

conclusive evidence of Him being the “I AM” or LORD God, readers are certainly invited to continue their investigation of the statements and actions of Yeshua.

JOHN 5:1-18

“After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Yeshua went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted. A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Yeshua saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Yeshua said to him, ‘Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.’ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.’ But he answered them, ‘He who made me well was the one who said to me, “Pick up your pallet and walk.”’ They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, “Pick up your pallet and walk”?’ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Yeshua had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. Afterward Yeshua found him in the temple and said to him, ‘Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.’ The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Yeshua who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Yeshua, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’ For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

John 5:1-18 records an important scene of Yeshua the Messiah taking the initiative to heal an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem.⁷⁰ Frequently for today’s Messianic people, their attention will be focused mainly on whether or not Yeshua’s healing of the man, was in violation of the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat* or not. Within the narrative, Yeshua directs the invalid, “Stand up, take your mat and walk” (John 5:8, NRSV). A miracle takes place, as it is recorded, “Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk” (John 5:9a, HCSB). The challenge with what took place is that, “Now that day was *Shabbat*” (John 5:9b, CJB/CJSB). It is to be recognized that within the mainstream Jewish Sabbath *halachah*, much of which would be later detailed in the Talmud, that helping to heal someone of an ailment was not prohibited. But, one does see the opinion expressed that while short term, acute conditions, could be treated on *Shabbat*—particularly those which were life-threatening—more long-term illnesses or handicaps could wait. As it is summarized,

“Further did R. Matia b. Harash say, ‘He who has a pain in his throat —they drop medicine into his mouth on the Sabbath.’ R. Yohanan suffered from scurvy. He went to a certain matron. She made him something on Thursday and on Friday. He said to her, ‘So what should I do on the Sabbath?’ She said to him, ‘You won’t need it any more’” (b.Yoma 84b).⁷¹

The healed man picks up his mat, and leaves the Pool of Bethesda. As John 5:10 appears in the rather popular ESV, “So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath,

⁷⁰ This entry has been condensed from the entry on John 5:1-19 appearing in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁷¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” But, have Torah and/or Tanach Sabbath regulations actually been violated or broken by Yeshua the Messiah? Laypersons encountering the statement in their English Bibles, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat” (John 5:10, NIV), might automatically assume that some commandment(s) of the Old Testament have been transgressed. Some commentators actually do see an intention of Yeshua, and/or the author of John, annulling the seventh-day Sabbath in this scene.⁷²

More commentators than not, however, do not draw the conclusion that an explicit violation of Torah Sabbath commandments has been committed by Yeshua the Messiah. Instead, the extra-Biblical regulations seen in the Mishnah, the thirty-nine stipulations of *m.Shabbat* 7:2, are often referenced, with specific attention given to “he who transports an object from one domain to another.”⁷³ The Jewish religious leaders, upon witnessing the healed man picking up his pallet or mat, would have concluded that their *Shabbat* orthopraxy has been violated by Yeshua, perhaps in His healing, but more so in the mat being transferred out of the Pool of Bethesda.

A selection of commentators on the Gospel of John, just about all of whom do not believe in a post-resurrection era continuance of the seventh-day Sabbath, recognize how the accusation in John 5:10 of Yeshua breaking the Sabbath almost entirely involved extra-Biblical regulations and/or an interpretive tradition.⁷⁴

Yeshua the Messiah did not break Torah or Tanach statutes of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*. Yeshua may have violated the extra-Scriptural statement of *m.Shabbat* 7:2, “he who transports an object from one domain to another,”⁷⁵ or *m.Shabbat* 10:5, “[He who takes out] a living person in a bed is exempt even on account of [taking out] the bed, for the bed is secondary to him. [If he took out] a corpse in a bed, he is liable.”⁷⁶ But, there has been no expressed violation of Moses’ Teaching with Yeshua directing the healed man to pick up his mat, although there has been some disregard for some human applications of various Torah and Tanach directions.

From a translation standpoint, it needs to be recognized how in John 5:10, “it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet” (RSV), “it is against the Law for you to carry your mat” (Goodspeed New Testament), or “It’s against *Torah* for you to carry your mat” (CJB/CJSB)—all include improper renderings of *ouk exestin* (οὐκ ἔξεστιν). Properly speaking, the verb *exesti* (ἔξεστι) means “it is allowed, it is in one’s power, is possible” (LS),⁷⁷ and notably lacks the root *nomos* (νόμος) or “law”—such as in 1 Timothy 1:8, “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully [*nomimōs, νομίμως*].”⁷⁸ Some more proper renderings of *ouk exestin* in John 5:10b include:

- “it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet” (NASU).
- “you aren’t allowed to carry your mat” (Common English Bible).
- “You shouldn’t be carrying your mattress” (Kingdom New Testament).
- “It’s not permitted for you to carry your mat” (TLV).

