

king and her warriors into your hands.” Contextually, if the figure of the *sar-tzeva*-YHWH seen previously (Joshua 5:14, 15) were just a messenger/angel sent from God proper, a created being, there is no reason in Joshua 6:2 for God proper to now be seen speaking, or for first person dialogue to be employed. Joshua 6:2 could just as well have said, “The *captain of the LORD’s host* said to Joshua, ‘See, *He has* given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors” (NASU modified).

The *sar-tzeva*-YHWH or “the captain of the LORD’s host” receives some kind of veneration or worship (Joshua 5:14b), is called *Adonai* or “Lord” (Joshua 5:14c), speaks the almost identical words to Joshua as Moses was at the burning bush (Joshua 5:15b), and then the narrative continues with the LORD or YHWH formally speaking. Is the entity in view only a created, supernatural agent? Or, might this entity be a distinct manifestation of God proper? Not surprisingly, the *sar-tzeva*-YHWH here has frequently been associated with the figure of the *malakh* YHWH, the “messenger/angel of the LORD,” who is seen to be a manifestation of God proper. Hugh J. Blair is a commentator who properly concludes,

“[T]here appeared to him the representative of Yahweh, who called himself ‘commander of the army of the Lord’ (v. 14). There can be no doubt that this was God Himself as seen in human form: ignoring the artificial break made by the beginning of a new chapter, it is correct to see 6:2 as following on from 5:15 in a continuous narrative, with 6:1 as a parenthesis. This visitant of 5:13 becomes ‘the Lord’ of 6:2.”¹⁰⁹

Blair draws the further extrapolation that this was “‘the angel of the Lord’ frequently identified with God, e.g. in Gn. 16:7-11, compared with 16:13. This was none other than the pre-existent Son of God Himself.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, we should once again be reminded that the principle of an entity sent from God, receiving the same veneration as God and speaking in the first person “I” as God, who takes the identity of God, but can be slightly differentiated from God, is something established by scenes such as Joshua 5:13-6:2. And, it is seen that there are some who forthrightly conclude that the *sar-tzeva*-YHWH whom Joshua encountered, was actually a pre-Incarnate Yeshua the Messiah.

JUDGES 2:1-5

“Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, “I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.” But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? Therefore I also said, “I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.”’ When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.”

The Book of Judges largely records some of the challenges faced by the Israelites during the period of the Conquest, and the consolidation of the community being settled in the Promised Land. Prior to the death of Joshua (Judges 2:6-10), and with it some of the initial Israelite rejection of the Lord for the Baals (Judges 2:11-23), readers encounter the elusive figure of the *malakh*-YHWH (מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה), the “messenger of YHWH” (Judges 2:1, Fox) or “messenger of the LORD” (Alter), an entity which comes to not only speak to the people about past salvation-historical activity for Israel, but also the future surety of problems because not all of the Canaanite pagans

¹⁰⁹ Hugh J. Blair, “Joshua,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp 230-251.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 238-239.

had been ejected from the Promised Land (Judges 2:1-3). Significant questions about this entity are necessarily raised, not only as is witnessed how the *malakh-YHWH* speaks in the first person “I” as the LORD or YHWH, but even more so how specific covenantal promises are invoked, where the *malakh-YHWH* was specifically noted to be present in previous Tanach narratives:

“An angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, ‘I brought you up from Egypt and I took you into the land which I had promised on oath to your fathers. And I said, “I will never break My covenant with you. And you, for your part, must make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you must tear down their altars.” But you have not obeyed Me – look what you have done! Therefore, I have resolved not to drive them out before you; they shall become your oppressors, and their gods shall be a snare to you”’ (Judges 2:1-3, NJPS).

