

of Yeshua as affirming of a being integrated into the Divine Identity, as Yeshua was regarded as being far, far more than a created supernatural force of God.

Acts 9:1-6

“Saul Encounters Yeshua on the Damascus Road”

“Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Yeshua whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.’”

Many Bible readers are surely familiar with the supernatural encounter of Saul, the enemy of the Believers, with the Living Yeshua on the road to Damascus, and the complete turnaround that he experienced. The great travesty of Saul’s activities, in persecuting the Believers, is not just seen in him condemning many of them to blasphemy—but also how Saul, as a Pharisaical zealot (Galatians 1:14), sought support from the Saddusaical high priest, for religious-political approval to condemn the Messiah followers (Acts 9:1). And if this were not enough, not being content in searching out for the Believers in the environs of Jerusalem and Judea, Saul expanded his vendetta to the Jewish community in Damascus (Acts 9:2).

We all know the narrative quite well, “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him” (Acts 9:3, NIV). From Saul’s vantage point, he was surely experiencing powers beyond his terrestrial control. As Luke narrates, “And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him...” (Acts 9:4a, RSV). Here, the verb used to describe Saul’s action is *piptō* (πίπτω), “to fall, fall down” (LS),²³⁴ and while it can be used in various instances of veneration,²³⁵ here the reaction was probably one of fearing the unknown. The voice speaks out, “Sha’ul! Sha’ul! Why do you keep persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4b, CJB/CJSB).

The response as seen in most English versions is, “Who are You, Lord?” (Acts 9:5a, TLV), the source text having *tis ei? Kurie* (τίς εἶ, κύριε). Not all versions render the title *Kurios* (κύριος) by the proper “Lord,” though, with some having the lowercase “lord” (NLT), and others either “Master” (The Message) or “sir” (CJB/CJSB, New American Bible). While these latter three renderings are not lexically incorrect—as the title *Kurios* can indeed mean either “Master” or “sir”—once Saul came to a fuller understanding of who was speaking to him (cf. Acts 9:20, 22), did he simply consider this Yeshua to have been just another one to be extended the courtesy of being called “sir”?

While there tends to be no discussion on this among Acts commentaries, the source text, of Yeshua’s self-identification to Saul in Acts 9:5b, bears something important: *egō eimi Iēsous hon su diōkeis* (ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις).²³⁶ It would have been entirely normal for Luke to have simply written *egō Iēsous* as a part of Yeshua’s self-identification. In Stephen’s dialogue in Acts 7:32 preceding, where he quotes from Exodus 3:6, “I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS” (Acts 7:32), the source text only says *egō ho Theos tōn paterōn sou* (ἐγώ ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων σου), whereas the

²³⁴ LS, 641.

²³⁵ One definition available is indeed, “fall down, throw oneself to the ground as a sign of devotion or humility, before high-ranking persons or divine beings, esp. when one approaches w. a petition” (BDAG, 815).

²³⁶ This also appears in the paralleling records of Acts 22:8, *egō eimi Iēsous ho Nazōraios* (ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος), “I AM Yeshua of Nazareth” (PME), and Acts 26:15, *egō eimi Iēsous hon su diōkeis* (ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις), “I AM Yeshua whom You are persecuting” (PME).

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.