

The Nature of Yeshua in the Gospel of John

before Yeshua, stresses that this action has to be taken within a wider reading of the Fourth Gospel:

“[I]t is an important foretaste of what the evangelist is wishing to be the outcome of the pilgrimage of faith (cf. John 20:28)—an adequate confession and worship of Jesus. This story then could be used as a paradigm to reveal the progress of a soul and so lead others in the same direction.”¹⁷⁸

John 9:38 includes a definite employment of the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) or “worship.” However, it is to be witnessed that various versions which are employed in either Messianic Judaism and/or the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, indicate that their translators or publishers, are unsure about the kind of honor or veneration issued by the man healed of blindness, to Yeshua in John 9:38:

- “‘Lord, I trust!’ he said, and he kneeled down in front of him” (CJB/CJSB).
- “And he said, ‘I believe, Lord:’ and he fell down and prostrated himself before Him” (Power New Testament).
- “And he said, ‘Master, I believe,’ and bowed before Him” (ISR Scriptures-2009).
- “He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ and he bowed down before him” (The Messianic Writings).

While lexically, John 9:38 can be rendered with “he prostrated himself at his feet” (Montgomery New Testament), theologically, and in the scope of the wider issues of the nature of the Messiah in play, the verb *proskuneō* should be rendered as “worship.” Thankfully, among Messianic versions, the TLV has rendered John 9:38 with, “He said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.”

John 10:7-21

“Yeshua is the Good Shepherd”

“So Yeshua said to them again, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. *He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.’ A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others were saying, ‘These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?’”

The activity of Yeshua the Messiah is compared to that of a shepherd who guards and cares for sheep. Much of the activity of Yeshua being a shepherd, directly relates to the salvation He provides to those who believe in Him. While previous servants of God in the Tanach, such as Moses (Exodus 3:1) or David (2 Samuel 5:2), had once been shepherds, God

¹⁷⁸ Witherington, *John*, 184.

Himself is notably depicted as a shepherd (Psalm 23:1-4 addressed previously; also 80:2; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:9). Most readers of John 10:7-21 are going to approach Yeshua's words from the perspective of Him being the only way to salvation, intent on the protection and guidance of His followers, His willingness to sacrifice Himself for His own, and the intimate knowledge that the Father and Son have, something which His followers are to likewise participate in. Given the scene which follows in John 10:22-39, it is to be properly recognized that there are some significant statements made in John 10:7-21 preceding, which bear importance regarding the nature of the Messiah, and not only His character.

In the source text of John 10:7, Yeshua's statements begin as *amēn amēn legō humin hoti egō eimi hē thura tōn probatōn* (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα τῶν προβάτων), "Truly, truly, I say to you, I AM the door of the sheep" (PME). Here, Yeshua being the entryway for His followers to enter, notably includes employment of "I am" or *egō eimi*, recalling the burning bush theophany of Exodus 3:14. Kruse notes how "This is the third of seven 'I am' sayings which predicates in the Fourth Gospel (6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5)."¹⁷⁹ The "I am" formula will be repeated in v. 9 following, which unambiguously has soteriological intentions.

A reader has to be very careful when encountering the Messiah's claim, "All those who have come before me have been thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them" (John 10:8, CJB/CJSB). Many Christians have inappropriately interpreted this as meaning that Yeshua was dismissing the Jewish religious leadership as having *anything* legitimate to ever offer the people of God. A widescale, blanket dismissal present in John 10:8 is most impossible, because there had been godly shepherds witnessed in the Tanach, such as figures like Abraham, Moses, David, and various righteous kings of Ancient Israel. Yeshua's words are rightly taken to be rooted within the sentiments of Ezekiel 34 and Zechariah 11:4-9, 11, of the false shepherds leading God's people astray.

