

Keraphobia

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Exod 34:30

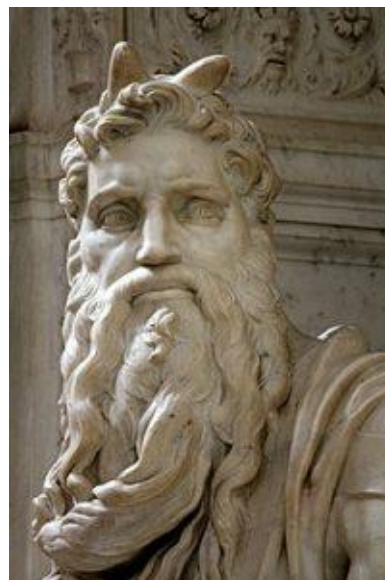
(BHS)

(Wycliffe Bible)

וַיֵּרָא	1	
אֶהְרֹן וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	2	Aaron and the sons of Israel
	3	saw
אֶת־מִלְּשָׁה וְהָיָה קָרוֹן עוֹר פָּנָיו	4	(that) Moses' face (was) horned ,
וַיֵּרָאוּ מִגִּשְׁתֹּת אֱלֹהֵינוּ:	5	and they dreaded to nigh nigh

Obviously, lines 1 and 3 relate. You may notice a possible Hebrew wordplay between “seeing” (line 1), and “dreaded” (line 5). Wycliffe doesn’t bother with translating, “Behold!” (middle of line 4). But by far the most interesting gloss is, “horned” (*qaran*); “And behold! The skin of his face was horned.” Jerome’s Vulgate translates with *cornutam*, as in, “cornucopia” (items in a horn). You may remember that *qeren* means “horn.” See Psa 69:31, “a bull having horns.”

Perhaps you are familiar with Michelangelo’s Moses. Here is a picture. See what he did there? You can see other works of art that show Moses with horns [here](#). Go on, take a look.



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So, if the Hebrew has Moses sprout scary horns, why then do modern translations instead gloss “shone,” “radiant,” and the like?

Well, the only really comparable text to this in the Bible is Hab 3:4, which in WB reads, “The shining of him shall be as light; (with) horns in the hands of him.” It seems to be describing a thunderstorm with lightning. So

ESV, “rays flashed from his hand”—as if he were throwing bolts of lightning. Along these lines the Tree of Life Version translates our verse, “the skin of his face shone in rays.” Wycliff glosses v29, “his face was horned *with wonderful shining beams.*”

The Septuagint translates “horned” with “glorified,” “the glorified appearance of the skin of his face.” Paul follows this in 1 Cor 3:7. So all translations today rightly interpret the horn reference as a way of saying that his face shined. But I think something has been lost in translation.

In Habakkuk, it is talking about a violent, earth-shattering appearance of God. Lightning and thunder. Pestilence and plague. Hills brought low. The earth split. Sun and moon affected. Mountains threshed. Terrible war. Tsunami. Very scary stuff—and horns that really mean rays are in this context. *This* is what the Israelites saw when they looked at Moses’ face.

His face was a living electrical discharge. To see him was like staring into a thunderstorm, like gazing into an oncoming tidal wave, like feeling an earthquake. It is in this manner that Moses imaged God. He would soak up the unbearable presence of God—and the devastating energy would pour out from him when he went back down the mountain. The overwhelming intensity of his face terrorized the fighting men of Israel, so he covered it to mask its projection of power.

One interesting aspect of this is that Moses was unaware that anything had changed! Next to God, the transformation of his face was not even noticeable. His face seemed normal. It didn’t feel any different. But to Israel, looking at him was like looking at the mountain of God.

Okay, pretty cool, right? Please read [Zonē of Glory](#) now. Go ahead. Then I will preach on it.

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The difference between this essay and that one is that here we are emphasizing the character of Moses' transformed appearance. This is what people will see on the day of judgment when they look on Jesus' face. And this is how you and I will appear on that Day—when we visibly reflect the glory of God and agree with him in his judgments.

The way we do this today is by insisting on the truth. We humbly and gently live out our calling, faithfully and uncompromisingly witnessing to Jesus and his gospel. Some unbelievers may find this inflexible and intolerant and seek to shut us up. It is as if our unwavering testimony is threatening to some. Jesus told us that we should be full of light, like a lamp shines its “rays” (Luke 11:36)—using *astrapē*, “lightning.” Here it is in the NTE version, “If your whole body is illuminated, with no part in darkness, everything will be illuminated, just as you are by a flash of lightning.” Spiritually, be bright today like lit by lightning!

And we look forward to the day when our union with Jesus will be writ on our faces like Moses. So—be inspired! Catch the vision and let it give you courage! Be insistent on what is right! Don't worry about what they think! Keep your eyes on the prize! Put the fear of God in them!

Be the lightning of the world!