

## APPROACHING THE NATURE OF YESHUA FROM THE TANACH

There is nothing in the text which requires that every time a figure such as *malakh haElohim* or “the messenger/angel of God” (Exodus 14:19) appears, that it be God proper manifest as an angel. God can surely authorize one of His angels, as created beings, to perform critical tasks, including facilitating the deliverance of His people from Egypt. Yet, when it is stated that God Himself is the One who led Israel in a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21), there are factors to be surely weighed about *how* God can choose to manifest Himself to human beings. It is hardly outside the realm of possibilities for God proper to manifest Himself in a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire, as well as some sort of perceived messenger or angel—which then various Christians and Messianic people may conclude was a pre-Incarnate Yeshua the Messiah, a member of what would then have to be a plural Godhead. Sarna usefully observes,

“A theme that recurs in the narratives of the wilderness wanderings is that God manifested his active, dynamic Presence throughout. This is conceptualized in accordance with the idea that the God of the Hebrew Bible is a Being who transcends the limits of time and space, and thus surpasses human imagining. Hence, God’s indwelling Presence in the world is symbolized, however inadequately, by the mysterious, intangible, incorporeal elements of fire and cloud.”<sup>61</sup>

### EXODUS 20:1-4; DEUTERONOMY 5:6-9

“Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth’” (Exodus 20:1-4).

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The First and Second Commandments prohibit polytheism and the employment of images in worship. The First Commandment expressly states, *anokhi YHWH Elohekha* (אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ), “I am YHWH your God” (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6, Fox). For the Ancient Israelites having been delivered from Egyptian servitude, and preparing to enter into a Promised Land occupied by Canaanites, the need to not observe religious practices which employed statues mainly based on members of the animal kingdom, or some hybrid of human and animal, was imperative. The God of Israel, as an omnipotent and omnipresent Being, the “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14), could not be contained to any form of human image by humans. And, this same God of Israel requires exclusive allegiance to Himself as the One True Creator, not a divided allegiance along with some other deity or deities. Deuteronomy 5:9 significantly stresses, *lo-tishtachaveh l’hem v’lo ta’avdeim* (לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם), “You shall not worship them or serve them.” **The God of Israel was to be the only focus of the veneration of the people.**

The First and Second Commandments bear importance for any understanding of monotheism, particularly the monotheism of Second Temple Judaism, and how not just the early followers of Yeshua the Messiah perceived His identity, but how Yeshua Himself presented His identity. In terms of Christology, if Yeshua the Messiah is affirmed to be uncreated and be God—obviously a member of a plural Godhead—then any kind of veneration of Him needs to be conducted in alignment with the tenor of the First and Second Commandments. The First and

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<sup>61</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 70.

Second Commandments would stand decisively against the employment of any images or icons of the Messiah in worship activities, as would be widely witnessed in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. But more significantly, given the Deuteronomy 5:9 prohibition against the worship<sup>62</sup> of deities other than the LORD or YHWH, any sort of veneration issued toward Yeshua the Messiah in the Apostolic Writings or New Testament *would quantitatively be idolatry* unless Yeshua is a part of the Divine Identity.

Certainly, evangelical Christian theologians have recognized that an affirmation of Yeshua the Messiah as God, must be done in concert with the First and Second Commandments and the monotheism of the Tanach or Old Testament. As is properly summarized by the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*,

*“Jesus Claimed to Be God by Accepting Worship.* The Old Testament forbids worshiping anyone other than God (Exod. 20:1-4; Deut. 5:6-9). The New Testament agrees, showing that humans refused worship (Acts 14:15), as did angels (Rev. 22:8-9). But Jesus accepted worship on numerous occasions, showing he claimed to be God. A healed leper worshiped him (Matt. 8:2), and a ruler knelt before him with a request (Matt. 9:18). After he stilled the storm, ‘those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, “Truly you are the Son of God”’ (Matt. 14:33). A group of Canaanite women (Matt. 15:25), the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20), the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:6), all worshiped Jesus without one word of rebuke. The disciples worshiped him after his resurrection (Matt. 28:17). Thomas saw the risen Christ and cried out, ‘My Lord and my God!’ (John 20:28). This could only be allowed by a person who seriously considered himself to be God. Not only did Jesus accept this worship due to God alone without rebuking those who gave it, but he even commended those who acknowledged his deity (John 20:29; Matt. 16:17).”<sup>63</sup>

Some may try to claim that instances where Yeshua the Messiah seemingly received or accepted worship, was no different than a person “bowing down” or “prostrating” before Him, with no spiritual or religious veneration intended. This will require a further investigation of various passages in the Apostolic Writings, to evaluate the sort of veneration in view, especially given the possibility in some places of Tanach intertextuality being employed, where Yeshua might very well be given the same veneration intended of the LORD or YHWH.

## **EXODUS 23:20-24**

**“Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them. You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their *sacred* pillars in pieces.”**

Early in the wilderness experience of Ancient Israel, God proper confirms His intention to lead His people into the Promised Land (Exodus 23:23b), although there are certainly conditions associated with them not adopting the worship practices of the present residents (Exodus 23:24-

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<sup>62</sup> It is to be noted how unlike the NASU, various versions have rendered *lo-tishtachaveh l'hem v'lo ta'avdeim* as “you shall not bow down to them or serve them” (RSV/ESV).

<sup>63</sup> “Christ, Deity of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 130.