

## Hospitality in an Alienated World, Part 2 - Old Testament

### GOD AS HOST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Do you remember reading about the Israelites going into the Wilderness of Sin? Their stomachs and spirits complained because of hunger, it had been two months since they departed from Egypt's slavery where they had their daily fill of meat and bread (Exodus 16:3), and where they multiplied and grew exceedingly great (Exodus 1:7). The wilderness journey out of Egypt was necessary for those Israelites, even as they grew, because there was a prideful and insecure king who had set himself over Egypt, one who did not know the provision, comfort, and kindness of Joseph (Genesis 50:21; Exodus 1:8). The king set taskmasters over Israel to afflict them with burdens in order to keep them in a place that best suited his wants. But the more Israel was oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew. And so, the king and his entire house lived in dread of Israel, which resulted in an increased effort to make Israel submissive (Exodus 1:8-18). It is in that context we come to understand why Israel had to release themselves from the clutches of Egypt, and why they had to give up the daily assurance of meat and bread – slavery was still slavery even with the assurance of the king's food.

As I move forward through the Book of Exodus, I again land on the issue of Israel's hunger pangs after their departure from Egypt. The unforgiving climate of the wilderness meant escalated chances of starvation, which was a huge factor in Israel's temptation to crave the meat and bread they knew back in Egypt. That is where I come across the passages that describe God taking the lead role as Host to Israel. The Lord of Hosts instructed the Israelites to gather, distribute, and prepare their allotted food provisions - meat to eat in the evening, bread to the full in the morning, and water to satisfy their thirst (Exodus 16: 4-18, 17:1-6). Those 'wilderness tables' made all the difference in Israel making it to the Promised Land.

But we all know the journey to the Promised Land was a lengthy one. Like any good exodus and redemption story there is always trouble, division, and obstacles to overcome on the road to freedom, and this one is no exception. It would be a long time before Israel would subdue and occupy the land promised and most desired for them, by their unparalleled Almighty Host.

“...a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you” (Deuteronomy 8: 8-10).

### GOD AS GUEST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

I've noticed within the pages of the Old Testament, God occasionally shows up to have a meal with the Israelites. On those occasions God would take the form of an 'angel(s)' or 'messenger(s)' in order to present Himself to His people. For example, Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, Monoah, Zorah, and Samson were all dedicated to the Lord's work of bringing forth, delivering, possessing, and defending their nation. It takes me back a little when I read that each of those people were recorded to have shared hospitality with a Divine presence (Genesis 18: 1-15, Judges 6: 11-27, 13:2-23). *Systematic Theology*, by Wayne Grudem, mentions that whether those 'angels' or 'messengers' were written in the plural or singular form, they

were *divinely* distinct from any other created person, but were similar to you and me in the fact that they were created by God to have the capacity to be morally intelligent beings (Grudem, 1994, 229 & 402).

If the morally intelligent beings were ‘messengers’ or ‘angels’ then did Christianity’s heroes of the faith really experience hospitality *with* God? Or was it that they experienced ‘the office of God’ in the form of ‘the sent one’ (‘the sent one’ pertaining to the ‘angel’ or ‘messenger’)? Questions similar to mine have been welcomed and debated among Christian students and scholars for eons! According to Brauch’s, book *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, in *many* of the Old Testament passages ‘The Angel of the Lord’ is eventually referred to as God. Brauch provides the example that in the Book of Genesis an Angel of the Lord was recorded to have addressed Hagar four times, and Hagar eventually named The Angel of the Lord, “You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees” (Brauch, 1996, 191; Genesis 16:7-16). But take note, Brauch did not say that pattern of naming could be applied to *all* Old Testament verses that speak of angel(s) or messenger(s), but it could be applied to many. I decided to take that into consideration, and as a result of having been thoughtful toward the texts I agree with Brauch that Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, Monoah, Zorah, and Samson all had a Divine hospitable encounter, which included a special message from the Lord!

#### ISRAEL AS HOST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As clearly expressed throughout the Book of Deuteronomy, you and I know that God’s Law was to be metaphorically written on the hearts of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9). That was a significant facet in the shaping of Israel’s nature, even after they began to live within their inheritance. A remembering, thankful, hospitable community could only be such if they were instructed in God’s Law well enough that it became intrinsic within them to value God’s hospitable values – to not turn away the fatherless, widow or stranger without the giving of food and clothing – all of which is said to have been exemplified to Israel by God Himself. Read here:

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lords of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him good and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

“Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

““And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34).

That spirit of giving and receiving was an act of righteous and godly hospitality – a once alienated Israel gave on to others what God had first given to them!

To conclude here, hospitality in the Old Testament was not just an issue of simple social ethics, it was a matter of life and death, especially in the situation of alienated Israel. Hospitality in the Old Testament

was also a sign of friendship that had its roots deeply planted in mutual commitment. That cultural Middle Eastern trait was so firmly embedded in its people that it persisted through the generations into New Testament times where mutual commitment came with a positive warning: “Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13: 1-2), and that positive warning still persists today.

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**Bibliography:**

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