth write: ...

Stanza 42 In God's true gospel, in words divine
 That Matthew in your mass doth cite ...¹⁵

It is, naturally, quoted here in Tolkien's own translation.

We can see that Tolkien's knowledge of, and relationship with, the Bible pre-dated his study of any other literature; it continued throughout his personal and professional life, and even included a brief period when he contributed to a new translation. He could therefore appreciate the Bible both as divine revelation of vital relevance to him and his lifestyle, and as a document with a human history and a literary significance.

Biblical influences on Tolkien's writing

In the light of this, it is not surprising that we find a great deal of biblical influence in Tolkien's writing, and specifically in *The Lord of the Rings*. One area of influence is the cosmology of Middle-earth: it is a monotheistic universe created by the one God, and overseen by lesser spiritual powers, in which mankind is directly created by God.¹⁶

Secondly, biblical morality has shaped the story. Tolkien states that Frodo's story is 'mechanically, *morally* and psychologically credible' [my emphasis], and the morality is explicitly linked to the Lord's Prayer, within a wider discussion of the Christian moral logic of the narrative.¹⁷

A third area may be seen in a number of echoes of Christian (or Roman Catholic) religious practice, such as:

- 'For help [the elves] may call on a *Vala* (as *Elbereth*), as a Catholic might on a saint...'¹⁸
- '[Lembas] also has a much larger significance, of what one might hesitatingly call a 'religious' kind.'¹⁹ Later, when discussing the parallel

15 *Sir Gawain*, 93, 94

16 *Letters*, 284-5

17 *Letters*, 233

18 *Letters*, 193 footnote

19 *Letters*, 275

between lembas and the Eucharist, Tolkien comments: ‘...far greater things may colour the mind in dealing with the lesser things of a fairy story’²⁰

- Tom Shippey lists certain dates that chime with the church calendar, the most significant being the defeat of Sauron on 25th March, corresponding to the date of the Annunciation and also (in old English tradition) the Crucifixion.²¹

A fourth area is the language Tolkien uses in parts of his writing. Tolkien uses many archaic patterns of speech, as appropriate to the setting and the mindset of his characters,²² and we must not unthinkingly identify such language as ‘biblical’ just because the King James Bible is the text in an archaic style most familiar to many people. There are, however, some specific places where the comparison is apt. The eagle announcing the fall of Sauron to Minas Tirith²³ uses, as Shippey says, ‘exactly the language of the Psalms’ in the KJV,²⁴ Other parts follow the underlying structure of the Biblical text, less dependent on the age of the translation. Steve Walker notes that Treebeard’s (prose) lament for the Entwives echoes the parallelism of Jewish poetry in the Psalms,²⁵ and observes that elsewhere ‘[t]he Bible rhythm, like so much of Tolkien’s subtle styling, is buried so deep in his prose it is almost imperceptible’.²⁶

A narrative influence from the Bible

How else might Tolkien’s familiarity with the Bible have influenced his writing? There is also the possibility of narrative influences; elements of individual Biblical stories which Tolkien has transmuted and incorporated into the history of Middle-earth.

There are in the Bible a number of occasions when a human character is visited by, or has a vision of, a miraculous person. This visitor may be an angel, meaning a spiritual being acting in God’s service, or it may be God, either appearing as a person or speaking through some image (such as the burning bush

20 *Letters*, 288

21 Shippey (2000), 208

22 *Letters*, 225-6

23 *RK*, 241

24 Shippey (2000), 209; though as a Roman Catholic Tolkien would presumably have used the Douay-Rheims Bible

25 Walker (2009), 140-1

26 Walker (2009), 75

through which God spoke to Moses).²⁷ These encounters may involve a prediction of some significant person's birth, or the commissioning of the human character to some new task or purpose, or they may be to rescue or care for the character in a time of danger or distress. These encounters are greatly varied, but it is curious how the episode of Tom Bombadil echoes the actions and events of these heavenly appearances.

I will not argue that Tom Bombadil is an angel, still less divine (though I will discuss this briefly at the end). Tolkien has written *The Lord of The Rings* using a different palette of characters from that revealed in the Bible. None of the Valar and Maiar, the Elves and Orcs, the Ents and Trolls—let alone hobbits—have an exact correspondence with any biblical beings. We should not expect a character acknowledged by his creator to be a mystery to match any biblical being. What I am showing is that Tolkien uses Tom to provide an intervention in Frodo's quest equivalent to many of the angelic visitations or theophanies in the Bible.

The relevant elements of this episode, in roughly chronological order of their first occurrence, are:

- Tom stops Frodo and Sam in their flight
- Tom releases the hobbits from the Willow and the Barrow
- Tom displays supernatural power, even (seemingly) over the Ring
- Frodo bursts into rhyme, and the hobbits find themselves singing
- The hobbits are given food, water and rest
- Frodo dreams of a far green country under a swift sunrise
- Tom names the hobbits' ponies
- Tom evokes a vision of a line of Men, the last with a star on his brow
- Tom is never again present in the narrative

Each of these items by itself might be insignificant, but together they form a pattern of behaviour that suggests a reason for Tom Bombadil's presence in the story. They will be considered in turn.

²⁷ Exodus 3

- Tom stops Frodo and Sam in their flight

‘Whoa! Whoa! Steady there!’ cried the old man, holding up one hand, and [Frodo and Sam] stopped short, as if they had been struck stiff.²⁸

Tom’s first action is to control the panicked flight of the two hobbits. Even before seeing him, they both ‘stood as if enchanted’, and now he is able to halt their rush while he asks them what their problem is. It is a small intimation of the power he will later display over Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight. Tom’s command over the hobbits is further exemplified by Frodo’s readiness to hand him the Ring when he asks for it.

