

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.

25). The Lord prefaces this direction with the strict admonition that a distinct figure or entity is going to go before them, for their protection (Exodus 23:20), which they are to obey (Exodus 23:21-22a), causing the enemies of Israel to be defeated (Exodus 23:23b). The identity and functions of this entity bear some questions for later probing into the identity of Yeshua the Messiah, as there are various areas of overlap and agreement.

The Lord decrees, *hinneih anokhi sholeiach malakh l'fanekha* (הִנֵּנִי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַח מַלְאָךְ לְפָנַיִךְ), "Look, I am about to send a messenger before you" (Exodus 23:20a, Alter). Many conclude that this *malakh* (מַלְאָךְ) or messenger/angel, is a supernatural intermediary between God proper and the people of Israel. Alter actually notes how "modern rationalist commentators have sought to explain this as a divine metaphor for providential guidance,"<sup>64</sup> as some liberal examiners might dismiss the concept of any supernatural figure being actually present with Ancient Israel, to guide and protect them. Contrary to this would be the thought of Durham, who interjects, "however the combination Yahweh/Yahweh's messenger came about, the 'messenger' here is the equivalent of Yahweh himself, thus another way of indicating Yahweh's presence."<sup>65</sup> In the Torah, there are surely encounters with a figure designated as either *malakh YHWH* or *malakh Elohim*, speaking in the first person "I" as God proper. So, is the *malakh* or messenger/angel described in Exodus 23:20-24 this same figure, God specifically manifesting Himself as a messenger/angel?

Key inquiries are certainly raised in God's word to the Israelites, "Pay heed to him and obey him. Do not defy him, for he will not pardon your offenses, since My Name is in him" (Exodus 23:21, NJPS), *ki sh'mi b'qirbo* (כִּי שְׁמִי בְקִרְבוֹ). The figure of the *malakh* or messenger/angel is said to specifically bear God's *shem* (שֵׁם) or "name," which all readers will conclude as designating how this entity surely possesses significant power and authority authorized from God. Sarna as a Jewish commentator concludes, "The Divine Will and Power manifests itself through his heaven-sent messenger."<sup>66</sup> Martin Noth makes the point, "The 'angel' is the ambassador of Yahweh...who represents Yahweh himself and in whom Yahweh himself is present...Israel must behave towards the angel as though he were Yahweh himself."<sup>67</sup> Many will take the *malakh* or messenger/angel to be an authorized, albeit a most significantly authorized, agent of God proper, an entity to be effectively treated as God Himself, although most probably created. Without saying too much, all Brevard S. Childs notes is "the virtual identification of the angel with God himself."<sup>68</sup>

Readers of the Gospels, when seeing "My name is in him" (Exodus 23:21), might very well be prompted to consider Yeshua the Messiah's statement, "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him" (John 5:43). Yeshua does not present Himself as just some singular actor, pushing His own, self-serving agenda. On the contrary, the Lord would say, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; also Matthew 20:28). The Messiah bears the name or authority of His Father, and has been authorized by Him to perform critical salvation-historical tasks, the same as the figure of the *malakh* or messenger/angel who would bear God's name, leading Ancient Israel into the Promised Land. It is hardly a surprise why various evangelical Christian resources have noted this scene, and have gone to the extent that some pre-Incarnate manifestation of Yeshua is likely in view. In the estimation of TWOT,

<sup>64</sup> Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 452.

<sup>65</sup> Durham, 335.

<sup>66</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 148.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 193.

<sup>68</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 487; noting Genesis 20:15ff; Judges 6:11ff.

“In some passages *shēm Yahweh* is so inextricably bound up with the being of God, that it functions almost like an appearance of Yahweh (Exo 23:20-21; Isa 30:27). Cf. the tabernacling of the Name at various spots almost like a Christophany (Exo 20:24; Deut 12:5; 2Sam 7:13, etc.).”<sup>69</sup>

In the dialogue of Exodus 23:22, where it is clear that God proper is speaking, it is recorded, *ki im-shamo'a tish'ma b'qolo v'asi'ta kol asher adabbeir* (כִּי אִם-שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹלוֹ וְעָשִׂיתָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אֲדַבֵּר), “now if to-listen you-listen to-voice-of-him and-you-do all that I-say” (Kohlenberger).<sup>70</sup> The dialogue has God speaking in the first person, on behalf of this *malakh* or messenger/angel: “but if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes” (Exodus 23:22, NJPS). If this *malakh* or messenger/angel were only a standard, supernatural intermediary, then God speaking in the third person for this figure would instead have been expected, something like: “But if you truly obey his voice and do all that *he* says, then *he* will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries” (Exodus 23:22, modified NASU).

It should not be surprising, for further evaluation of the origins and identity of Yeshua the Messiah, for scenes such as Exodus 23:20-25 to be considered, as the *malakh* or messenger/angel is an entity sent by God proper, but then represents God proper in the first person “I,” when exclusive references in the third person would be more natural to expect. A commentator like Peter Enns is reserved in his conclusion, “Regardless of the mystery surrounding his precise identity and despite the fact that he is not frequently mentioned in Exodus, he is no doubt a central figure in Israel’s redemption. And when we keep in mind the virtual equation of the angel and Yahweh, it follows that the angel’s presence is an indication of God’s presence with his people from beginning to end.”<sup>71</sup> Far be it from the identity of Yeshua the Messiah to be considered from either Ancient Near Eastern or classical mythology—as a god or goddess comes down from the sky to perform some task—Tanach accounts of the *malakh* or messenger/angel authorized from God, and virtually indistinguishable from God Himself, need to be considered for evaluating activities of Yeshua in the first person “I” as God.

## EXODUS 24:9-11

**“Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.”**

When evaluating the nature of Yeshua the Messiah in the Apostolic Writings or New Testament, questions are undeniably posed from various theophanies in the Tanach or Old Testament. What might various appearances, in some state or another, of God to people, communicate to us about approaching the Incarnation of Yeshua of Nazareth?

Early in the wilderness sojourn of Ancient Israel, the leadership and elders had a unique encounter with God. The Hebrew is straightforward enough: *v'yir'u et Elohei Yisrael* (וַיִּרְאוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), “and they saw the God of Israel” (Exodus 24:10, NJPS). Later in Exodus 33:20, the Lord will tell Moses, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” Many have viewed Exodus 24:10 to stand in direct contradiction to this, with liberal source critics perhaps suggesting at times that Exodus 24:10 is the product of one Pentateuchal source and Exodus 33:20 is the product of another source. Another option would be that mortals being incapable of “seeing”

<sup>69</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “**וַיִּרְאוּ**,” in TWOT, 2:934.

<sup>70</sup> Kohlenberger, 1:210.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp 473-474.