The gravity of John 10:9, "I AM the door; if anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out, and will find pasture" (PME), can only be appreciated when the source text has been noted: *egō eimi hē thura* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα). John 10:9 is not only a promise by Yeshua of those who follow Him, to receive a life of goodness and satisfaction in Him; John 10:9 is a claim that true salvation or deliverance (*sōthēsetai*, σωθήσεται) comes by Him. The theme represented invokes Psalm 118:20, "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will enter through it." Köstenberger's thoughts need mentioning:

"As is attested in Greek literature since Homer, people in ancient times frequently thought to entering heaven by a gate. Jesus' claim to be 'the gate' would have resonated with this kind of thinking (cf. 1:51). The notion of a 'gate to heaven' appears also in Jewish sources, both in OT and apocalyptic literature. In the latter, the visionary receives a glimpse of the eternal truth of heaven that is the source of final salvation (cf. Rev. 4:1). Besides providing access to angels, the doors of heaven are the means by which knowledge and salvation are made known."¹⁸⁰

It is not enough, though, for Yeshua to simply claim that He is the door or gate to the Kingdom of Heaven; Yeshua says "I AM the door," with the source text of John 10:9 employing the "I am" or *egō eimi* formula of God's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 3:14. And, this is further coupled with the provision of salvation for those who enter in through the Messiah. The later exclaim of John 14:6 needs to be recognized here: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life [*egō eimi hē hodos kai hē alētheia kai hē zōē*, ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή]; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Does John 10:9 at all imply that in order for a human

¹⁷⁹ Kruse, *John*, 234.

¹⁸⁰ Köstenberger, 303.

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being to be saved, that he or she must recognize Yeshua as the “I AM”? Yeshua is certainly the only way to salvation, and the evidence is quite strong that a recognition of His Divinity is a prerequisite for people to have that salvation.

The life that Yeshua offers is one which not only involves people being redeemed from sins, but also involves participation in the goodness of God, something easily deduced by the Lord’s statement, “A thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness” (John 10:10, REB). The reason that this is possible, is because Yeshua says “I AM the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11, PME). To be certain, Yeshua is asserting His mission of self-sacrifice and selfless service for those who trust in Him. Likewise, given the source text having *Egō eimi ho poimēn ho kalos* (Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός), what kind of direct association is being made between Yeshua as the Good Shepherd, and the LORD or YHWH in the Tanach being the shepherd of Israel? At the very least, John 10:11 needs to be catalogued, as Kruse indicates, as this is “the fourth of seven ‘I am’ sayings with predicates in the Fourth Gospel (6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).”¹⁸¹ That Yeshua is identified as the “I am” Good Shepherd, who takes the most serious care of His sheep, is described in terms of Him not fleeing His sheep at the first sign of danger, because Yeshua is not a hireling or hired hand:

“The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (John 10:12-13, NIV).

Continuing to encounter Yeshua’s dialogue about Him being the Good Shepherd, the “I am” or *egō eimi* formula is seen again, in the source text of John 10:14-15:

“I AM the good shepherd [*Egō eimi ho poimēn ho kalos*, Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός]; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (PME).

Yeshua the Messiah, being the Good Shepherd, involves how He knows His followers, and His followers know Him. Yeshua’s followers participate in knowing Him, in a similar manner to how the Father and Son know each other. And, Yeshua is hardly just the shepherd of Jewish sheep, as He describes how “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold” (John 10:16), which is widely taken to be a reference to the mission He will give to His Disciples to go to the nations, proclaiming the good news.¹⁸² Yet, as significant as it is that Yeshua is a Good Shepherd for all, Yeshua being the Good Shepherd is predicated on the One God of Israel being a shepherd for His own—something which doubtlessly plays a role in understanding the nature of the Messiah. Kruse directly associates the Messiah being the Good Shepherd with some critical activities of the One God of Israel in the Tanach:

“References to Jesus as ‘the good shepherd’ recall Jeremiah 23:2-4, where God himself promises to gather the scattered people Israel, and Ezekiel 34:11-16, where God promises to look after his sheep, providing them with good pasture, caring for the injured and weak, and shepherding the flock with justice. There are also possibly allusions to Psalm 23, in which God is again depicted as the good shepherd....It was also a claim to be one with God the Father, who is ‘the good shepherd’ of his people.”¹⁸³

To review these referenced Tanach passages,

¹⁸¹ Kruse, *John*, 235.