‘Show me the precious Ring!’ he said suddenly in the midst of the story: and Frodo, to his own astonishment, drew out the chain from his pocket, and unfastening the Ring handed it at once to Tom.²⁹

These actions are gentle and benign, in comparison with some of the possible biblical parallels. When the patriarch Jacob wrestled with ‘a man’ at Peniel, the man was unable to get the upper hand, and miraculously dislocated Jacob’s hip, before blessing him, saying ‘... you have striven with God ... and have prevailed’. Jacob subsequently recognised ‘I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.’³⁰ But the limp was not healed.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, and foretold that his wife Elizabeth would bear him a son, the future John the Baptist. Zechariah questioned this due to the couple’s age, whereupon Gabriel struck him dumb. After the birth, when Zechariah wrote that the boy’s name was to be John (in obedience to Gabriel’s instruction) his speech was restored.³¹

Now it may be reasoned that in each of these cases the disability was given to teach a proper humility to those to whom a great privilege was also granted; such conclusions are beyond the scope of this essay. What is clear is that the divine or angelic visitor had great power to harm and heal, and was prepared to use it as seemed best for the one they were visiting. Tom Bombadil likewise has

28 *FR*, 131

29 *FR*, 144

30 Genesis 32:24-32 *NRSV*

31 Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

authority to command the hobbits, and uses it benignly: to calm the hobbits, and also to teach them, perhaps, that there was at least one power in Middle-earth that neither feared nor desired the Ring that so tempted and terrorised even Gandalf.

- Tom releases the hobbits from the Willow and the Barrow

After Merry and Pippin are trapped within the trunk of Old Man Willow, Frodo and Sam run hopelessly along the river-bank, shouting for help. They meet Tom, who is able to command the Willow to release the two captives.³²

Later, after Tom has foresightedly taught them a song to summon him in case of danger, all four hobbits are trapped in a barrow by the Barrow-wight. Frodo remembers and sings the song, and Tom responds. He breaks open the barrow, banishes the Barrow-wight, revives the other three hobbits from their enchanted state, and then forever breaks the spell of the barrow by bringing out the treasure and leaving it free for anyone to take.³³

There are a number of biblical examples of angelic release from bondage. In Daniel, three Hebrews were bound and flung into a furnace, but when King Nebuchadnezzar peered in, he saw four figures free and walking about, and he said “the fourth has the appearance of a god.”³⁴ The three came out unharmed; the fourth is not, on the face of it, mentioned again.

There are two examples in the book of Acts. Very early in the history of the church, the Jewish High Priest and his supporters, jealous of the popularity of the followers of Jesus, arrested the apostles—apparently all twelve—and locked them in prison. ‘But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.”’ The high priest was perplexed the next morning to find the prison still securely locked, while the prisoners were teaching in the temple.³⁵

The second example is when King Herod arrested the apostle Peter and imprisoned him, chained and guarded by four squads of soldiers. In the night, an angel woke Peter, removed his chains, and led him out of the prison through a

32 *FR*, 130-1

33 *FR*, 151-7

34 Daniel 3:25 *NRSV*

35 Acts 5:25 *NRSV*

number of gates and past many guards. Once in the street, the angel leaves. Up to this point, Peter had thought he was dreaming.³⁶

On both occasions, the angel came to release those who had already committed themselves to the path of faith, but were imprisoned by an opposing party. The angel merely released them (and in the first instance, encouraged them to continue their preaching), but did not further attack their enemies. In the second instance, the angel's intervention followed fervent prayer by the church.

Similarly, Tom comes to the aid of those who are already committed to their journey, but have been imprisoned by forces they cannot themselves resist. At the Willow, Frodo and Sam shout for help with no great hope of an answer, but in the barrow, Frodo repeats the rhyme that Tom taught the hobbits to summon his help. Tom is therefore an answer to prayer, both undirected and directed.

Tom releases Merry and Pippin from Old Man Willow, but takes no further action against the tree. Again, once he releases the four hobbits from the Barrow-wight, he empties and cleanses that one barrow, but takes no steps to remove other barrows or Barrow-wights. It seems plain that Tom has the power to do more, and (given the length of time he has been living there) has had plenty of opportunity to, for example, pacify the Old Forest, tame or remove Old Man Willow, and free the Barrow-downs of all the dread spirits that dwell there. Either he chooses to restrain himself, or perhaps, like the angels, he does only what he has been sent to do.

- Tom displays supernatural power, even (seemingly) over the Ring

As well as having the power to command the hobbits (as seen above) and Old Man Willow, and to cleanse the barrow, Tom displays a number of supernatural abilities.

Tom Bombadil came trotting round the corner of the house, waving his arms as if he was warding off the rain—and indeed when he sprang over the threshold he seemed quite dry, except for his boots.³⁷

36 Acts 12:1-11

37 *FR*, 140

He also puts the Ring on his finger, yet without vanishing (nor, it seems, being affected by any desire for it), and when Frodo in turn puts on the Ring and is invisible to Merry, Tom can still see him.³⁸ This attitude to the ring distinguishes him from any other character in the story, for even Gandalf desires but fears the Ring.³⁹ In a final twist, Tom makes the Ring itself vanish and reappear. Note, though, that when Tom Bombadil is discussed at the Council of Elrond, Erebor says ‘It seems that he has a power even over the Ring,’ but Gandalf responds ‘Say rather that the Ring has no power over him . . . he cannot alter the Ring itself, nor break its power over others.’⁴⁰ Making the Ring vanish turns out to be an illusion, after all.

Tom is able to summon and control the hobbits’ ponies: ‘... behind him came in an obedient line *six* ponies: their own five and one more’ and they step forward and stand in line as he calls each one.⁴¹ More subtly, Tom refers to the ability of his own pony, Fatty Lumpkin, to calm the hobbits’ ponies with his ‘words of wisdom’, as if Fatty Lumpkin could speak—at least with other ponies.

