

Identity is the close relationship that the Son has with the Father. And, when the close relationship that the Son and the Father have is considered, we tend to find that Yeshua is a very subversive figure, when it comes to much of our natural, human evaluation of what we often think the Messiah is to do.

JOHN 13:1-20

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Yeshua knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son of Simon*, to betray Him, *Yeshua*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, ‘Lord, do You wash my feet?’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Never shall You wash my feet!’ Yeshua answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.’ Yeshua said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*.’ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’ So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but *it is* that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME’ [Psalm 41:9]. From now on I am telling you before *it* comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *He*. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

All readers of the Gospels should be innately impressed by the humility demonstrated by Yeshua the Messiah, not only in His ministry service, teachings, and example—but also in His willingness to give of Himself freely, as a sacrifice for sinful humanity. The moments leading up to His betrayal, trial, and execution are of particular importance—not only for what it means to those of us who desire to gain inspiration for our service as His followers today—but for probing much of the character and nature of Yeshua. There are important statements made by the Messiah, and claims made by the Messiah, in the classic scene of Yeshua washing His Disciples feet—a seemingly simple action which could have been performed by any ancient household servant, but here as an act of humility offered by their Master.

The scene of Yeshua washing His Disciples' feet begins with a narration of Yeshua knowing that He was about to be betrayed (John 13:1-4). Some significant clues about the origins and nature of Yeshua are given. It is first stated in John 13:1, “Yeshua knew that His hour had come to depart from this world to the Father” (TLV), *hina metabē ek tou kosmou toutou pros ton patēra* (ἵνα μεταβῆ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα). It is further stated in John 13:3, “Yeshua knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was returning to God” (TLV), *hoti apo Theou exēlthen kai pros ton Theon hypagei* (ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθεν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπάγει). Both of these statements, for sure, denote a supernatural, extra-dimensional origin for Yeshua the Messiah. And, it is not only a matter of Yeshua having

originated in some way from God (John 13:1), as it is stated that He “was returning to God” (John 13:3, NIV).

There is some important dialogue which takes place between Peter and the Lord about his cleanliness, highlighting the point that not all of the Disciples should be regarded as clean, mainly pointing out the presence of Judas Iscariot (John 13:5-11). Yeshua performs the service of washing all of His Disciples’ feet, and then He asks them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” (John 13:12, CJB/CJSB). The purpose of Yeshua washing the Disciples’ feet is explained in terms of how the Disciples—especially with Yeshua soon to be gone—were to serve one another:

“You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for I am [*eimi gar, ἐγὼ γάρ*]. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example, that you also should do as I did to you” (John 13:13-15, PME).

Yeshua mentions a common human example, highlighting the gravity of the Disciples’ service to one another: “I assure you, servants aren’t greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them” (John 13:16, Common English Bible). Yet, Yeshua the Messiah, as the Rabbi and Master of these Disciples, did not think it beneath His dignity to wash their feet. And so, the Disciples performing such seemingly menial tasks to one another will come with a great blessing (John 13:17). This certainly also has ramifications as it involves how the Disciples will be received by others, as they will be sent out into the world to declare of Him (John 13:20).

Some critical inquiry is needed in how Yeshua obviously is expecting some opposition against Him to manifest in the coming hours. Not all present at the Last Supper meal are truly His own, and so He says how “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me’” (John 13:18, NIV). The reference to Psalm 49:1 in John 13:18, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me,” is applied to the betraying action of Judas Iscariot (cf. Mark 14:20; John 13:26-27). Psalm 41, as a whole, is a Davidic Psalm, which mainly is an appeal to the God of Israel and His faithfulness, particularly when enemies are present, and when a friend commits an act of betrayal. This was obviously appropriate for Yeshua, the King of Israel and descendant of David, to quote at the Last Supper:

“For the choir director. A Psalm of David. How blessed is he who considers the helpless; the LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble. The LORD will protect him and keep him alive, and he shall be called blessed upon the earth; and do not give him over to the desire of his enemies. The LORD will sustain him upon his sickbed; In his illness, You restore him to health. As for me, I said, ‘O LORD, be gracious to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.’ My enemies speak evil against me, ‘When will he die, and his name perish?’ And when he comes to see *me*, he speaks falsehood; His heart gathers wickedness to itself; when he goes outside, he tells it. All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they devise my hurt, *saying*, ‘A wicked thing is poured out upon him, that when he lies down, he will not rise up again.’ **Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.** But You, O LORD, be gracious to me and raise me up, that I may repay them. By this I know that You are pleased with me, because my enemy does not shout in triumph over me. As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, and You set me in Your presence forever. Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen” (Psalm 41:1-13).

