

Koren). Notwithstanding the fact that human language is incapable of fully describing the Eternal God, and with a concession that some level of metaphor might be employed, it is stated “and [they] saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky” (Exodus 24:10, TNIV). R. Alan Cole indicates, “In this verse it is...stressed that the elders did not dare raise their eyes above His footstool.”⁷⁴ Enns also concurs, “The leaders do not actually see God in any full sense. In this case, ‘[seeing] the God of Israel’ probably means that they see him in part. Such an understanding removes the notion of contradiction between this passage and 33:20, the latter having to do with seeing God’s glory.”⁷⁵

For later discussions on the nature of the Messiah, those who hold to a low Christology may claim that Yeshua cannot be God, on the basis of it being impossible for mortals to encounter God and live (cf. Exodus 33:20). So, perhaps Yeshua is just a supernatural intermediary of some kind. If, however, it can be recognized from the Tanach that there are various levels or experiences of people legitimately “seeing God”—such as the leadership of Ancient Israel seeing God, but likely only at a level of encountering His footstool—then Yeshua the Messiah being God incarnated as a human being, is hardly something impossible. While people encountering Yeshua the Messiah in the Gospel narratives would indeed be encountering God in human form, that they were not encountering God in all of His glory and majesty (cf. John 17:5)—similar to the leadership of Ancient Israel only seeing God up to His footstool—needs to be recognized.

Exodus 32:34-33:6

“The Angel Will Go Out Before Israel”

“But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.’ Then the LORD smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it.” I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.’ When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, ‘Say to the sons of Israel, “You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.”’ So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.”

Exodus 32:34-33:6 narrates some of the immediate aftermath of the incident with the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-33), and the continued charge of the Lord for Moses to follow Him and lead the people, as He will be the One who will blot sinners out of His book (Exodus 32:32-33). Moses is informed *hinneih malakhi yeileikh l’fnekha* (הִנֵּה מַלְאָכִי יֵלֵךְ לְפָנַיִךְ), “Look, My messenger shall go before you” (Exodus 32:34a, Alter), an affirmation that there will be supernatural protection as they prepare to enter into the Promised Land. Following this is the assertion, “But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins” (Exodus 32:34b, NJPS). Based on what Exodus 32:34 says exclusively, one could assume that the *malakh* or messenger/angel in view, is just a supernatural agent of God, a created being, intended to guard Ancient Israel during their wilderness sojourn and activities.

⁷⁴ R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 186.

⁷⁵ Enns, 491.

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

Further on, however, the Lord directs Moses to lead the people into the Promised Land (Exodus 33:1-3), and He says, *v'shalachti l'fnekha malakh* (וְשָׁלַחְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ מַלְאָךְ), “And I shall send a messenger before you” (Exodus 33:2a, Alter). If this *malakh* or messenger/angel, were just a normal supernatural intermediary, then the immediate actions which follow would normally be expected to be detailed in the third person: “and *he* will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite” (Exodus 33:2b, NASU modified). Instead, we see God proper speaking in the first person: “and I will drive out the Keana’ani, the Emori, and the Hivvi, and the Yevusi: into a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 33:2b, Jerusalem Bible-Koren). Recognizing how this figure, a messenger/angel, will go before Israel to defeat Israel’s enemies—but God proper is detailing how He will be the One who defeats Israel’s enemies—at the very least serves as an indication of how Bible readers need to pay attention to the identity and descriptions of this elusive entity when encountered.

While the activity of the messenger/angel is described in terms of God proper, in the first person “I,” driving out the enemies of Israel (Exodus 32:2), God in the first person “I” also says how “I will not go up in your midst” (Exodus 33:3). How is this to be approached? While God will obviously be present with His people throughout the wilderness sojourn, that a closer interaction between God and His people will not be present, because of their sin, is to be deduced: “for I will not go up in your midst⁷⁶, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way” (Exodus 33:3). At best, many of the people at large would encounter God in their interactions with and knowledge of the *malakh* or messenger/angel—a messenger/angel which performs actions as God proper in the first person. Questions are certainly raised about how this representative of God, who in various ways is treated as God, prefigures for sure later actions of Yeshua the Messiah.

Kaiser is an evangelical Christian theologian, who forthrightly concludes here in his Exodus commentary, that the *malkah* or messenger/angel, was actually a Christophany:

“The Lord issued a command to move on (v. 1), promising to ‘send an angel’ before them (v. 2; cf. 23:20, 23; 32:34)...God declared that his ‘Name is in him’ (23:21). Thus this angel was a christophany, an appearance of Christ in the OT. Although the Lord promised to send his personal representative, he himself would ‘not go with [them]’ (v. 3). This withdrawal of the divine presence assured in 23:20-23 was because of the presence of sin.”⁷⁷

Exodus 33:7-23

“Moses Sees God”

“Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. Then Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, You say to me, “Bring up this people!” But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, “I have known you by name,

⁷⁶ Heb. *ki lo e'eleh b'qirbekha* (כִּי לֹא אֲעִלֶה בְּקִרְבְּכֶם); “because I shall not ascend among you” (ATS).

⁷⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, “Exodus,” in Frank E. Gaebelstein, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:482.