We have already mentioned the power shown by God over Jacob, and by the angel over Zechariah, and also the power of angels to release people from prison. Angels may also show miraculous powers, either as proof of their *bona fides* or to assist those they visit. Gideon was commissioned to fight by an angel who proceeded to set fire to the meal Gideon prepared for him, simply by touching it with his staff; thus Gideon was convinced that his visitor really was an angel of God.⁴² The angel that appeared to Manoah and his wife (parents-to-be of Samson) ‘ascended in the flame of the altar’ on which Manoah sacrificed a kid, convincing Manoah that it was indeed an angel.⁴³

When God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, he caused Moses’ staff to turn into a snake, and turn back again, and also caused Moses’ hand to become leprous, and to revert to normal. He did this, not to convince Moses that God was really speaking, but to demonstrate a continuing power he conferred on Moses so that Moses could give miraculous evidence, both to his own people and to Pharaoh, of his authority to speak from God.⁴⁴

38 *FR*, 144

39 *FR*, 71

40 *FR*, 278-9

41 *FR*, 155

42 Judges 6:11-24

43 Judges 13:19-23 *NRSV*

44 Exodus 4:1-9

Angels demonstrate control over both domestic and wild animals. Balaam's donkey was able to see an angel who was invisible to Balaam, and the donkey was eventually granted the power of speech to rebuke Balaam, before Balaam finally saw the angel himself.⁴⁵ When Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, he was saved because, as he tells King Darius, 'God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me'.⁴⁶

Tom's demonstrations of power serve to reassure the hobbits that though they are setting out into a dangerous world, and specifically carrying with them a most perilous Ring, there is also great power that is on their side, and even the Ring is not entirely overwhelming.

- Frodo bursts into rhyme, and the hobbits find themselves singing

Tom Bombadil's speech is almost always in verse, sometimes rhymed: Le Guin observes '... his meter is made up of free, galloping dactyls and trochees, ...',⁴⁷ and this has power to transform the hobbits' speech. When Frodo meets Goldberry, he bursts into rhyme:

*O slender as a willow wand! O clearer than clear water!
O reed by the living pool! Fair river-daughter!
O spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after!
O wind on the waterfall, and the leaves' laughter!*⁴⁸

And at supper,

The drink in their drinking-bowls seemed to be clear cold water, yet it went to their hearts like wine and set free their voices. The guests became suddenly aware that they were singing merrily, as if it was easier and more natural than talking.⁴⁹

When Tom teaches the hobbits a charm to summon him in case of danger or difficulty, it is, quite naturally, in rhyme.

45 Numbers 22:22-35

46 Daniel 6:22 *NRSV*

47 Le Guin (2004), 86

48 *FR*, 135

49 *FR*, 136

Angels, too, have inspired poetry in those they visit. The greatest example must be Mary the mother of Jesus, whom the angel Gabriel visited to announce her son Jesus' birth. After Mary accepted the message with obedience, she went to visit her relative Elizabeth, and there sang the *Magnificat*:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
...⁵⁰

Intertwined with her story is that of Zechariah, husband of Elizabeth, who was at that point dumb while Elizabeth was bearing the child (John the Baptist) prophesied to Zechariah by Gabriel. When the child was born, and Zechariah obediently named him John, his speech was restored and he sang the *Benedicite*:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
...⁵¹

Other points at which people have had their speech somehow transformed include Isaiah, whose lips an angel touched with a burning coal to cleanse them, and Jeremiah, whose lips were touched by God.⁵² Both men were commissioned to speak God's words to his people. The most dramatic transformation of all was Pentecost, when the nascent church of about 120 followers of Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.⁵³

Frodo and his friends are not merely refreshed, they are transformed under Tom's influence. Here it may be appropriate to cite Jesus' words to his disciples:

[Y]ou will be dragged before governors and kings because of me . .
. do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say;
for what you are to say will be given to you at that time;⁵⁴

50 Luke 1:46-55 *NRSV*

51 Luke 1:68-79 *NRSV*

52 Isaiah 6:5-7; Jeremiah 1:6-9

53 Acts 2:1-13

54 Matthew 10:18-19 *NRSV*

All four hobbits do indeed have to speak to those in authority—Frodo and Sam to Faramir, Merry to Théoden, and Pippin to Denethor—and their words have great influence on the outcome of the quest. Perhaps they were better prepared for having been with Bombadil. And Sam in particular displays a previously unsuspected talent for verse and song, such as his performance by the stone trolls, and the song that found Frodo in the Tower of Cirith Ungol.⁵⁵

- The hobbits are given food, water and rest

Tom Bombadil burst out laughing. ‘Well, my little fellows!’ said he, stooping so that he peered into their faces. ‘You shall come home with me! The table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter.’⁵⁶

And indeed, their arrival at Tom’s house is followed, once they have washed, by a generous supper, the first of several ample meals. For two nights they sleep in soft, warm beds, and between times they are entertained by Tom’s stories and Goldberry’s singing.

Angels are less known for their hospitality, but on occasion they have provided the basics to sustain life. Hagar, concubine of Abraham and mother of his oldest son Ishmael, was cast out into the desert with her son after the birth of Isaac. Having used all her water, she despaired of surviving, until an angel revealed to her a well of water.⁵⁷ Elijah the prophet fled into the desert from Jezebel’s threats, wishing to die. As he slept, an angel woke him and provided water and food, and after he slept again this happened a second time. ‘He went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God’.⁵⁸

On occasion, God has done the same. When the Israelites were at Mount Sinai, God called Moses up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. Later, he called Moses and 70 elders to meet him on the mountain, and ‘they beheld God, and they ate and drank.’⁵⁹

Tom’s hospitality may not smack of the miraculous, but it follows a heaven-born pattern.

