

question about the nature of this Yeshua, regarded His exaltation at the right hand of God, something to be considered from Psalm 110:1: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"

The Apostles declare before the Sanhedrin that they have witnessed the actions of Yeshua, and are beneficiaries of the Holy Spirit and its attendant work (Acts 5:31). With much of the city of Jerusalem having been affected by the declaration of Yeshua as Messiah and Savior, any decision the Sanhedrin made regarding the Apostles, would impact the population. The initial response of the Sanhedrin, presumably to the claims that Yeshua had been exalted to the right hand of God in Heaven and was Leader and Savior (Acts 5:31), was not dissimilar from the statements made by Yeshua Himself at His trial. Luke's narrative indicates, "When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death" (Acts 5:33, NIV). But, unlike Yeshua, who had claimed Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 for Himself (Mark 14:53-65; Matthew 26:57-68; Luke 22:63-71), all the Apostles were seen doing was repeating the claims of their Master. In stating that Yeshua had been exalted to the right hand of the God of Israel, various Pharisees probably considered this idea to be blasphemous and in violation with their understanding of monotheism.

In the record which follows, a moderate on the Sanhedrin, the Pharisee Gamaliel, urged restraint. He was seemingly open-minded enough that something supernatural was taking place in the name of an executed man whom His followers claimed had been resurrected from the dead, and this required further investigation. He also reminded the Sanhedrin that there had been multiple messianic figures appear in relatively recent history, that they had caused a ruckus or tumult for a season, and then they disappeared and their followers dispersed. He was fair enough to direct the Sanhedrin that if this movement of Yeshua followers were of human design, that it would fail, but that if it were of God, it would succeed:

"But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away *some* people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.' They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Yeshua, and *then* released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Yeshua *as* the Messiah" (Acts 5:33-42).

Acts 7:36-39

"The Angel Present With Israel in the Wilderness"

"This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN' [Deuteronomy 18:15]. This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt."

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

It can be very easy to overlook, but there are some statements appearing in the apology or defense of Stephen, before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, most probably speaking of the figure of the *malakh YHWH* (מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה), the “messenger/angel of the LORD.” In providing an overview and abbreviated history of Ancient Israel and the Jewish people up until the First Century C.E., Stephen makes light of the experience of Moses at the burning bush, directing,

“After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH [Exodus 3:2-3]. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look *more* closely, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB’ [Exodus 3:6]. Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, ‘TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT’ [Exodus 3:4-10]. This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE [Exodus 2:14]?’ is the one whom God sent *to be* both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years” (Acts 7:30-36).

Here, concurrent with how we previously examined Exodus 3:1-16, Stephen—who as a Hellenistic Jew could very well have been addressing the Sanhedrin in Greek—is recorded from the source text as saying, *ōphthē autō en tē erēmō tou orous Sina angelos en phlogi puros batou* (ὄφθη αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τοῦ ὄρους Σινᾶ ἄγγελος ἐν φλογὶ πυρὸς βᾶτου), “there appeared to him [Moses] in the wilderness of mount Sinai a messenger of the Lord, in a flame of fire of a bush” (Acts 7:30, YLT). With the angel or messenger appearing to Moses in the burning bush, Stephen further says, *egeneto phōnē Kurion* (ἐγένετο φωνὴ κυρίου), “there came the voice of the Lord” (Acts 7:31), with the first person “I” present in the dialogue of Exodus 3:4-10 referenced in Acts 7:32-34. Stephen then indicates that while commissioned by God to lead and deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, that he was provided *cheiri angelou tou ophthentos autō en tē batō* (χειρὶ ἀγγέλου τοῦ ὀφθέντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ βᾶτῳ), “the hand of a messenger who appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35, YLT).

The figure of Moses, and his role in seeing the Israelites delivered from Egypt, is lauded by Stephen: “This man led them out, performing miracles and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years” (Acts 7:36, CJB). Moses is notably appealed to as being an authority so significant for the descendants of the Exodus generation, that he is invoked to the Sanhedrin for them to realize that he spoke of the arrival of Yeshua of Nazareth on the scene of history. Deuteronomy 18:15 is quoted in Acts 7:37: “This is the Moses who said to *Bnei-Yisrael*, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers’” (TLV). The obvious implication is that rejection of Yeshua as a prophet, will bring with it severe consequences, as the Israelites in the wilderness had disobeyed Moses (Acts 7:39).

Some questions as to why Stephen would even mention the presence of an angel or messenger, are raised from Acts 7:38: “He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us” (NRSV). The source text makes note of *meta tou angelou tou lalountos autō en tō orei Sina* (μετὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει Σινᾶ), “with the messenger who is speaking to him in the mount Sinai” (Acts 7:38, YLT). That there were some members of the Heavenly host present with God proper, at Mount Sinai when God gave the commandments to Moses, is seen in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 33:2:

“And he said: The Lord has come from Sina and appeared to us from Seir and hasted from Mount Pharan with myriads of Kades; at his right, angels with him [*ek dexiōn autou angeloi met’ autou, ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ ἄγγελοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ*]” (NETS).

Of course, that angels would be present with the Lord at the giving of the Torah to Moses, as Divine functionaries, is hardly surprising. The presence of a singular angel or messenger, as is seen in Acts 7, should indicate to readers how further investigation into the identity of this figure in the Torah and Tanach, is warranted. While there are commentators of the Book of Acts who have indicated doubts about the *malakh YHWH* or the “messenger/angel of the LORD” being a pre-Incarnate manifestation of Yeshua the Messiah,²²⁸ there are surely others who would take Stephen’s defense as a prompt that further review of the Tanach record is needed.

Acts 7:54-60

“Stephen Sees the Son of Man in Heaven”

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Yeshua standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, ‘Lord Yeshua, receive my spirit!’ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ Having said this, he fell asleep.”

The Sanhedrin was not receptive to the defense or apology offered by Stephen, because of his professed faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. Much of what is seen in Stephen’s testimony, recalling the history of Ancient Israel and a pattern of widescale rebellion and obstinance against God (Acts 7:39-53), was not received well by those listening on. *If the ancestors of the current generation rejected and killed many of the Prophets who were sent to them—then it is hardly a surprise why Yeshua the Messiah was killed as well.* Luke’s narrative indicates, “On hearing these things, they were cut to their hearts and ground their teeth at him” (Acts 7:54, CJB/CJSB), as Stephen’s speech definitely worked in revealing their spiritual shortcomings.

Immediately, it is recorded how “Stephen, full of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh*, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God—and *Yeshua* standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55, TLV). Stephen’s perception changes from this corporeal dimension, to that of Heaven. And so Stephen declares, “Look!...I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56, CJB/CJSB). The response of a crowd that had gathered against him is one of total revulsion: “But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him” (Acts 7:57, NRSV). As defined by *BDAG*, the verb *hormaō* (ὁρμάω) means, “**to make a rapid movement from one place to another, rush (headlong).**”²²⁹ This was an impulsive action, and not one which was guided by any sort of reason, legal deliberation, or measured jurisprudence. While Stephen delivered an impassioned message before the Sanhedrin in defense of his beliefs, the mob has now taken over.

Luke records how they “threw him outside the city and began stoning him. And the witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Sha’ul” (Acts 7:58, CJB/CJSB). Why was the crowd stoning Stephen? Because they obviously considered him guilty of some

²²⁸ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 376.

²²⁹ *BDAG*, 724.