

John 6:16-21

‘Yeshua Walks on the Water’

“Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, and after getting into a boat, they *started* to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Yeshua had not yet come to them. The sea *began* to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Yeshua walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

The record of John 6:16-21 indicates that a supernatural miracle did take place, as the Disciples were crossing over the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum, and were frightened when a strong wind began to blow. They were without the personal presence of their Master, but then they see Him. As it is described, “After they had rowed about twenty-five or thirty stadia, they catch sight of Yeshua walking on the sea, approaching the boat. They were terrified!” (John 6:19, TLV). Yeshua’s presence, and control over the situation, are indeed indicated, as John 6:20 is seen in most English versions, in the words, “but he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’” (John 6:20, RSV), or “But he spoke to them, ‘Don't be afraid: it is I myself’” (Phillips New Testament).

Given the scene of Yeshua walking on water, identifying Himself to the Disciples, and then how when they “were willing to take him into the boat...instantly the boat reached the land they were heading for” (John 6:21, CJB/CJSB), a review of the source text of John 6:20 is surely justified. When Yeshua identifies Himself to His Disciples, walking on water, the Greek has Him saying *egō eimi mē phobeisthe* (ἐγώ εἰμι μὴ φοβεῖσθε). In encountering *egō eimi*, readers are necessarily piqued to consider whether a connection is intended with the Exodus 3:14 (LXX) theophany of the burning bush, where the God of Israel identifies Himself as the “I am.” Commentators on the Gospel of John have had to weigh what the intention of *egō eimi* appearing in John 6:20 is intended to communicate.

A variety of Christian commentators, who would be seen to hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah genuinely being God, conclude that the usage of *egō eimi* in the source text of John 6:20 should mainly be taken as a statement of self-identification. Bruce asserts, “How else would one say ‘It is I’ in Hellenistic Greek than with the words *egō eimi*? The man cured of blindness uses the same words of himself in John 9:9.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, it is to be fairly noted how not all uses of *egō eimi* have to be connected to the Exodus 3:14 theophany of Mount Sinai—but it is to also be fairly noted that the context is of *egō eimi* being employed needs to be evaluated, especially if there are any supernatural activities present or declarative statements made. For John 6:20, Morris recognizes how “Ἐγώ εἰμι is often the style of deity, especially in the Greek Old Testament. Undoubtedly such a meaning is conveyed in some places in this Gospel (e.g. 8:58).” But he draws the conclusion that “here it is primarily a means of self-identification.”¹⁰⁹ Readers of John 6:20 have to weigh whether *egō eimi* is to be associated with the “I am” of Exodus 3:14, or is only Yeshua’s manner here of identifying Himself, such as in, “It is I.”¹¹⁰ Michaels thinks that the usage of *egō eimi* in John 6:20 is primarily for identification, but that it purposefully draws readers to future uses where claims of Divinity will be present:

¹⁰⁸ Bruce, *John*, 148; also: Carson, *John*, pp 275-276.

¹⁰⁹ Morris, *John*, 350 fn#42; also: Kruse, *John*, 165; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 89.

Beasley-Murray, *John*, pp 89-90 further discusses his conclusion of “I am” involving the Messiah being God’s eschatological revealer.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Keener, *John*, 673.

The Nature of Yeshua in the Gospel of John

“To them {the Disciples} ‘It is I’ does not in itself signal either messiahship (which they already acknowledged [John 1:41, 45, 48]) or divinity, but simply Jesus’ presence. To the reader it hints at something more, perhaps an angelic or divine epiphany. But this becomes a serious option only later when Jesus adds to the expression a series of designations telling what his presence means (beginning with the ‘I am the Bread of life,’ vv. 35, 47), and when he uses the expression by itself to evoke the eternal God of Israel (8:58). For now he is merely announcing himself.”¹¹¹

While more commentators than not may be seen to conclude that *egō eimi* in John 6:20 is only Yeshua identifying Himself to His Disciples—a few are seen to make connections between Yeshua walking on water, Ancient Israel being led through the Red Sea (Exodus 13-15), and the explicit claim of Psalm 77:16, 19-20 about God leading the people through the Red Sea:

“The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were in anguish; the deeps also trembled...Your way was in the sea and Your paths in the mighty waters, and Your footprints may not be known. You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.”

Psalm 107:29-30 has also been noted as being in view for John 6:20:

“He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet, so He guided them to their desired haven.”