55 *FR*, 219-220; *RK* 185

56 *FR*, 131-2

57 Genesis 21:8-21

58 1 Kings 19:4-8 *NRSV*

59 Exodus 24:9-11 *NRSV*

● Frodo dreams of a far green country under a swift sunrise

On the second night with Tom Bombadil:

That night they heard no noises. But either in his dreams or out of them, he could not tell which, Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise.⁶⁰

At Crickhollow, Frodo dreams of a tangled forest, the distant sea, and a tall white tower. In Tom's house, the dreams are more specific; on the first night he has a vision of Gandalf's rescue from Orthanc eight days earlier. Then comes this dream of a far country. The significance is hidden until the very end of the endings of the story, when Frodo takes ship with Elrond and Gandalf as they return

... into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.⁶¹

So the passing dream was a foreshadowing of Frodo's final (to mortal eyes) journey into the West, where he might find rest and healing that could not be in Middle-earth.

It is therefore not inappropriate to compare Frodo's dream with the vision of Jacob at Bethel. On the run from his furious brother Esau, Jacob flees alone, sleeping with only a stone for a pillow.

60 *FR*, 146

61 *RK*, 310

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him, . . . [then the Lord spoke to Jacob] . . . and [Jacob] said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”⁶²

A vision quite distinct from the apocalyptic vision of the Old Testament prophets, or of St John in Revelation, this is almost a domestic affair; God shows Jacob a connection between where he lies and heaven, and Jacob realises that he is in the house of God.

We should not read a Christian understanding of the afterlife into either Jacob’s or Frodo’s dream. Jacob had no expectation of going to heaven, for ‘in Hebrew thought only exceptional human beings (esp. Enoch and Elijah) were conceived as being raised to heaven after this life’.⁶³ The ladder he saw carried angels between heaven and earth, not humans. Likewise Frodo, theologically a human (but one of the little people rather than the big people), could have had no more knowledge of life after death than Aragorn himself, who could only say in his farewell to Arwen, ‘Behold! We are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory, Farewell!’.⁶⁴ But she was not comforted. Even allowing for the fact that Tolkien clearly states ‘The passage over Sea is not Death,’⁶⁵ that Frodo is seeking healing in this mortal life, and will at some point die and leave Arda, even this is something Frodo could never have expected to receive. But his dream is the closest we get, in hobbit experience, to seeing any road to an afterlife, or a life outside the sphere of Middle-earth.

Rather, both Jacob and Frodo are shown a connection between a realm where God is glorified and obeyed, and the fallen world where each was struggling and suffering. Jacob recognised this immediately, but Frodo, like ourselves as first-time readers, will not understand that connection until the end of his time in Middle-earth.

62 Genesis 28:10-17 *NRSV*

63 Cross & Livingstone (1997), 741

64 *RK*, 344

65 *Letters*, 254

● Tom names the hobbits' ponies

*Hey! Now! Come hoy now! Whither do you wander?
Up, down, near or far, here, there or yonder?
Sharp-ears, Wise-nose, Swish-tail and Bumpkin,
White-socks my little lad, and old Fatty Lumpkin!*

...

Merry, to whom the others belonged, had not, in fact, given them any such names, but they answered to the new names that Tom had given them for the rest of their lives.⁶⁶

Tom's power over the hobbits' ponies, mentioned previously, extends to giving them names. This may indicate that he sees and treats them as individuals with their own identities and characteristics, in a way that Merry, their owner who left them un-named, had not. There is no lasting significance to this naming in the narrative, as none of the ponies' names are ever used again, but it is indicative of the ponies' relationship with Tom (or perhaps with Fatty Lumpkin) that when they are let loose and frightened away by the Black Riders that same night, they find their way back to Fatty Lumpkin, and are cared for by Tom.

Of greater significance are the Biblical re-namings of people by God. When God made his great covenant with Abram ('exalted ancestor'), God changed his name to Abraham ('ancestor of a multitude'),⁶⁷ and gave the name of the son to be born to him as Isaac ('he laughs').⁶⁸ This is the covenant that established circumcision as sign of the relationship with God. Abraham's new name relates to the promised significance of his descendants; not only the Jews (i.e. the circumcised), but also, in Christian belief, those Gentiles (i.e. the uncircumcised) who have faith in the God of Abraham.⁶⁹

When Jacob wrestled with God at Peniel, his name was changed from Jacob ('He takes by the heel' or 'He supplants')⁷⁰ to Israel ('the one who strives with God' or 'God strives').⁷¹ Curiously, the narrative continues to call him Jacob

66 *FR*, 155

67 Genesis 17:5 *NRSV*. The translations are footnoted.

68 Genesis 17:19 *NRSV*. The translation is footnoted.

69 See Romans 4:11-12

70 Genesis 25:26 *NRSV*. The translation is in the footnote.

71 Genesis 32:28 *NRSV*. The translation is in the footnote.

—perhaps he was shy about his new status?—but his descendants were known as the Israelites.

Two other sons were predicted and named by angels; John (the Baptist) and Jesus himself were named by Gabriel when he foretold their birth to Zechariah and Mary respectively.⁷² John means ‘The Lord is gracious’⁷³, and Jesus (the Greek form of Hebrew ‘Joshua’) means ‘The Lord is salvation’.⁷⁴ Jesus’ name was also given to Joseph by an (unnamed) angel.⁷⁵

Middle-earth names are often significant in describing the person. Aragorn was named *Estel*, meaning ‘Hope’ during his youth in Rivendell. In the narrative he is first encountered under the nick-name of Strider; as Barliman Butterbur explains: ‘What his right name is I’ve never heard: but he’s known round here as Strider. Goes about at a great pace on his long shanks; . . .’,⁷⁶ and Aragorn adopts it in the ‘high tongue’ form of *Telcontar* as the name of his kingly line.⁷⁷ Many hobbit-names are supposedly translated from the Westron language in which they originated to produce appropriate names in English. *Kali* becomes Merry, *Banazîr* (*Ban*) becomes Samwise (Sam) meaning ‘half-wise’.⁷⁸

To name someone is a chance to define or reveal something significant about that person (or pony). Tom takes the opportunity to reveal five more characters, albeit briefly, in Frodo’s larger story.