While it is customary in much Jewish examination to view the figure of the *malakh-YHWH* as just a supernatural agent sent from God proper, when it is noted what this being is claiming responsibility for, Bible readers should legitimately wonder:

- the *malakh-YHWH* claims to have brought the Israelites out of Egypt (Judges 2:1b), which Exodus 20:2¹¹¹ says the LORD or YHWH proper did.
- the *malakh-YHWH* claims to have sworn the Promised Land of Canaan to Israel’s ancestors (Judges 2:1c), which Genesis 17:7-8¹¹² says God proper did.
- the *malakh-YHWH* claims to have told the Israelites not to make a covenant or agreement with the Canaanites (Judges 2:2b), but the Torah narrative records that these directives were issued by the Lord or God proper (Exodus 23:32¹¹³; Deuteronomy 7:2-5¹¹⁴; Exodus 34:12-13¹¹⁵).
- the *malakh-YHWH* claims that it will withhold driving out the Canaanites from before Israel (Judges 2:3), invoking the word of Numbers 22:55¹¹⁶ which was directed by the LORD or YHWH proper.

The statement of Judges 2:4a is that “the messenger of YHWH had spoken these words to all the Children of Israel” (Fox). It is hardly a surprise to any reader of Scripture, that when some transition or shift is taking place in the experience of Ancient Israel, that some supernatural encounter will occur, with key messages conveyed. In Judges 2:1-3, the figure of the *malakh-YHWH* or “messenger/angel of the LORD,” is seen making claims where the Torah record has the LORD or YHWH proper actually having spoken. It does too little to simply identify this entity as

¹¹¹ “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2).

¹¹² “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:7-8).

¹¹³ “You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods” (Exodus 23:32).

¹¹⁴ “and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their *sacred* pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire” (Deuteronomy 7:2-5).

¹¹⁵ “Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim” (Exodus 34:12-13).

¹¹⁶ “Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan *opposite* Jericho, saying...‘But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them *will become* as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live”’ (Numbers 33:50, 55).

“an emissary of the LORD” (Judges 2:1, Keter Crown Bible); the third person “He” is notably not employed in Judges 2:2b-4:a as it could have been, unambiguously making this figure entirely a created intermediary:

“*He* brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which *He had* sworn to your fathers; and *He* said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed *Him*; what is this you have done? Therefore *He* also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you’” (NASU modified).

Contrary to the modified quotation referenced above, the figure of the *malakh-YHWH* claims personal responsibility for leading Israel out of Egypt, bringing them into the Promised Land sworn to their ancestors, and issuing directions as what to do with the Canaanites. A Bible reader who concludes that the *malakh-YHWH* or “messenger/angel of the LORD” is a distinct manifestation of God Himself, and is no mere supernatural agent—being a part of the Divine Identity—has a legitimate basis for such a view. The activities of a figure like the *malakh-YHWH*, provide significant material for later evaluating the activities of Yeshua the Messiah in the Apostolic Writings, as the Son is integrated into the Divine Identity right alongside of the Father.

JUDGES 6:11-23

“Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save *it* from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, ‘The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.’ Then Gideon said to him, ‘O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, “Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?” But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.’ The LORD looked at him and said, ‘Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?’ He said to Him, ‘O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.’ But the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.’ So Gideon said to Him, ‘If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me. Please do not depart from here, until I come *back* to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.’ And He said, ‘I will remain until you return.’ Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought *them* out to him under the oak and presented *them*. The angel of God said to him, ‘Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.’ And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, ‘Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.’ The LORD said to him, ‘Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.’”

People who survey the Book of Judges tend to encounter a repetitive pattern of the Ancient Israelites forgetting God and falling into idolatry, God being required to judge His people often by one of Israel’s pagan neighbors, and then God raising up a leader from among them who will turn them back to a state of fidelity to Him. In Judges 6, the backdrop is how the Israelites had fallen into sin and found themselves oppressed by Midian (Judges 6:1-10). An unnamed prophet or *navi* (נָבִי) is sent to the people, a human agent sent by the Lord, who is unambiguously seen speaking in the third person on behalf of the Lord: