

The Nature of Yeshua in the Gospel of John

have been inappropriate, in confronting a corrupt religious system, for Yeshua to have exclusively said that His self-witness is true; but Yeshua also has a witness from His Heavenly Father. And at the same time, Yeshua's self-identification is so strong, that He can invoke the "I am" terminology used by the LORD or YHWH to Moses at the burning bush.

As this dialogue closes, at best many of the detractors of the Messiah were confused as to what He had just told them. Given the fact that their motives were fleshly (John 8:15a), all they can ask Yeshua is, "Where is Your Father?" And, all that Yeshua can tell them is, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (John 8:19). There is an abrupt end, as it is narrated, "He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come" (John 8:20, NIV). Further exchange does take place between Yeshua and these Pharisaical critics in the record which follows. Whether this happened immediately, or there was a brief pause, with Yeshua moving on and then encountering these persons moments later, is unknowable. But it would seem likely to this reader, at least, that much of the interchange of John 8, took place during the course of activities at the water pouring ceremony over multiple hours.

John 8:21-30

"The Son of Man Will Be Lifted Up"

"Then He said again to them, 'I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.' So the Jews were saying, 'Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?' And He was saying to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.' So they were saying to Him, 'Who are You?' Yeshua said to them, 'What have I been saying to you from the beginning? I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.' They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. So Yeshua said, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.' As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him."

The interaction between Yeshua and the Jewish religious leaders at *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2) continues, where further words are issued about the Messiah's mission, and also His nature. Those hearing Yeshua were confounded about His statement, "I am going away, and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin—where I am going, you cannot come" (John 8:21, CJB/CJSB). Much of what Yeshua intended is explained further in His dialogue with the Disciples in John 13:33-14:4, but reading Yeshua's remark, "Where I go you cannot come" (NKJV), in the scope of the wider Biblical narrative, we know that He is speaking of His return into Heaven. More critically, however, Yeshua's opponents here will die without their sin issues being resolved, as a consequence of their disbelief.

As it is recorded, Yeshua's detractors were really at a loss to understand what He was saying to Him: "'Is he going to kill himself?' asked the Judaeans. 'Is that what he means when he says we can't come where he's going?'" (John 8:22, Kingdom New Testament). The dullness of these persons is evident, given the fact that Yeshua had just invoked the Exodus 3:14 "I am" formula in describing Himself as the light of the world (John 8:12) and in describing the validity of His self-witness (John 8:18). Rather than wondering about the supernatural origins of this Yeshua of Nazareth speaking to them, the Jewish religious leaders only think in entirely

terrestrial terms: that they cannot follow Yeshua because they somehow will not kill themselves.

It is not difficult to imagine that Yeshua probably shook His head, or had a deadpan face, when speaking these words to His opponents, given the absurdity of what they had just said: “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23, TLV). Representative of origins that are not terrestrial, and are in fact extra-dimensional, the source text says *egō ek tōn anō eimi* (ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω εἰμί), “I of the things above am” (Brown and Comfort), and *egō ouk eimi ek tou kosmou toutou* (ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμί ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), “I am not of this~world” (Brown and Comfort).¹⁴¹ Proponents of either a high or low Christology, would both conclude that John 8:23 is representative of Yeshua ultimately having origins in the Heavenly dimension. However, having just asserted His non-terrestrial origins, Yeshua says something to His detractors, presented to readers in terms of Him being integrated into the Divine Identity: “Therefore I told you that you will die in your sins. If you don’t believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24, TLV). A number of English translations will only say “I am He” (NASB/NASU) or “I am he” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NIV), but others will have “I AM” (NLT) or even “I am what I am” (NEB, REB).

The source text of John 8:24 is indeed *hoti egō eimi* (ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμί), “that I AM” (LITV), and there are a sufficient enough commentators of the Gospel of John who will recognize that a connection is made between Yeshua using “I am” and the theophany of Exodus 3:14, and/or the representation of God in a passage like Isaiah 43:10.¹⁴² It is most appreciable to see how the 2016 *Complete Jewish Study Bible* notes for John 8:24 asserts, “Yeshua intimates here and in v. 28 that he is to be identified with *ADONAI*.”¹⁴³ Indeed, given the precise theme of John 8:24 involving redemption from sins—“I said therefore to you, that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” (PME)—it would be most appropriate to conclude that some recognition of Yeshua as the “I am,” Yeshua as God, is required for salvation. It does, though, need to be recognized that while Yeshua claims to be the “I am,” that Yeshua does not claim to be all that God is, nor does He claim an existence in disassociation from the Heavenly Father. Witherington properly details,