- Tom evokes a vision of a line of Men, the last with a star on his brow

As Tom describes the history of the swords he has found for the hobbits, he talks of

‘. . . sons of forgotten kings . . . guarding from evil things folk that are heedless.’

The hobbits did not understand his words, but as he spoke they had a vision as it were of a great expanse of years behind them, like a vast shadowy plain over which there strode shapes of Men, tall and

72 Luke 1:13 and 31

73 Morris (1974), 69

74 Morris (1974), 72

75 Matthew 1:21

76 *FR*, 168

77 *RK*, 139

78 *RK*, 414

grim with bright swords, and last came one with a star on his brow.⁷⁹

This is clearly a reference to the latest descendants of those who were buried in the barrows, who are now the Rangers. The one with the star must therefore be Aragorn, who would later come to his coronation with his head ‘bare save for a star upon his forehead bound by a slender fillet of silver.’⁸⁰ However, this foreshadowing of Aragorn will be fulfilled faster than that, as the hobbits will meet him in *The Prancing Pony* later that same day,⁸¹ though his identity as heir of Isildur, and therefore the rightful claimant to the throne of Gondor and Arnor, is not revealed until the Council of Elrond. Tom’s words give hints of the history and purpose of Aragorn’s line in protecting the weak from evil, though they do not explicitly speak of Aragorn’s kingship.

The earliest foretelling in the Bible of the one who would be king of all is by God walking in the garden in Eden, after Eve was deceived by the serpent and she and Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit.

The LORD God said to the serpent,

“ . . .

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”⁸²

And the last foretelling that explicitly mentioned his kingship was by Gabriel, who told Mary:

79 *FR*, 157

80 *RK*, 244

81 It is later revealed that Aragorn was even closer. When the hobbits reach the East Road, they watch Tom Bombadil ride back south, then Frodo reminds them to call him ‘Underhill’ rather than ‘Baggins’ in Bree, then they mount and ride off (*FR*, 159). At the inn, Strider reveals that he had been hiding behind the hedge, had overheard the conversation with ‘old Bombadil’ and Frodo’s remarks about ‘Underhill’, and had then followed the hobbits into Bree (*FR*, 176). Clearly, Tom Bombadil and Aragorn know about each other, which makes sense given the Rangers’ responsibility for guarding the Shire, and Tom’s country being part of that border. How much Tom knows about Aragorn’s movements and presence that day can only be guessed. Aragorn says nothing when Bombadil is discussed during the Council of Elrond.

82 Genesis 3:14-15 *NRSV*

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.⁸³

Tom, who knows the past history of Arnor, is equally aware of current events, and would understand far better than the hobbits the relevance of their quest to the mysterious Strider. His words give them a hint of the significance of the events about to unfold.

- Tom is never again present in the narrative

*Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders.
Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting!*⁸⁴

With these words, Tom Bombadil takes leave of the four hobbits, and leaves them, and the narrative, for good. He is discussed, but not seen as a helpful resort, at the Council of Elrond. As the hobbits return to the Shire, Gandalf leaves them to have a long talk with Tom, but Tom does not make an appearance (despite the hobbits' hope that he would). He plays no part in the scouring of the Shire, or the restoration that followed. Not till the end, as the white ship nears the shores of Elvenhome, is Frodo's dream in Tom's house recalled as a foreshadowing.

In the chiasmic structure of the narrative⁸⁵ a number of characters more minor than Tom are revisited, or given a personal farewell appearance. The hobbits revisit Barliman Butterbur at *The Prancing Pony*. Bill Ferny is finally banished as the hobbits re-enter the Shire (while his namesake Bill the pony is found at Bree and comes home with Sam). Fredegar Bolger is released from the Lockholes, as is Lobelia Sackville-Baggins who redeems herself and is reconciled to Frodo. Even Gildor is present in Elrond and Galadriel's riding to the Grey Havens. But Tom and Goldberry are bypassed with only a mention, and neither the final chapters nor the Appendices make any reference to further contact between any hobbit and Tom. (Curiously, Farmer Maggot—the only hobbit

83 Luke 1:32-33 *NRSV*

84 *FR*, 159

85 There may be several chiasmic interpretations of *The Lord of The Rings*. I am referring here to that structure natural to a journey there and back again, where places visited on the outward journey are revisited on the return journey in reverse order.

explicitly linked to Tom Bombadil—is also absent from the hobbits’ return journey.)

Angels have no ongoing role in the stories of the Bible. They appear, pass on their message, carry out whatever function is theirs, and depart. Few angels are named, so we rarely know whether any angel makes a repeat appearance. An angel appeared to the wife of Manoah, to foretell the birth of her son Samson. When she told her husband, he prayed for the angel to return, and God sent him back again so Manoah could also see him. Gabriel appeared twice to Daniel in the Old Testament, and appeared also to Zechariah and Mary in the New Testament, foretelling the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, but in each case his appearance was brief.

Even the theophanies, where God himself is somehow present, are short and purposeful. Abraham’s meal with three men and the negotiation over Sodom ended abruptly when ‘the LORD went his way’,⁸⁶ Moses left the burning bush to return to his father-in-law,⁸⁷ the fourth figure in King Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace never emerged.⁸⁸ God the omnipresent is everywhere hidden, possibly for our protection.

There is one exception. Tolkien was a Roman Catholic, and therefore held the Deuterocanonical books, called by Protestants the Apocrypha, to be a full part of the Biblical canon. Among these is the book of Tobit, containing the tale of Tobit’s son Tobias, who went on a hazardous journey accompanied by his servant Azariah, who was actually the angel Raphael in disguise. After ensuring the journey was more than successful, Raphael reveals his identity and ascends back to God. In spending such an extended period on earth, travelling with humans and in human disguise, Raphael may better be compared to Gandalf.

