

good rendering: “I have put you in the place of God to Pharaoh.” The irony seen is that Moses, a created human being, and coming into Egypt from a wilderness life of tending sheep, will have a greater legitimacy being regarded as “G/god” to some extent, than the leader of the Thirteenth Century B.C.E. Ancient Near Eastern superpower.

Moses being designated with the title *elohim* in Exodus 4:16 and Exodus 7:1, contextually requires readers to conclude that he is an authorized agent of the One True God or Elohim. Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being a supernatural, yet ultimately created being, may use this as evidence of Him possessing the title of “God,” as the Father’s agent sent into the world. Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being uncreated and being God, have tended to avoid references to created entities or individuals, which are titled as “G/god” to some degree. While Moses is called *elohim* by God proper in Exodus 4:16 and Exodus 7:1, what we do not see Moses do anywhere in the Torah or Pentateuch, is claim a self-identification in the first person “I” as the LORD or YHWH. Moses is always seen speaking in the third person for the Lord. **Yeshua the Messiah, however, is witnessed speaking in the first person as the LORD or YHWH, and His origins are decisively other-worldly** (discussed further).

## **Exodus 13:21; 14:19** **“God Moving as the Pillar of Cloud”**

“The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night” (Exodus 13:21).

“The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them” (Exodus 14:19).

Those with a cursory knowledge of the Exodus and wilderness sojourn of Ancient Israel, recognize that the people were led by a pillar of cloud during the daytime, and a pillar of fire during the night. But in the Torah narratives detailing this, who was the specific entity responsible for this? It is witnessed in some places that it was the LORD or YHWH who was responsible, and in other places His messenger or angel. Which is it? Is “the messenger/angel of the LORD” only to be regarded as a supernatural agent sent by the Lord, or might “the messenger/angel of the LORD” actually be, at least at some time, a manifestation of God proper? What is communicated to readers as it concerns the overlapping descriptions of this figure as being both the LORD or YHWH, but also being sent by Him?

Exodus 13:21 states *v’YHWH holeikh lifneihem* (וַיֵּהוּהוּ הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם), “Now YHWH goes before them” (Fox). Following this in Exodus 14:19 it is narrated, *v’yisa malakh haElohim haholeik l’fnei machaneih Yisrael* (וַיִּסַּע מַלְאָךְ הָאֱלֹהִים הַהֹלֵךְ לִפְנֵי מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל), “And the messenger of God that was going before the camp of Israel...” (Alter). Later on, though, in Numbers 20:16, the Israelites are recorded as saying, “But when we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out from Egypt; now behold, we are at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory.”

So, what are we to make of the figure which led the Israelites out of Egypt via a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire? Was it the LORD or YHWH manifest as an angel? Was it a messenger/angel sent by God? There is no agreement among examiners. Noting Numbers 20:16, “And we cried out to the LORD and He heard our voice and sent a messenger and brought us out

## Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

of Egypt” (Alter), Alter concludes that “In some of the varying accounts in Exodus, not God Himself but a divine messenger leads Israel out of slavery into the wilderness.”<sup>60</sup>

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

#### “The First and Second Commandments”

“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).

“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. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Deuteronomy 5:6-9).

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

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<sup>60</sup> Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 784.

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