

6.

YHWH's Divine Agents: The Messenger and the *šēm*

The compartmentalization of loci for divine self and divine agency in the texts of the late-seventh and sixth centuries BCE opened the door for a number of entities to take on presencing roles in the biblical literature. As that literature arrogated increased authority in certain circles, and in the absence of the temple and its trappings, cult seems to have given way to text as the primary backdrop against which those entities facilitated both the assertion of divine imminence and the sheltering of the deity's primary locus of self from the prying eyes and destructive hands of humanity. The most explicit vehicle for divine agency and the divine self in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible is the messenger of YHWH, and that vehicle will be interrogated in the chapter's first section. As a part of this interrogation, I discuss one biblical author/editor's use of YHWH's *šēm*, or "name," to rationalize the messenger's occasional identification with—even self-identification as—YHWH, the very deity of Israel.¹ This rationalization relates to a broader conceptual matrix found in Dtr and certain layers of D in which the *šēm* is the vehicle for presencing the deity in the temple. That matrix will be the subject of the chapter's final section.

THE MESSENGER OF YHWH

This section considers the use of the construct phrase "messenger of YHWH" (*mal'ak YHWH*) in the apparent conflation of the deity and their messenger in a handful of early biblical narratives: Gen 16:7–13; 21:17–19; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exod 3:2–6; Num 22:22–35; Judg 2:1–5; 6:11–23; 13:3–23. Camille Hélène von Heijne (2010, 1), in her discussion of the reception of the messenger of YHWH in early Jewish engagement with the book of Genesis, includes Gen 48:15–16 and Josh 5:13–15; 6:2 in her list of texts that merge the identity of the messenger with that of YHWH. I would suggest the situation is slightly distinct in these verses,

¹ For a discussion of the significance of the divine name within Judaism from a cognitive perspective, see Levy 2014.