¹⁸² Consult the author’s discussion of John 10:14-18 in *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*

¹⁸³ Kruse, *John*, pp 236-237.

“Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: ‘You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,’ declares the LORD. ‘Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:2-4).

“For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,’ declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment” (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

“A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:1-4).

When these Tanach passages, which present the LORD or YHWH as the shepherd of Israel, are viewed as the background behind Yeshua saying “I AM the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14, PME)—which notably employs the “I am” or *egō eimi* formula of Exodus 3:14—then Yeshua’s integration into the Divine Identity is certain. **And the seriousness of this is undoubtedly connected to one’s salvation** (John 10:9). However, while recognizing Yeshua as the “I am” Good Shepherd, integrated into the Divine Identity, may be required for one’s eternal salvation—Yeshua is hardly some independent entity, out to promote self-serving interests. Yeshua the Messiah’s origins and identity are innately caught up into His relation with the Father:

“[T]he Father loves Me, because I lay down My life, so that I may take it up again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father” (John 10:17-18, TLV).

Yeshua saying, “I lay it down of my own accord” (Joh 10:18, RSV) or “of Myself” (NKJV), *ap’ emautou* (ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ), is quite serious. Not only is Yeshua the Good Shepherd in that He will die for His sheep (John 10:11, 15), but in the case of Yeshua being the Word of God in the flesh (John 1:14), He would willingly allow or permit Himself to be sacrificed or executed for the sins of all human people (cf. John 10:17). As the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:7-8 puts it, “[he] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (NRSV). The gravity and magnitude of the salvation available in Yeshua, is truly awe-inspiring and humbling in view of Him being the “I am” Good Shepherd.

Not quite knowing what to do about Yeshua’s words, the Jewish religious leaders hearing them found themselves divided (John 10:19). There were those who concluded that Yeshua

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was either demon-possessed or insane (John 10:20), and there were those who wondered, because He had healed a blind man (John 10:21; cf. ch 9).

John 10:22-39

"I and the Father are one"

"At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Yeshua was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Yeshua answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.' The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Yeshua answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?' The Jews answered Him, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.' Yeshua answered them, 'Has it not been written in your Law, "I SAID, YOU ARE GODS" [Psalm 82:6]? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.' Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp."

The statements in John 10:22-39 actually do get some traction in today's Messianic movement, because they testify to the fact that Yeshua the Messiah observed the Feast of Dedication or *Chanukah*.¹⁸⁴ Frequently, Yeshua's statement to the Jewish religious leaders of John 10:30, "I and the Father are one," gets quoted with some reference to the Deuteronomy 6:4-5 *Shema* being involved. Because of their response in wanting to stone the Messiah for blasphemy (John 10:31), this is taken as a declaration of Divinity by Him. And perhaps, Yeshua was indeed declaring Himself to be a part of the Divine Identity, a member of the Godhead, by His statement. However, there are surrounding statements in this scene which do need to be evaluated. This most especially includes a better handle on Yeshua responding to the claim of Him being guilty of the crime of self-deification (John 10:33) by quoting Psalm 82:6 (John 10:34). Advocates of a low Christology, believing Yeshua the Messiah to be a created entity, have exploited a great deal of our present avoidance of John 10:34-36, using the claim that by mortal humans somehow being called "gods," that Yeshua the Messiah similarly must be a created being.

Yeshua the Messiah was at the portico or colonnade of Solomon in Jerusalem during *Chanukah* (John 10:22-23). The presence of Yeshua had been causing a great deal of tension, particularly for the Jewish religious authorities. As it is narrated, "Then the Judean leaders surrounded Him, saying, 'How long will You hold us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us outright!'" (John 10:24, TLV). With all of the statements He had previously been making about being the door or gate (John 10:7, 9), the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), and His relationship to the Heavenly Father (John 10:15, 18), there were surely questions as to not only who this Yeshua was, but what He might do.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. "Hanukkah: New Testament Observance," in *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, 1538.

If necessary, consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.