

Abraham, the deity of Isaac, and the deity of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at the deity [*hā-’ēlōhīm*].

Judges 6:22

And Gideon saw that it was the messenger of YHWH, and Gideon said, “Help, Lord YHWH! For I have seen the messenger of YHWH face to face!”

Judges 13:21–22

And the messenger of YHWH did not again appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the messenger of YHWH, and Manoah said to his wife, “We will definitely die, because we have seen deity [*’ēlōhīm rā’înū*].”

There is no such threat associated with communication with the deity's messenger anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, it entirely undermines the function of a divine messenger for direct communication to be deadly.⁴ From the biblical to the wider Southwest Asian contexts, the texts reflect the literary motifs associated with direct communication between humans and full-fledged deities. The removal alone of the word *mal’āk* resolves all the complications.

Another consideration that adds further support to the interpolation theory is the frequent interpolation of the messenger in the ancient versions.⁵ A famous example is YHWH's confrontation with Moses in Exod 4:24, which in the Hebrew reads, “And when YHWH met him [*wayyipgōšēhū YHWH*], he sought to kill him.” In the Septuagint, however, the passage differs slightly: “a messenger of the Lord met him [*syntēntēsen auto angelos kyriou*] and sought to kill him.” The messenger was interpolated, either by the translator or by a scribe responsible for their source text, to obscure the deity's physical interaction with Moses, and likely also their attempted murder (Olyan 1993, 27–28).⁶ In the story of God's

⁴ Sommer (2009, 43) states, “The expression of God's presence known as the *mal’akh* is accessible precisely because it does not encompass God's entirety.” This is a perfectly reasonable interpretation of the use of the divine messenger, but it betrays the interpolation, since the terror of seeing the deity is identical to what is expressed by those who see the messenger of YHWH, who is supposed to be “accessible.” We cannot reason that in all instances the individuals simply mistakenly thought they were looking at the deity's entirety, since the omniscient narrator states in Judg 13:21 that Manoah, “realized [*yḏ*] it was the messenger of YHWH [*mal’ak YHWH*],” and immediately afterwards in verse 22 has Manoah express fear of death for seeing *’ēlōhīm*. For another take on this fear, see Chavel 2012.

⁵ Sommer (2009, 43) understands these variations to “strengthen the impression that the boundary between angel and Yhwh was regarded in the texts underlying the translations as indistinct.”

⁶ A similar prophylactic alteration takes place with the biblical *śāṭān*, “satan,” who