It should not at all be thought that John 5:10 includes the intention that Yeshua the Messiah violated the Sabbath, when no direct Biblical commandments were transgressed. As Bruce astutely concludes,

⁷² Witherington, *John*, 135.

⁷³ Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 187-188.

⁷⁴ Morris, *John*, pp 305, 306; Bruce, *John*, 125; Carson, *John*, 244; Milne, 95; Kruse, *John*, 149; Köstenberger, 181.

⁷⁵ Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 187-188.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁷⁷ LS, 273.

⁷⁸ “pert. to being in accordance with normal procedure, in accordance with rule(s)/law” (BDAG, 676).

“In Jesus’ eyes, the sabbath was given to be a blessing and not a burden to human beings, and it was most worthily kept when the purpose for which God gave it was most actively promoted. He therefore regarded acts of healing and relief not as permitted exceptions to the prohibition of work on the sabbath, but as deeds which should be done by preference on that day, because they so signally fulfilled the divine purpose in its institution.”⁷⁹

When accused of violating the Sabbath because of picking up his pallet or mat at the direction of Yeshua (John 5:8), the healed man responded to the Jewish religious leaders present, “The man who healed me said to me, ‘Take up your pallet, and walk’” (John 5:11, RSV). As the NIV has for John 5:12, “So they asked him, ‘Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?’” Yet, the former invalid had no real idea who had healed him, as it is recorded, “But he did not know the One who cured him, for a crowd being in that place, Jesus had withdrawn” (John 5:13, LITV).

No specified amount of time is noted as to the duration which passed between the man’s healing and him encountering Yeshua again. It is detailed, “Afterwards, Yeshua finds him in the Temple. He said to him, ‘Look, you’ve been healed! Stop sinning, so nothing worse happens to you’” (John 5:14, TLV). Sometimes in the Tanach, physical suffering was a consequence of prior sin (1 Kings 13:4; 2 Kings 1:4; 2 Chronicles 16:12). Seemingly a worse condition will await the healed individual (John 5:22-30), if any past sinfulness is not rectified. Upon hearing this from Yeshua, John 5:15 states, “The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well” (TNIV).

It is fair to recognize, as the text directs, that Yeshua the Messiah performing miracles on the Sabbath is something which the religious leaders were not too pleased with: “Because Yeshua was doing these things on *Shabbat*, the Judean leaders started persecuting Him” (John 5:16, TLV). As the NEB puts it, “It was works of this kind done on the Sabbath that stirred the Jews to persecute Jesus.”

An historical prompt is given to readers of John’s Gospel, regarding how, at least subsequent to the scene of the invalid healed at the Pool of Bethesda, Yeshua the Messiah would respond to His detractors among the Jewish religious leaders: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (John 5:16). Yeshua could have legitimately debated over the minutiae over the application of Sabbath instructions from the Torah with His detractors, *but instead* Yeshua associated His healing abilities with the working of God Himself on the Sabbath—the God who He poignantly refers to as “My Father,” and not the more common “our Father,” as observant Jews might have prayed.

It is specified in Genesis 2:2-3⁸⁰ that when the six days or *yamim* (יָמִים) of Creation were completed, that the Creator God rested (Heb. verb *shavat*, שָׁבַת). However, while God ceased from His creative actions for the universe, Planet Earth, and humankind—Jewish theologians and important minds always recognized that God as Creator had to always be in some position of monitoring His Creation (cf. Philo *Allegorical Interpretation* 1.5-6). By the end of the sixth day or *yom* (יּוֹם) of Creation, God ceased His creation of anything new. At the same time, though, God as the Eternal One does have to conduct some ongoing activity as the Being which is sustaining life, upholding the world and universe, and guiding various laws of time and space for the universe. The Father “working” (*ergazetai*, ἐργάζεται) on the Sabbath, involves such a sustaining of the cosmos.

⁷⁹ Bruce, *John*, 125.

⁸⁰ “By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3).

