

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

Septuagint of Exodus 3:6 has *egō eimi ho Theos tou patros sou* (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς σου), “I am the God of your father.” Certainly, not every use of the formula *egō eimi* or “I am” in the Book of Acts is indicative of Divinity, or even a general supernatural nature.²³⁷ But, recognizing how *egō eimi* is the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14), we do have to consider potential parallels between the appearance of HaShem or YHWH at the burning bush to Moses, and now this dramatic intervention of Yeshua the Messiah to Saul on the Damascus Road.

When what was clearly a supernatural entity exclaimed to Saul, “I AM Yeshua whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5b, PME), did Luke provide a hint that something more was present than just Yeshua identifying Himself? Once again, the source text could have just said *egō Iēsous*, and all readers would deduce would be a statement of self-identification. But with *egō eimi Iēsous* instead employed—in what is obviously a dynamic, spiritual scene, with a supernatural entity intervening to stop Saul’s persecution of the Believers—questions are necessarily raised about possible connections between Saul’s Damascus Road encounter, and previous Biblical scenes such as the burning bush theophany.

Acts 10:19-26

“Cornelius Attempts to Worship Peter”

“While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.’ Peter went down to the men and said, ‘Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?’ They said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was *divinely* directed by a holy angel to send for you *to come* to his house and hear a message from you.’ So he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am *just* a man.’”

Many Messianic people review the Apostle Peter’s vision of Acts 10 and the animals on the sheet, often coming to the conclusion that instead of the common Christian interpretation of God rescinding the Torah’s dietary laws, that the vision instead regards the cleansing of all people, per Peter’s own conclusion, “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Indeed, within the details of Peter’s vision of the sheet with the animals (Acts 10:9-16) and subsequent activities (Acts 10:17-18ff), one does not see Peter go into the marketplace and acquire meats which would be considered unclean by the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Instead, Peter is bidden to go and declare the good news of Israel’s Messiah to the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:19-23), who was a God-fearer (Acts 10:2, 22), but because of not being Jewish, he may have been treated with extreme suspicion (Acts 10:28a). While there are many details to be evaluated in the scene of Acts 10 as they concern the continued validity of the Torah’s dietary laws,²³⁸ there are also other factors which need to be catalogued as they involve the nature of the Messiah.

Luke’s record indicates how there were supernatural intermediaries present, sent by God, to bring Peter and Cornelius together. Cornelius, as a God-fearer, apparently observed

²³⁷ Places where *egō eimi* are employed in the Book of Acts, where created beings are unambiguously in view, include: Acts 10:21; 22:3; 26:29.

²³⁸ Consult the entry for Acts 10:1-48 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

traditional Jewish times of prayer throughout the day, as it is stated, “About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had *just* come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’” (Acts 10:3). Here, Cornelius saw *angelon tou Theou eiselthonta pros auton* (ἄγγελον τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθόντα πρὸς αὐτόν), “a messenger of God coming in unto him” (YLT). It is then narrated, “And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God’” (Acts 10:4). When Cornelius says *ti estin? Kurie* (τί ἐστιν, κύριε), he is not fully coherent of the entire situation, and so his question to the Supreme Power of “What is it, Lord?” is understandable. Some do take Cornelius’ question as being issued to the angel or messenger directly, witnessed in the renderings “What is it, lord?” (NKJV, CSB) or “What is it, sir?” (CJB/CJSB).

The angel or messenger is the entity which speaks to Cornelius, and not the Lord proper, even though the angel or messenger does convey to Cornelius how he has been honoring of God. After he is directed to send a party to collect Peter (Acts 10:5-6), the record states, “When the angel who was speaking to him had left...” (Acts 10:7a), *hōs de apēlthen ho angelos ho lalōn autō* (ὡς δὲ ἀπῆλθεν ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν αὐτῷ). Unlike various scenes in the Tanach, where “the angel/messenger of the LORD” is seen to speak in the first person “I” as the LORD or YHWH, this entity only speaks of the Lord or God proper in the third person. This entity, while supernatural in origin, is implied to be a created agent sent from God, later identified by Cornelius as *anēr* (ἄνθρωπος) or male: “a man stood before me in shining garments” (Acts 10:30). In contrast to this, it was the Spirit of God which directly communicated to Peter that Cornelius’ men were on the way to fetch him (Acts 10:19), clearly speaking in the first person as God: “But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself [*hoti egō apostalka autous*, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀπέσταλκα αὐτούς]” (Acts 10:20).

