

## 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 midst<sup>76</sup>, 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.”<sup>77</sup>

### 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,

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

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

and you have also found favor in My sight.” Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.’ And He said, ‘My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.’ Then he said to Him, ‘If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?’ The LORD said to Moses, ‘I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.’ Then Moses said, ‘I pray You, show me Your glory!’ And He said, ‘I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.’ But He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’ Then the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”

All readers of the Torah should recognize that Moses had a unique relationship with God, and had a degree of free access and availability to God, which few have ever had. A majority of the interactions which Moses had with God took place at the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:7-11), where he would often entreat the Lord for His guidance and direction regarding circumstances among the people of Israel. Recognizing how serious and severe it is for mortals to experience the formal presence of an Eternal God, questions are necessarily raised from both Exodus 33:11 and 33:20, regarding how Moses could be said to actually encounter God’s “face.”

It is forthrightly stated in Exodus 33:11a, “HASHEM would speak to Moses face to face, as a man would speak to his fellow” (ATS), *el-rei'eihu v'diber ADONAI el-Moshe panim el-panim k'asher yedabbeir ish* (אֵל-רֵעֵהוּ וְדִבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ). Here, it is to be recognized that Moses and the Lord would speak *panim el-panim*: “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another” (Exodus 33:11a, NJPS). Most frequently, Jewish examiners have taken Moses’ speaking to the Lord *panim el-panim*, as indicative of Moses’ relatively free access to God, the open interchange that Moses and God would have, and some of the frankness and candor which would pass between them. In his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, Hertz describes this interaction to be “not in obscure visions and dreams, nor in enigmatical allusions, but distinctly.”<sup>78</sup> The *ArtScroll Chumash* would also concur how “Unlike other prophets, Moses did not need any sort of intermediary (*R’ Bachya*) and he was fully conscious when God spoke to him (*Sforno*)—like two people conversing with one another.”<sup>79</sup> Numbers 12:8a further specifies, “With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD.”<sup>80</sup>

Further on, Moses entreats the Lord, so that He can better know Him and the reality of His presence, both for Israel and for Himself (Exodus 33:12-17). Moses exclaims, “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18, ESV), and God complies with this, by telling Moses, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show” (Exodus 33:19, NJPS). With the sin of the golden calf in Exodus 32 in immediate view, that God indeed is willing to show Moses *kol-tovi* (כָּל-טוֹבֵי), “all

<sup>78</sup> Hertz, 362.

<sup>79</sup> Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 504.

<sup>80</sup> Heb. *peh el-peh adaver-bo u'mar'eh v'lo b'chidot u'temunah ADONAI yabit* (פֶּה אֶדְבַר-בוּ וּמְרָאָה וְלֹא בַחֲדִידֹת וְתַמְנֵחַת יְהוָה יָבִיט) (פֶּה אֶל-פֶּה); “With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the LORD” (NJPS).

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My goodness," is significant. But following this is a qualification: *lo tukal lir'ot et-panay ki lo-yir'ani ha'adam v'chay* (לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פָּנָי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי) (Exodus 33:20a, Alter). Moses has specifically asked to see the *kavod* (כְּבוֹד) or glory of the Lord (Exodus 33:18), the Lord says that He will demonstrate all His goodness to him (Exodus 33:19), but then also says that no mortal can see His *panim* (פָּנִים) or face and survive (Exodus 33:20).

Is there a contradiction with Exodus 33:11 preceding, where Moses is actually said to have spoken to God *panim el-panim*? Hertz states, regarding Exodus 33:20, that "The expression that a mortal cannot see God and live is frequently found in Scripture." But he immediately qualifies this, asserting, "Many interpreters deduce from this passage the teaching that no living being can see God's face, *i.e.* penetrate His eternal essence. It is only from the *rearward* that we can know Him."<sup>81</sup> When the Lord appears to Moses, He tells him that he will only be able to see His glory in a limited sense:

"And the LORD said, 'See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen'" (Exodus 33:21-23, NJPS).

We should take no issue with the observations made in the *ArtScroll Chumash* on this:

"In the plain sense of the word, a human being can no more survive a direct confrontation with the glory of God than a person's eyesight can remain intact if he stares at the sun. To save Moses from harm, God would place him in a cave, *a cleft*, in Mount Sinai, as it were, and shield him from a brilliance that would be more than he could bear. Then, when the degree of revelation was dull enough for him to tolerate, God would permit him to see it."<sup>82</sup>

What Moses asked for in Exodus 33:18, "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!" (NJPS), was for a full out revelation of God in His total glory. Already, God had been seen up to His "footstool" (Exodus 24:9-11) by the leaders of Israel. But this revelation of God's *kavod*, God's direct presence to His face, was impossible. Instead, all Moses would be able to see would be God's *achor* (אָחוֹר) or "back."

In further discussions regarding the nature of the Messiah, those who hold to a low Christology may claim that Yeshua is not God, because if human beings encounter God's face or presence, they will be struck dead. Thus, it might be said that Yeshua cannot be God. However, this is hardly quantitative evidence against a high Christology of Yeshua being God Incarnate in human form. There are various levels of people encountering God, from the leadership of Israel only seeing God up to His footstool (Exodus 24:9-11), to Abraham actually hosting God present with him, as a human man, for a meal (Genesis 18:1-33). The statement, "My face you cannot see, for no mortal may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20, REB), is given in direct response to Moses' desire to see God in the totality of His glory (Exodus 33:18). And, in view of God in the totality of His very Being as God, no mortal in his or her natural state, can survive. Yet at the same time, that God can show Himself to people, with various lesser levels of glory to be seen, should also be fairly recognized by readers.

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<sup>81</sup> Hertz, 363.

<sup>82</sup> Scherman, *Chumash*, 507.