“Here at 8:24 we have the absolute use of *ego eimi*, which likely is drawing on Isa. 41:4ff. and on God’s self-designation, involving a possible play on the manner God revealed himself to Moses in Ex. 3:14. Notice, however, that this does not amount to a claim to *be* the heavenly Father, or to exhaust the Godhead, as v. 28 makes evident. It may be seen, then, as a claim to divine status or eternal existence, which thus warrants the use of the divine name of Jesus as well as the Father. Jesus is eternal but not self-existent; he is dependent on the Father and, while on earth as his agent, in a subordinate role to him.”¹⁴⁴

Yeshua might very well invoke the Exodus 3:14 “I am” formula in representing Himself, but Yeshua is not an independent entity all by Himself. In terms that not only those who encountered Him—but also many of us today—could understand, Yeshua’s identity is to be approached as Him being the One sent from the Father in Heaven:

“At this, they said to him, ‘You? Who are you?’ Yeshua answered, ‘Just what I’ve been telling you from the start. There are many things I could say about you, and many judgments I could make. However, the One who sent me is true; so I say in the world only what I have

¹⁴¹ Brown and Comfort, 352.

¹⁴² Morris, *John*, 447; Carson, *John*, pp 343-344; Kruse, *John*, 206; Keener, *John*, 744; Köstenberger, 259.

¹⁴³ *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, 1534.

¹⁴⁴ Witherington, *John*, 175.

heard from him.’ They did not understand that he was talking to them about the Father” (John 8:25-27, CJB/CJSB).

When many English Bible readers encounter Yeshua’s words of John 8:28, they may assume that it simply involves a recognition on the part of the Jewish religious leaders, that Yeshua may have been an important figure, prophet, or even the Messiah. As the RSV renders it, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me.” That Yeshua has employed the Daniel 7:13-14 title of the “Son of Man,” alone demonstrates that He is no ordinary figure: “He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14, NIV). A point is coming in time when the religious leaders criticizing Yeshua, among others, will recognize Him as this Son of Man, even if for some with it being too late. The *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:10-11 does state that “those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and...every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord,” some of which will come via coercion.

Yet, while the title of the “Son of Man” appearing in John 8:28 might be sufficient to place Yeshua into the Divine Identity, it is not only what appears. The source text of John 8:28a communicates *hotan hupsōsēte ton huion tou anthrōpou, tote gnōsethe hoti egō eimi* (ὅταν ὑψώσητε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τότε γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι), “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know who I am” (TLV). Burge points how “8:28 leaves off the predicate, making Jesus’ audience wonder and marvel at the amazing claims he is making.”¹⁴⁵ But while Yeshua can claim “I am,” once again invoking the burning bush theophany of Exodus 3:14, Yeshua is no independent agent off and alone to Himself. As the Father’s agent sent to Planet Earth, He is an obedient Son. Michaels indicates, “to know Jesus as the one who says ‘I am’ is to know him as the One sent from the Father, and thus finally to know his Father as well.”¹⁴⁶ Yeshua’s identity, origins, and nature are all to be determined from what it fully means for Him to be the One sent from the Father: “The One who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to Him” (John 8:29, TLV). Köstenberger further observes,

“Jesus, as the sent Son, again affirms his dependence on the Father, in keeping with the Jewish maxim that ‘a man’s agent [*šāliah*] is like the man himself’ (e.g., *m. Ber.* 5.5). The Father is with Jesus; he has never abandoned his Son...because he always does what pleases the Father (8:46; cf. 4:34). Hence, Jesus’ actions are proof of the Father’s presence with him.”¹⁴⁷

In spite of some of the limitations of His listeners in this scene (John 8:23-24, 26)—and by extension the ongoing challenges presented by us investigating what it fully means for Yeshua to identify Himself as “I am” (John 8:24, 28)—it is recorded “As He was speaking these things, many people put their trust in Him” (John 8:30, TLV). *Polloi* (πολλοί) is “many,” not just “some” to be taken as a few.

John 8:38-41

“Yeshua’s Origins Are From God”

“I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.’ They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Yeshua said to them, ‘If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is,

¹⁴⁵ Burge, *John*, 258.

¹⁴⁶ Michaels, 492.

¹⁴⁷ Köstenberger, 260.