

throughout the course of his life. Surely, God being called “angel,” in a titular sense, seems out of place to many. A Jewish commentator like Sarna is conflicted as much, going as far as to say that in various texts there is no clear distinction between God and angels:

“[T]he parallelistic structure of verses 15-16 strongly suggests that ‘angel’ is here an epithet of God. No one in the Bible ever invokes an angel in prayer, nor in Jacob’s several encounters with angels is there any mention of one who delivers him from harm. When the patriarch feels himself to be in mortal danger, he prays directly to God, as in 32:10-13, and it is He who again and again is Jacob’s guardian and protector (28:15, 20; 31:3; 35:3). Admittedly, ‘Angel’ as an epithet for God is extraordinary, but since angels are often simply extensions of the divine personality, the distinction between God and angel in the biblical texts is frequently blurred (cf. Gen. 31:3, 11, 13; Exod. 3:2, 4).”⁴⁰

The NJPS uniquely renders Genesis 48:16 by capitalizing the title “Angel”:

“And he blessed Joseph, saying, ‘The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day—**The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—bless the lads.** In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth’” (Genesis 48:15-16, NJPS).

God proper actually being called “angel,” and manifesting Himself as a messenger/angel for distinct actions and purposes, provides a basis for later manifestations of a more permanent nature. While Messianic people who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God need to be reserved in their conclusions, regarding whether or not the *malalkh* or messenger/angel noted in Genesis 48:16 was a pre-Incarnate Yeshua—we can be assured that God specifically manifesting Himself as a messenger/angel, provides a Tanach foundation for God being born as a human being in the future Incarnation of Yeshua.

Exodus 3:1-16

“The Burning Bush and ‘I am who I am’”

“Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.’ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?’ And He said, ‘Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.’ Then Moses said to

⁴⁰ Sarna, *Genesis*, 328.

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." Now they may say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."' God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.'"

The theophany of the burning bush, God's revelation to Moses, the presentation of the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה), and most especially God's self-designation as the "I AM," all present something extremely important for later evaluations of the identity of Yeshua the Messiah. Moses, who would be commissioned as the leader of Israel, is witnessed pasturing the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro (Exodus 3:1), and experiences a significant supernatural encounter. It is recorded, *v'yeira malakh YHWH eilayo b'labat-eish m'tokh ha'seneh* (אִשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה), "And YHWH's messenger was seen by him in the midst of a bush" (Exodus 3:2a, Fox). Noticing the marvel of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2b-3), the figure of the *malakh YHWH* (מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה), "the messenger/angel of the LORD," is stated to have been the entity present. John I. Durham fairly informs us, "As often in the OT (Gen 18, Judg 6), there is in this passage a fluid interchange between symbol, representative, and God himself."⁴¹

While the narrative could continue, stating that the *malakh YHWH* or "messenger/angel of the LORD" spoke to Moses from the burning bush, it is instead recorded that God proper is the One who spoke to Moses: *v'yar YHWH ki sar lir'ot v'yiqrā eilayo Elohim m'tokh ha'seneh v'yomer, Moshe Moshe* (וַיִּרְא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לְרֵאוֹתַי וַיִּקְרָא אֵלַי יְהוָה מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה), "When YHWH saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, he said: Moshe! Moshe!" (Exodus 3:4, Fox). God proper tells Moses to remove his sandals, as he is standing on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). And with the *malakh YHWH* or "messenger/angel of the LORD" originally having been noted to be the entity present (Exodus 3:2), this being proceeded to speak in the first person, *anokhi Elohei avikha, Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzchak, v'Elohei Ya'akov* (אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב), "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6a). It is then asserted of Moses, *ki yarei m'habit el-ha'Elohim* (כִּי יָרָא מִהֵבִיט אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים), "for he was afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:6b, NJPS). God proper is recorded as being the figure which speaks to him of the present condition of the Israelites: *v'yomer YHWH ra'oh ra'iti et-ani ami asher b'Mitzrayim* (וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה רָאָה רָאָה אֲתֵעֲנִי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם), "Now YHWH said: I have seen, yes, seen the affliction of my people that is in Egypt" (Exodus 3:7a, Fox). Discussion about the slavery of Israel in Egypt, God's intention to deliver the people, and God's assignments for Moses, continues with dialogue in the first person (Exodus 3:7b-12; cf. Acts 7:30-31).