Milne offers the extensive summary,

“The words *It is I* translate the Greek *egō eimi*, which in other contexts is the divine self-affirmation so often reproduced in this gospel, ‘I am’ [6:35; 8:24, 58; 10:14; 15:1; 18:5]. The words would of course be natural enough in this context as a means of Jesus’ identifying himself. It is difficult, however, to believe that John does not intend us to see more here, particularly if we recall the Passover background. The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt led to the wilderness wandering and their supernatural sustenance by means of the manna. That wilderness experience, however, was reached by way of the Red Sea and the supreme demonstration of the majesty of God as he parted the waters for his people (Ex. 12-14). Jesus appears here as the Lord of the waves and the seas, the personal manifestation of the Almighty who walked about the waters at the Red Sea...[quoting Psalm 77:16, 19]...A similar passage in Psalm 107 concludes...[quoting Psalm 107:29-30]...”¹¹²

Burge also agrees that there are deliberate connections between the employment of *egō eimi* in John 6:20, and the activity of God proper in delivering Ancient Israel:

“When Jesus arrives at the boat, he identifies himself with a term that was sure to evoke...images of the Exodus story: ‘It is I’ (Gk. *egō eimi*)...[T]his may be a mere form of self-identification. But it may imply more. The verb to be (*eimi*) possesses no predicate here and thus reflects God’s divine name given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 3:14). Even Jesus’ call not to fear echoes Moses’ response on the mountain when he learned God’s name and saw the burning bush...[quoting Exodus 3:6]...Jesus approaches and even though he is now providing an awesome and overwhelming presentation of his powers, they need not fear.”¹¹³

It is to be recognized that not all English versions render *egō eimi* as “It is I” or even “I am *he*” (YLT) in John 6:20. Some actually do render *egō eimi* as “I am,” with some intended connection made with Exodus 3:14:

- “He said to them, ‘I Am. Don’t be afraid’” (Common English Bible).
- “But He said to them, I AM! Do not fear” (LITV).

¹¹¹ Michaels, 357.

¹¹² Milne, 108.

¹¹³ Burge, *John*, pp 195-196.

- “But Yeshua says to them, ‘I am. Don’t be afraid’” (TLV).

With various Tanach themes in play, ranging from the Sinai theophany of God revealing Himself as the “I am” (Exodus 3:14) to the deliverance of Ancient Israel through the Red Sea (Exodus 12-14; Psalm 77:16, 19-20; 107:29-30), John 6:20 should be rendered along the lines of, “But He said to them, ‘I AM; do not be afraid’” (PME). Yeshua speaking “I am” while walking on the Sea of Galilee, and then seeing the boat with His Disciples immediately transported to the shore, serves as excellent proof of Him being integrated into the Divine Identity. At the same time, there are more uses of *egō eimi* which will be appearing in the Gospel of John, which require our attention.

John 6:26-40

“Yeshua is the Bread of Life”

“Yeshua answered them and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.’ Therefore they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?’ Yeshua answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.’ So they said to Him, ‘What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT” [Exodus 16:15; Numbers 11:7-9; Nehemiah 9:15]. Yeshua then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.’ Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, always give us this bread.’ Yeshua said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.’”

The day after crossing over to Capernaum, a crowd gathered to hear Him, including a number who had traveled from Tiberias by boat (John 5:21-25). As He sees the crowd, Yeshua lets them know, “you’re not looking for me because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the bread and had all you wanted!” (John 6:26, CJB/CJSB). Was the multitude really interested in seeing Yeshua demonstrate miracles of healing the sick (John 6:2) or of casting out demons—or instead Yeshua providing them with a great banquet (John 6:5-14)? While many of the people who sought out Yeshua had some legitimate needs in terms of sustenance, what Yeshua offered was far more than food for the stomach.

Already, those who had been present earlier at his feeding of five thousand had recognized Yeshua to be a Prophet: “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). Yeshua, however, details to the crowd how He is the one who will provide them with a food which cannot perish or spoil, which only He as the Son of Man—the One to whom all Creation must pay homage (cf. Daniel 7:13-14)—can provide. The Messiah says, “Don’t work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on Him, God the Father has put the seal of approval” (John 6:27, TLV). The crowd asks Him, “What must we do, that we may work the works of God?” (John 6:28, American Standard Version), rightly taken to mean, “What must we do to do the works God