Tom has very firm boundaries. He has his own tasks and purposes—you can ask him to help you, but don’t disturb his water-lilies!—and he will not leave the boundaries of his own country. It appears that he will equally not leave the boundaries of his own episode; having helped the hobbits to the edge of his territory, he sends them off, and as far as they are concerned, vanishes for good.

86 Genesis 18:33 *NRSV*

87 Exodus 4

88 Daniel 3

Tom Bombadil's dissimilarities with angels

Not everything about Tom shows a parallel with angelic appearances. Despite the fact that he appears unannounced, and vanishes once the hobbits leave his country, he is firmly settled in the soil of Middle-earth. He remembers the deep history of Middle-earth, before the lands were planted, or the elves travelled West. He knew the woman who wore the brooch found in the barrow. He has taken a wife, whereas angels do not marry.⁸⁹ He is familiar with the Rangers, knows Farmer Maggot, and is in touch with Gildor. Elrond remembers him, and Gandalf looks forward to a long talk with him. It is just that in Frodo's story he only takes a small and temporary part.

Tom does not cause the hobbits to fear him. It is a characteristic of theophanies and angels that they cause fear in those that are present. 'Fear not!' are common words in such stories, heard by Abram, Hagar, Gideon, Zechariah, Mary and the shepherds near Bethlehem. Curiously, both Tom Bombadil and Goldberry say similar words, but with a different intent.

*Fear no alder black! Heed no hoary willow!
Fear neither root nor bough! Tom goes on before you.*⁹⁰

sings Tom as he dances homeward ahead of the hobbits. When they reach Tom's house, Goldberry shuts the door behind them.

'Let us shut out the night!' she said. 'For you are still afraid, perhaps, of mist and tree-shadows and deep water, and untame things. Fear nothing! For tonight you are under the roof of Tom Bombadil.'⁹¹

Here there is no suggestion that either Tom or Goldberry are to be feared; rather they are the protectors and guarantors of the hobbits' safety.

I was also expecting to draw a parallel between Tom's pervasive singing, and the songs of the angels. Alas, the strict word of scripture reveals that angels do a lot of speaking, but none of them can be proven to have sung. The choir of angels singing to the shepherds near Bethlehem—so beloved of carol writers—

⁸⁹ Matthew 22:30

⁹⁰ *FR*, 132

⁹¹ *FR*, 134

was actually a multitude of the heavenly army speaking their message; the angelic songs in heaven were likewise spoken rather than sung. Indeed, according to B.F.C. Atkinson, ‘As a matter of fact there is nothing in the Bible to tell us that angels can sing at all.’⁹²

An understanding of the episode of Tom Bombadil

Given these many parallels between Tom Bombadil’s episode and the Biblical stories of angelic appearances and theophanies, it is clear that Tolkien has consciously or unconsciously taken the character of Tom Bombadil as described in his 1934 poem, and used him in the role of an angelic visitor to Frodo’s story, while simultaneously embedding the biography of Tom deep into the history and landscape of Middle-earth. Tom appears to Frodo as an unexpected but providential acquaintance, with remarkable powers to nurture and help the hobbits. Without Tom, none of them might ever have left the Old Forest alive; without Tom, they might have remained immured in the barrow; without Tom, they would have been less prepared in words and swords to face future challenges. He was essential to the continuation of their journey, but soon ceased to be part of it.

I will reiterate here that I am not attempting to prove anything about Tom’s nature or his origins, only his role in the narrative. Much of what Tom does is paralleled by Aragorn, who arrives equally unexpectedly in the hobbit’s story, knows the country he lives in very well, faces down five Ringwraiths, enters the Paths of the Dead to command those who dwell there to follow him and frees them from their curse, shows gifts of healing even over the Black Breath of the Nazgûl, marries an immortal elf (five generations descended from a Maia) and has an unusually long lifespan (for a Man of the late Third Age). It is only Tom’s extraordinary lifespan and his attitude to the Ring that raise any serious objection to his being as human as Aragorn.

Angels, as their behaviour throughout the examples mentioned demonstrates, are messengers of God, granted authority to speak and act in God’s name.⁹³ In some cases, references to ‘the angel of the Lord’ may leave it unclear whether an intermediary angel or God himself is speaking.⁹⁴ The message is very

92 Basil F.C. Atkinson (n.d.) *The War with Satan*, cited in Morris (1969), 100 footnote.

93 Stewart (1982)

94 Taylor (1982)

specific, and the angel leaves once the message is delivered or the action completed. Even appearances by God himself conform to this pattern.

The parallels therefore suggest that Tom Bombadil, however wild and free a character he appears to be, is in fact a ‘man set under authority’⁹⁵ (a description accepted by Jesus as appropriate for himself in his earthly ministry) who has been given a specific area of responsibility and particular tasks to perform. He hints as much when Frodo asks him if Tom heard his cries for help.

‘Did I hear you calling? Nay, I did not hear: I was busy singing. Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine, though I was waiting for you.’⁹⁶

The hobbits may call it chance, but Tom hints otherwise. And if it was not Tom’s plan, could it have been planned by another? And though Tom states ‘*And that proved well for you—for now I shall no longer / go down deep again along the forest-water . . .*’ he is saying this *after* he has met and rescued the hobbits.

Gandalf describes Tom thus: ‘He is withdrawn into a little land, within bounds that he has set . . .’⁹⁷ Perhaps there is significance in the usage ‘he is withdrawn’. To say ‘he has withdrawn’ would be more natural, if the action had been Tom’s choice, but ‘he is withdrawn’ allows it to be understood in the passive sense, and raises the possibility that some other authority withdrew him. And though Tom describes the area within his boundaries as ‘Tom’s country’, Goldberry denies that any part of it belongs to Tom; he is merely master.

