

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

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

“Gideon Interacts With the Angel of the Lord”

“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* (נָבִיא) 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:

“Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me’”” (Judges 6:7-10).

The key statement prefacing the different remarks where God is quoted speaking in the first person “I,” is the prophet’s word *koh-amar YHWH Elohei Yisrael* (כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), “Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel” (Judges 6:8, Fox).

Following this, when the interactions between Gideon and the figure of the *malakh YHWH* (מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה), the “messenger of YHWH” (Judges 6:11, Fox) or “the LORD’s messenger” (Alter), and

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raised the significant issue of this being a theophany. In his book *The God who became Human: A biblical theology of incarnation*, Graham A. Cole makes these critical observations from the interactions which have taken place between Gideon and the *malakh YHWH*:

“Gideon’s encounter with the mysterious angel of the Lord in Judges 6:1-40 brings an important set of questions into sharp relief. Who is this angel of the Lord? How is the angel of the Lord related to Yahweh? The angel of the Lord is introduced as such by the narrator in Judges 6:11. The language is anthropopraxic. The angel of the Lord comes and sits under the oak (Judg. 6:11). The angel speaks to Gideon (Judg. 6:12). However, the speaker becomes the Lord (Judg. 6:14, 16, 18) before the narrative returns briefly to the angel as Gideon’s conversation further references the angel of the Lord in the Gideon cycle, though there are references to the Lord as speaker (Judg. 6:23, 25; 7:4, 7).”¹¹⁷

It is reasonable to deduce, based on how the dialogue directed to the human Gideon, fluctuates between the “messenger/angel of the LORD” and the LORD or YHWH proper, for the *malakh YHWH* to be an entity integrated into the Divine Identity as a distinct manifestation of the LORD or YHWH. Cole raises the issue of whether such a manifestation of a figure differentiated from, but uniquely tied together with, the LORD or YHWH, could be a pre-Incarnate appearance of Yeshua the Messiah:

“[W]hether the anthropomorphic theophanies in the Old Testament are in fact Christophanies is an important question...The question is important because if these anthropomorphic theophanies are appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ, then there are indeed anticipations of the incarnation in the Old Testament.”¹¹⁸

Indeed, when Gideon first encountered the “messenger/angel of the LORD,” there is every indication that he perceived this figure to just be a man (Judges 6:11). If God proper can take the form of a messenger here, then He is surely capable of being born as a human later on, as is seen in the Gospels (cf. Matthew 1:23).

Kaiser guides how the “messenger/angel of the LORD” is not a mere, created or finite being, but also discusses how if such a figure is more than just a standard member of the angelic host, such has to be determined on the basis of the Scriptural data presented:

“If Gideon only saw an angel, why did he fear that he might die? Many interpreters believe that an angel takes God’s place and acts as his representative. However, others do not feel this explanation fits all the data...Since the root meaning of *angel* is ‘messenger’ or ‘one who is sent,’ we must determine from context whether the word refers to the *office* of the sent one or to the *nature* of created angels as finite beings.

“Initially, some contexts of the term ‘angel of the LORD’ appear to refer to nothing more than any other angel (as in Judg 6:11). But as the narrative progresses, that angel soon transcends the angelic category and is described in terms suited only to a member of the Trinity. Thus in the Judges 6 episode, we are startled when verse 14 has the Lord speaking to Gideon, when previously only the angel of the Lord had been talking.”¹¹⁹

For Kaiser, there is no difficulty extrapolating the figure of the “messenger/angel of the LORD” being a manifestation of the LORD or YHWH proper, to this actually being a Christophany, an appearance of a pre-Incarnate Yeshua the Messiah:

¹¹⁷ Graham A. Cole, *The God who became Human: A biblical theology of incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 64.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 65-66.

¹¹⁹ Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 191.

"It is clear...that the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was a preincarnate from of our Lord Jesus Christ, who would later permanently take on flesh when he came as a babe in Bethlehem. But mark it well: the one who came after John had already been before—he was that angel of the Lord. His full deity was always observed and yet he presented the same mystery of the Trinity that would later be observed in 'I and the Father are one' (Jn 10:30) and 'my other witness is the Father, who sent me' (Jn 8:18). It is that word *sent* that ties together the angel, messenger or sent one into an Old Testament theology of christophanies, appearances of God in human form."¹²⁰

Judges 13

"Manoah Interacts With an Elusive Angel"

"Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no *children*. Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, 'Behold now, you are barren and have borne no *children*, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.' Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, 'A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he *came* from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, "Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, 'O Lord, please let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.' God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, 'Behold, the man who came the *other* day has appeared to me.' Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, 'Are you the man who spoke to the woman?' And he said, 'I am.' Manoah said, 'Now when your words come *to pass*, what shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?' So the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, 'Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded.' Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, 'Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a young goat for you.' The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, 'Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, *then* offer it to the LORD.' For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, 'What is your name, so that when your words come *to pass*, we may honor you?' But the angel of the LORD said to him, 'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?' So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on their faces to the ground. Now the angel of the LORD did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. So Manoah said to his wife, 'We will surely die, for we have seen God.' But his wife said to him, 'If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear *things* like this at this time.' Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol."

¹²⁰ Ibid., 192.