In recognition of the mission that he is to perform for the God of his ancestors, Moses inquires about what name is to designate this God, as he will surely be asked about it from his fellow Israelites (Exodus 3:13). As it is recorded in the Hebrew text, *v'yomer Elohim el-Moshe ehyeh asher ehyeh* (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה), a standard English translation being, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'" (Exodus 3:14a). It is further stated, *v'yomer koh tomar l'vnei Yisrael ehyeh shelachni alei'khem* (וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם), "and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14b). There has certainly

⁴¹ John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus*, Vol 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), pp 30-31.

been some important discussion surrounding the meaning of *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה). Varied English translations of *ehyeh asher ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14,⁴² beyond the relatively standard “I AM WHO I AM,” do need to be noted:

- “I Shall Be As I Shall Be” (ATS).
- “I-will-be-what-I-will-be” (Moffat).
- “I will be that which I will be” (Keter Crown Bible)
- “I AM the One Who Always Is” (WBC).⁴³
- “‘Ehyeh-‘Asher-‘Ehyeh, I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be” (Alter).
- “EHEYE ASHER EHEYE (I will ever be what I now am)” (Jerusalem Bible-Koren).
- “EHYEH ASHER EHYEH/I will be-there howsoever I will be-there” (Fox).

It is widely agreed among Hebraists that the revelation of the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה) further, is connected to *ehyeh asher ehyeh*: “Thus you shall say to the Children of Israel: YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov, sends me to you” (Exodus 3:15, Fox). In his specialty translation of the Torah, Alter draws the conclusion,

“‘I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be’ is the most plausible construction of the Hebrew, though the middle word, ‘*asher*, could easily mean ‘what’ rather than ‘who,’ and the common rendering of ‘I-Am-That-I-Am’ cannot be excluded..Since the tense system of biblical Hebrew by no means corresponds to that of modern English, it is also perfectly possible to construct this as ‘I am He Who Endures.’ The strong consensus of biblical scholarship is that the original pronunciation of the name YHWH that God goes on to use in verse 15 was ‘Yahweh.’”⁴⁴

Durham’s observations on Exodus 3:14 also need to be noted:

“אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה ‘I AM that I AM,’ replies God. The verbs are first person common qal imperfects of the verb היה ‘to be,’ connoting continuing, unfinished action: ‘I am being that I am being,’ or ‘I am the Is-ing One,’ that is ‘the One Who Always Is.’ Not conceptual being, being in the abstract, but active being, is the intent of this reply. It is a reply that suggests that it is inappropriate to refer to God as ‘was’ or as ‘will be,’ for the reality of this active existence can be suggested only by the present: ‘is’ or ‘is-ing,’ ‘Always Is,’ or ‘Am.’”⁴⁵

The Greek Septuagint took the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), “I AM WHO I AM,” and translated it as *egō eimi ho ōn* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), which Brenton’s English translation renders as “THE BEING,” and the 2007 NETS has as “I am The One Who Is.” The “I am” or *egō eimi* (ἐγὼ εἰμι) formula is important for later statements made by Yeshua the Messiah appearing in the Gospels, detailing self-identification (i.e., Mark 14:62; John 8:58; 18:5-6), which many conclude are direct indicators of the Messiah identifying Himself as the YHWH God of the burning bush theophany (discussed further).

⁴² The NJPS notably just leaves it as “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.”

⁴³ Durham, 35.

⁴⁴ Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 321.

⁴⁵ Durham, 39.