That what is depicted in Psalm 41 is going to be repeated in some way in the train of events leading up to Yeshua’s execution, is hardly surprising. But what does Yeshua mean, as John 13:19 appears in the RSV, “I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take

place you may believe that I am he"? Here it is undeniable that actions are going to take place, which bear witness to Yeshua's identity. The clause *hoti egō eimi* (ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι) is rendered along an interesting spectrum. Many take it as a simple statement of Yeshua's self-identification: "that I am He" (NASU) or "that I am the one I claim to be" (Phillips New Testament). Other renderings, however, note some kind of connection to the *egō eimi* or "I am" formula: "that I AM" (LITV), "that I Am" (Common English Bible), or even "that I am what I am" (NEB/REB). There are examiners who note the presence of *egō eimi* or "I am" in John 12:19, and will make various connections between what is stated and either the burning bush theophany of Exodus 3:14, or other similar statements appearing in Tanach passages like Isaiah 41:4 or 43:10:

- F.F. Bruce: "Jesus tells them this now so that, when they see it happen, they may not only be prepared for it but may also realize more fully who their Teacher is. The Greek words *egō eimi* ('I am'), which are here rendered 'I am what I am' in NEB, are sometimes used in the most everyday sense, 'it is I' (as in John 6:20; 9:9), but in this Gospel especially (cf. John 8:24, 28) they tend to be used with overtones of the Ineffable Name of Ex. 3:14 or even more, of the affirmation 'I am He' of Isa. 41:4, 43:10, 13, etc. (*'ānî hû*, rendered as *egō eimi* in the LXX), in such a way as to hint at the speaker's oneness with the Father."²¹⁰
- D.A. Carson: "Here the object of Jesus' proleptic reassurance is that they might believe that *egō eimi* – an everyday expression that can be devoid of theological overtones...or can call to mind the ineffable name of God, the I AM, the I AM WHAT I AM (so NEB; cf. notes on 8:24, 28, 58; cf. Ex. 3:14), I AM HE of Is. 41:4; 43:10."²¹¹
- Bruce Milne: "Jesus' uncovering of the traitor is further evidence that he is 'I AM', the all-sufficient object of their faith."²¹²
- Craig S. Keener: "Jesus tells his disciples about the betrayal beforehand so that, rather than doubting his foresight in choosing Judas, they will recognize him as a prophet and that he controls the situation (13:19; cf. 14:29). The fulfillment of a prophet's words attests the prophet's accuracy (Deut 18:22). But Jesus' wording in several passages suggests an allusion to the promises of God in the biblical prophets: he foretold the future so that they might recognize his identity as YHWH (Isa 43:9-10). Similarly here, Jesus speaks so that the disciples might realize that 'I am,' alluding to Isaiah's 'I am' formula, which perhaps by this period already appeared in the Passover haggadah."²¹³

Whether one thinks that the *egō eimi* or "I am" in John 12:19 originates from Exodus 3:14 or another Tanach passage—it is easy to recognize that "From now on I am telling you, before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I am" (TLV). The clause *hoti egō eimi* surely does involve a recognition—when Yeshua is betrayed, humiliated, executed, and later resurrected—of Him being the prophesied Messiah of Israel. However, the clause *hoti egō eimi*—when particularly read in concert with other uses of *egō eimi* within the Gospel of John—should definitely be considered a statement of there being more involved: **the complete recognition on the part of the Disciples of not only Yeshua's Messiahship, but also Yeshua's integration into the Divine Identity.**

²¹⁰ Bruce, *John*, pp 287-288.

²¹¹ Carson, *John*, 471.

²¹² Milne, 200.

²¹³ Keener, *John*, 914.