On this understanding, Tom was tasked with helping Frodo and his companions through one stage of their journey, and ensuring they were appropriately equipped for later events. What then, are Tom’s responsibilities beyond this, through the many ages he has lived in Middle-earth? We may guess that, being a ‘moss-gatherer’, in contrast to Gandalf’s ‘stone doomed to rolling’⁹⁸ (was Tom equally ‘doomed’ to gather moss?), his responsibilities were directed to a specific geographical area, and that they began very early in Middle-earth’s history. He has seen the Elves go West, and Men arrive, and the hobbits after them. He remembers the kingdoms before the barrows, and the barrows before the

95 Luke 7:8 NRSV

96 FR, 137

97 FR, 279

98 RK, 275

Barrow-wights, and the Old Forest when it was but a corner of the vast woods which were since cut down.

Perhaps Tom Bombadil was tasked with preparing and watching the Shire, even before the hobbits crossed the Misty Mountains, to make sure it was fit for them; perhaps his boat trips down the Witherwindle to visit Farmer Maggot had a higher aim than just good company and good ale; perhaps he had authority to keep Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wights in line, but not to destroy them; maybe the success of the High Hay, protecting Buckland from the Old Forest, owed more to Tom than the Bucklanders ever realised? All guesswork, but consistent with what we understand of the nature of Middle-earth and those who have been set under authority to manage it.

Coda: Tom Bombadil – God, Christ, or a Type of Christ?

An issue that stands between us and a better estimation of Tom Bombadil's true nature and full power is that we never see Tom overmatched, or even truly threatened. He is never found outside his comfort zone, just as he never leaves his country. If we never see such limits to Tom's power or authority, we may be tempted to guess that there are no limits – that Tom is indeed divine. Some of the biblical episodes with which Tom Bombadil's story has been compared involve not just an angel, but God himself. This raises the question of how any lesser being can truly stand parallel with Divinity. Is Tom Bombadil an avatar, or an incarnation, of Eru Iluvatar?

There is some evidence pointing this way. Goldberry says of Tom 'He is'; Tom claims to be 'Eldest'; he remains unaffected by the Ring; and he breaks open a tomb and restores life to hobbits who are (to all appearances) dead.

Tolkien points out that '...the sublimities of 'I am that am' . . . [are] quite different from *he is*'.⁹⁹ The first is a claim to autonomous, independent, uncreated existence, which God alone can make. Goldberry, in contrast, is simply refusing to define Tom for the hobbits, and challenging them to see what he is from his words and actions.

As for 'Eldest, that's what I am. . . . Tom . . . knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless—before the Dark Lord came from outside', which can be compared to Jesus' claim 'before Abraham was, I am';¹⁰⁰ it can be read in different

⁹⁹ *Letters*, 192

¹⁰⁰ John 8:58 *NRSV*

ways. Perhaps Tom was the Maia who had been incarnate in Middle-earth the longest? Gandalf made a similar claim, but in a different context, for Treebeard, ‘the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun on this Middle-earth’;¹⁰¹ perhaps he was just thinking of mortals. Also, soon after this Gandalf refers to the ‘nameless things’ living far below Moria, saying ‘Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he.’¹⁰² From this casual use of ‘older’ and ‘eldest’, one thing is certain: neither speaker was scripting a card for *Top Trumps*®! The only resolution for this probably lies in

. . . Christopher Tolkien’s comment that his father was given to ‘rhetorical superlatives’, such as ‘the oldest living thing’ . . .¹⁰³

Perhaps Tom’s most unique characteristic is his immunity to the temptation or the power of the Ring. But this does not necessarily show Divine power. As Gandalf sees, the Ring has no appeal to Bombadil, who desires no power to command or destroy, and has no ambition that the Ring might tempt.

Tom does break open a tomb and restore life to those once buried, but he does so from the outside; again, a very different story from Christ who broke death from the inside. In addition, we have Tolkien’s own denial: ‘The Incarnation of God is an *infinitely* greater thing than anything I would dare to write.’¹⁰⁴

But we are still dealing with a consciously Christian universe. As such, the morality is determined very simply: characters are good insofar as they are Christ-like, and conversely bad just where they are un-Christ-like. So while the search for a Christ figure in the story (like Aslan in the Narnian tales) will find nothing, it is quite appropriate to identify characters who are Christ-like and who may be called ‘types’ of Christ.¹⁰⁵ In what way might Tom Bombadil foreshadow Christ, who was himself a divine appearance at the beginning of the Church’s history?

I would see Tom as exemplifying Christ in humble power. Tom rescues the lost from tree and barrow, as Christ called the dead back to life;¹⁰⁶ Tom provided food for his guests, as Christ gave wine at Cana and fish on the beach;¹⁰⁷ and yet

101 *TT*, 102

102 *TT*, 105

103 Hammond and Scull (2005), 391

104 *Letters*, 237

105 ‘types’ . . . In theology, the foreshadowings of the Christian dispensation in the events and persons of the O[ld] T[estament]’ Cross & Livingstone (1997), 1649

106 John 11:1-44

107 John 2:1-11; John 21:1-14

Tom does not claim an earthly authority, as Christ refused to be made king;¹⁰⁸ and Tom limits himself to certain actions in a prescribed area, as Christ spoke only as his Father told him to speak, and went only to those to whom he was sent.¹⁰⁹

Appendix

Theophanies and angelic appearances in the Bible referred to in the text

Reference	Description
Genesis 3	After Eve is tempted by the serpent, and eats the forbidden fruit and persuades Adam to eat also, God comes walking in the garden. When Adam and Eve hide from him, and confess what they have done, God pronounces curses on the serpent, Eve and Adam, combined with hints of a future resolution through their descendant.
Genesis 17	When Abram was 99 years old, God made a covenant with him to make his descendants a great nation. He established circumcision as a sign of the covenant, and he renamed Abram to Abraham, and Sarai his wife to Sarah. He also named their future son Isaac.
Genesis 18	Three men visit Abraham's tent, and he invites them to eat. They foretell the birth of Isaac (and Sarah, overhearing, laughs). The Lord discusses the fate of Sodom with Abraham, and agrees to spare it if he finds ten faithful men in the city.

