

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

- “And Manoah said to his woman, ‘We are doomed to die, for we have seen God’” (Alter).
- “Manoah said to his wife: We are going to die, yes, die, for it is a god that we have seen!” (Fox).

It has to be fairly recognized how the Hebrew term *elohim* can refer to angels or supernatural beings other than God proper. But it also has to be fairly recognized how the Hebrew term *elohim* can indeed refer to God proper. In *The Jewish Study Bible*, Yairah Amit details for Judges 13:22, “The view that seeing the LORD brings death...causes Manoah to express his fear,”¹²⁶ as the Lord or YHWH proper being in view is stated to be the issue here.

This scene actually closes with Manoah’s wife observing, *chafeitz YHWH l’hamiteinu lo-laqach mi’yadeinu olah u’minchah* (הָפִיץ יְהוָה לְהַמִּיתֵנוּ לֹא-לָקַח מִיָּדֵינוּ עֹלָה וּמִנְחָה), “Had YHWH desired to have us die he would not have taken an offering-up and a grain-gift from our hand” (Judges 13:23, Fox); “Had HASHEM wanted to put us to death, He would not have accepted from our hand an elevation-offering and a meal-offering” (ATS). *This is the action which took place when the malakh-YHWH ascended into Heaven from the fire.* As far as Manoah and his wife were concerned, when they countered the *malakh-YHWH*, they had encountered the LORD or YHWH Himself. If they had encountered something sharply different than the Lord proper manifested to them as an angel/messenger, then the record of Judges 13:23 could have included the more specific terms that had been previously used, such as, “We will surely die, for we have seen the angel of God [*malakh ha’Elohim*, Judges 13:9].”

The significance of the Judges 13 interaction between the *malakh-YHWH* and Manoah and his wife—where a being of unknown origin appears, is then regarded as supernatural, and then testified to be *Elohim* or God—is important for later evaluation of the origins and identity of Yeshua the Messiah. There were people who had reactions similar to Manoah and his wife, such as the Roman centurion (Mark 15:39; Matthew 27:54) and the Disciple Thomas (John 20:28), when they encountered Yeshua—which no doubt play a significant role in understanding who He truly is.

Isaiah 6:1-8

“Isaiah Encounters God’s Heavenly Throne”

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth *with it* and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

The death of King Uzziah (Azariah) indicated a significant shift in the prosperity and stability of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:1-15). This is the backdrop for the Divine commissioning of the Prophet Isaiah, who experiences a significant theophany involving

¹²⁶ Yairah Amit, “Judges,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 541.

God proper in Heaven (Isaiah 6:1), and various angels (Isaiah 6:2-3) specified to be *serafim* (שֶׂרָפִים). All readers of Isaiah 6:1-8 confront the grand holiness, majesty, power, and awesomeness of the Creator. The response of Isaiah to what he encountered—as a mere mortal in view of such supernatural wonders—is hardly surprising: “Woe is me; I am lost! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5a, NJPS).

The narrative of Isaiah 6:5b states, *ki et-ha'melekh YHWH tzeva'ot ra'u einay* (כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה רָאוּ עֵינַי), “and *** the-King Yahweh-of Hosts they-saw eyes-of-me” (Kohlenberger).¹²⁷ The level to which Isaiah saw the (full) glory of God is not the focus of what is recorded; it is instead how one of the seraphim takes a coal from the altar of God’s Heavenly Temple, and touches Isaiah’s lips with it (Isaiah 6:6), an indication that he has been forgiven of his sins (Isaiah 6:7). The question is then posed from the Throne, “Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8a, ATS). Isaiah then responds to the call (Isaiah 6:8b).

Questions about whether *Elohim* or God can be a unity in plurality, are necessarily posed by readers of Isaiah 6:8a: *et-mi eshlach u'mi yeilekh-lanu* (אֶת־מִי אֶשְׁלַח וּמִי יֵלֶךְ־לָנוּ), “Who should I send? Who will go for Us?” (HCSB). The Greek Septuagint sidestepped the issue of the nature of God being present in Isaiah 6:8, via the rendering, “Whom should I send, and who will go to this people?” (NETS).¹²⁸ Jewish examiners of the statement of Isaiah 6:8 take the plural “us” to include both God proper and His Heavenly court of angels (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-23; Job 1-2),¹²⁹ and there are Christian examiners who follow suit.¹³⁰ Unlike Genesis 1:26-28; 3:22-23; 11:7-8 preceding, where it can be legitimately questioned whether the plural “us” is to include God and His Heavenly court of angels—or God/*Elohim* as a unified plurality—it is to be recognized in Isaiah 6:1-8 that the “us” present could be God and His Heavenly court of angels. The scene of Isaiah 6:1-8 unambiguously includes the presence of *serafim*; the previous records of Genesis 1:26-28; 3:22-23; 11:7-8 do not.

Is it at all to be ruled out that “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8, RSV), involves God speaking as a unified plurality? J.A. Motyer interjects his opinion, which incorporates the witness of later Scripture:

“The *us* in *who will go for us?* is a plural of consultation (cf. 1 Ki. 22:19-23). The New Testament, however, relates this passage both to the Lord Jesus (Jn. 12:41) and to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), finding here that which will accommodate the full revelation of the triune God.”¹³¹

Isaiah 9:6-7

“Titles of the Messiah”

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

Those who believe in either a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God, or a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah as a created entity, are both going to read Isaiah 9:6-7 in a

¹²⁷ Kohlenberger, 4:12.

¹²⁸ Grk. *tina aposteilo kai tis poreusetai pros ton laon touton* (τίνα ἀποστείλω καὶ τίς πορεύεται πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τούτου).

¹²⁹ I.W. Slotki, *Soncino Books of the Bible: Isaiah* (London: Soncino Press, 1983), 30; Benjamin D. Sommer, “Isaiah,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 796.

¹³⁰ John D.W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, Vol 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), pp 72-73; John N. Oswalt, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 185; John Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 62.

¹³¹ J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 78.