After inviting Cornelius’ party to spend the night (Acts 10:21-23a), they leave for Caesarea, where Cornelius had assembled a number of his family members and close friends (Acts 10:23b-24). But then Luke actually records, “When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*” (Acts 10:25). This is far more than a sign of mere honor or deference to Peter, on the part of a God-fearing Roman to a Jew. The text incorporates two verbs in the clause *pesōn epi tous podas prosekuneōsen* (πεσὼν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας προσεκύνησεν), “having fallen at the(his) feet worshiped [him]” (Brown and Comfort).²³⁹ The first verb is *piptō* (πίπτω) or “fall down,” followed by the second, and more theologically significant *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω).

While technically speaking, the verb *proskuneō* can involve “prostrating oneself before kings and superiors,” it also notably does mean “to make obeisance to the gods, fall down and worship, to worship, adore” (LS),²⁴⁰ and is used throughout the Septuagint to describe the worship due to the God of Israel. As is seen by Peter’s response to Cornelius, rendering *proskuneō* as “fell prostrate” (CJB/CJSB), “fell at his feet in reverence” (NIV), “fell at his feet in order to honor him” (Common English Bible), or “made obeisance to him” (Goodspeed New Testament), **does not** at all do this scene proper justice. For some reason or another, “As Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him” (Acts 10:25, TLV).

That worship of the Apostle Peter, as though Peter were Divine, was apparently intended, is obvious from Peter’s **strong refusal toward the action** Cornelius displayed. Peter rebukes Cornelius, “Stand up; I am only a mortal” (Acts 10:26, NRSV) or “Stand up, I am a human being too!” (Phillips New Testament), *egō autos anthrōpos eimi* (ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος εἰμι). *Peter is not God*. In the view of Eckhard J. Schnabel, “The homage of the Roman centurion is a pagan element that Luke did not eliminate from his story despite his otherwise positive description of

²³⁹ Brown and Comfort, 451.

²⁴⁰ LS, 693.

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Cornelius,"²⁴¹ meaning that even with Cornelius' apparent condition as a God-fearer, a friend of the Jewish people, and as one who observed God's Law on some important level—there were still some pagan ideas and concepts needing to be corrected. The Apostle Peter's response, in refusing worship, is notably the same as the servant in Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9, where the Apostle John tries to give the angel worship. In the later narrative of Acts, Paul and Barnabas refuse worship as Hermes and Zeus by those at Lystra (Acts 15:11-15). The exact opposite response takes place regarding Herod, though (Acts 12:20-23).

Acts 10:34-43

"Yeshua the Messiah as Lord of All"

"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Yeshua the Messiah (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. You know of Yeshua of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.'"

Following the Apostle Peter's arrival at the home of the centurion Cornelius, the two of them both speak of how the God of Israel has brought them together (Acts 10:27-32), with Cornelius in particular very eager "to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord" (Acts 10:33). Peter opens up his message "to many people assembled" (Acts 10:27), with a recognition of how the God of Israel is gracious and welcoming of all human beings, which served as a significant compliment to his host, a Roman. He said, "It's become clear to me...that God really does show no favoritism. No: in every race, people who fear him and do what is right are acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-25, Kingdom New Testament). What Peter emphasizes was that he once had a prejudice toward those of the nations—those who were immoral idol worshippers, and unclean—which has needed to be replaced by a favorable tenor of thinking well of those of the nations at large, who will perform acts of goodness and kindness consistent with the ethos laid forth by the God of Israel. Peter had once shown partiality, in violation of God's Torah (Deuteronomy 10:17; cf. Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25), attitudes he has now repented of. Even people raised in paganism can be of a generally good disposition, especially those like Cornelius who became God-fearers (Acts 10:2, 22).

Peter declared the good news of Israel's Messiah to an audience invited by Cornelius involving "his relatives and close friends" (Acts 10:24). Presumably, many of this company were non-Jewish God-fearers just as he, who had already recognized the God of Israel and were nominally Torah obedient. But at the same time, many of those invited were seemingly also pagan worshippers of the Greco-Roman pantheon. Peter immediately says of the gospel, that it

²⁴¹ Schnabel, 496.