108 John 6:15

109 John 12:49; Matthew 15:24

Reference	Description
Genesis 21	Hagar, slave-girl to Abraham's wife Sarah, was given to Abraham as a second wife, and bore him a son, Ishmael. After Sarah also bore Abraham a son, Isaac, Sarah was jealous and asked Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. God gave Abraham permission to do this, promising to preserve Isaac's inheritance, but also to make Ishmael a nation too. When Hagar ran out of water in the desert, God (responding to 'the voice of the boy') revealed to her a well of water. (Note: this was the second time Hagar was driven out and had heavenly help, see also Genesis 16.)
Genesis 21	Jacob, having swindled his elder brother Esau out of his inheritance, and deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing meant for Esau, flees alone from his family. Stopping at sunset, he sleeps with his head on a stone. He dreams of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and down. God stands beside him and renews the promises to Jacob that he previously made to Abraham and Isaac. On waking, Jacob realises that the place is God's house, so he erects his pillow-stone as an altar and renames it Bethel 'House of God'.
Genesis 32	Jacob, about to meet his estranged brother Esau (who might have been hostile) wrestled with 'a man' who, failing to defeat him, miraculously lamed him. Jacob demanded a blessing, and the man gave him the name 'Israel' and revealed himself to be God. Jacob was left permanently lame.
Exodus 3-4	Moses saw a burning bush, and heard from it the voice of God, who commissioned him to demand the release of the Israelites by Pharaoh. He was given miracles to perform to prove his authority was from God.
Exodus 24	After the Israelites left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, they travelled to Mount Sinai, where God called Moses up to receive the Ten Commandments. Later, he summoned Moses and 70 of the elders of Israel to meet him on the mountain. They saw God, but were not killed, they also ate and drank.

Reference	Description
Numbers 22	Balaam, disobedient to God, set out on his donkey; an angel (visible at first only to the animal) stopped them. The donkey was granted speech to rebuke his master, before Balaam finally saw the angel.
Judges 6	An angel appeared to Gideon and commissioned him to deliver Israel from the Midianites; Gideon prepared a meal for him, and the angel caused the meal to burst into flame, as proof of his authority.
Judges 13	An angel appeared to the barren wife of Manoah, foretelling she would bear a son (Samson). When Manoah prayed, the angel reappeared to both of them, then ascended to heaven in the flame of Manoah's sacrifice.
1 Kings 19	After Elijah defeated and killed the prophets of Baal, Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him in return. Afraid, he fled alone into the desert, and lay down and wished to die. As he slept, an angel woke him and told him to eat the food and water provided. He did so, then slept, and the angel again woke him and told him to eat more so as to have enough strength for the journey. He was then able to travel forty days into the desert to a meeting with God.
Isaiah 6	Isaiah saw a vision of God surrounded by angels. He mourned that he was a man of unclean lips, so an angel took a burning coal from the altar and touched his lips. God then commissioned him to speak to his people.
Jeremiah 1	Jeremiah heard God appointing him as a prophet, but complained that he was too young and did not know how to speak. God touched his mouth, and gave him words to say.
Daniel 3	Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were bound and thrown into a furnace for refusing to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. When the king looked into the furnace, he saw four men walking free, and the fourth appeared like a god. When he called them, the three men emerged, unharmed.
Daniel 8-9	The angel Gabriel appeared twice to Daniel, to interpret his visions.

Reference	Description
Tobit 5-12	Tobias, son of Tobit, planned to go on a long and hazardous journey. He recruited Azariah, apparently a distant relative but actually the angel Raphael in disguise, as a servant to accompany him. Raphael helped Tobias to free a young woman from a demon (and then to marry her), and to regain a large sum of money that was the main purpose of the journey. Raphael revealed his identity at the end.
Matthew 1	An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and reassured him that Mary's child is from God, and should be named Jesus.
Luke 1	The angel Gabriel foretold the birth of a son (the future John the Baptist) to Zechariah, then struck him dumb for his disbelief. After John's birth, Zechariah regained his speech and declaimed the <i>Benedicite</i> .
Luke 1	The angel Gabriel told Mary she would bear a son, Jesus, who would be called Son of of the Most High, and reign on David's throne, and his kingdom will never end. Mary responded with obedient acceptance, and later declaimed the <i>Magnificat</i> .
Acts 2	On the day of Pentecost, Jesus' followers gathered in an upper room. A sound of wind filled the room, and a tongue of flame rested on each one. They were granted the ability to speak in other languages
Acts 5	The Jewish High Priest arrested and imprisoned the apostles. That night, an angel opened the prison doors, and told them to carry on preaching. The prison was left securely locked, to the perplexity of the priests and the temple guard.
Acts 12	King Herod imprisoned Peter, and had him guarded by four squads of soldiers, intending to kill him. The church prayed fervently for Peter's release. In the night, an angel woke Peter, removed his chains, and walked him out past many guards and gates. The angel left Peter in the street.

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Abbreviations used for the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien (detailed below)

<i>FR</i>	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	}
<i>TT</i>	<i>The Two Towers</i>	} <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>
<i>RK</i>	<i>The Return of the King</i>	}
<i>Adventures</i>	<i>The Adventures of Tom Bombadil</i> (2014 edition)	
<i>Sir Gawain</i>	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo</i>	
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	

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