Kruse interjects the compelling thoughts,

“Does he continue to observe the sabbath? Apparently not, for his providential care of the world, his administration of justice (when people die on the sabbath), and his creation of life (when children are born on the sabbath) all continue unabated. Jewish scholars acknowledged this and made efforts to show that while God worked on the sabbath he was not guilty of breaking the sabbath law. They argued that God was not guilty of carrying things from one domain to another, because the whole of creation is his house and so he never carries things ‘outside’.”⁸¹

While God Himself, in His activity as Creator of sustaining His universe, is not “guilty” of violating the Sabbath—so Yeshua identifies Himself with His Father, in the statement, “and I am working” (*kagō ergazomai, κἀγὼ ἐργάζομαι*) in John 5:16. Yeshua’s healing of the invalid, at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, is to be regarded as quantitatively indifferent from the Creator’s ongoing maintenance of the cosmos. In the view of Köstenberger,

“He could have objected to the (inaccurate) Jewish interpretation of the OT Sabbath command that prohibited work normally done on the other six days of the week. These regulations (which referred to regular work) hardly applied to the man’s picking up his mat after a miracle cure. But rather than taking this approach, Jesus places his own activity on the Sabbath plainly on the same level as that of God the Creator. If God is above Sabbath regulations, so is Jesus.”⁸²

Two issues are stated in John 5:18, involving the mindset of many of the Jewish religious leaders and their being incensed at the actions of words of Yeshua: “So for this reason the Judean leaders kept trying even harder to kill Him—because He was not only breaking *Shabbat*, but also calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18, TLV).

The first action of the Messiah is detailed in the clause *eluen to sabbaton* (ἔλυνεν τὸ σάββατον), frequently rendered as “breaking the Sabbath.” It cannot go unnoticed how the verb *luō* (λύω) can mean “**to set free someth. tied or similarly constrained, set free, loose, untie**” and “**to do away with, destroy, bring to an end, abolish**” (BDAG),⁸³ as well as “*to loosen, i.e. weaken, relax*” (LS).⁸⁴ Yeshua’s instruction of Matthew 18:18, “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose [verb *luō*] on earth shall have been loosed in heaven,” is often and rightly regarded as a statement regarding *halachah* or orthopraxy, the right application of God’s Law for His people. As the Power New Testament interestingly renders John 5:18b, “He was loosing on the Sabbath.”⁸⁵

The second action, which would have far more enraged the Jewish religious leaders (also John 8:59; 10:31), is that Yeshua was believed to be committing blasphemy against the God of Israel (cf. Leviticus 24:13-16). As is narrated in John 5:18, “by saying that God was his own Father, he was claiming equality with God”(CJB/CJSB). More to the point, “but also [his] own-father he was saying the [very] God [to be] equal himself making to the [very] God” (Brown and Comfort),⁸⁶ *alla kai patera idion elegen ton Theon ison heauton poiōn tō Theō* (ἀλλὰ καὶ πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεὸν ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ). The First Century Jewish philosopher Philo would assert, using similar terminology, “But the selfish and atheistical mind, thinking

⁸¹ Kruse, *John*, 151.

⁸² Köstenberger, 185.

⁸³ BDAG, pp 606, 607.

⁸⁴ LS, 482.

⁸⁵ Also, “because He not only was loosening the Sabbath...” (PME).

⁸⁶ Brown and Comfort, 335.

itself equal with God [*isos einai Theō*, ἴσος εἶναι θεῶ]..." (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.49).⁸⁷ Indeed, any human being caught making himself out to be "God," would be viewed as not only guilty of self-deification, but also in significant violation of the thrust of Isaiah 40:25, "To whom then will you liken Me that I would be *his* equal [*v'esveh*, וְשֵׁוּי; that I should be like him, RSV; To whom can I be compared, NJPS]?" says the Holy One."

Bruce indicates that to the Jewish religious leaders in view, "here was a man whose words and actions implied a trespass across the inviolable boundary that separated God from mankind."⁸⁸ Morris further notes, "They discerned that the {presumed} sabbath breaking was no isolated rootless phenomenon. It proceeded from Jesus' view of His person and was consistent with it."⁸⁹

Either Yeshua's direct association with His Father's sustaining actions on the Sabbath are legitimate—and thus Yeshua is Himself legitimately God—or Yeshua of Nazareth was a lunatic and blasphemer, making Himself out to be something He was not. A Messianic Jewish theologian like David H. Stern usefully interjects, "Some Jews would like to reclaim Yeshua for the Jewish people by regarding him as a great teacher, which he was, but only human, not divine. Yeshua's claim here makes that option impossible."⁹⁰

While in the minds of Yeshua's detractors, He was guilty of the sin of self-deification, "making" Himself the equal of God—the discussion which will follow in John 5:19ff actually involves the unique agency of Yeshua as the Son. Far from Yeshua of Nazareth being a mortal man guilty of the blasphemous crime of self-deification, it is in the unique and significant actions that Yeshua is designated to perform, *as the Son sent from the Father*, where His true identity is to be investigated and weighed. Yeshua the Messiah did not "make" Himself God, but rather His unique identity—and integration into the Divine Identity—is predicated on His being sent from the Father.

JOHN 5:19-24

"Therefore Yeshua answered and was saying to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.'"

Yeshua has just been accused of "calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18b, TLV), the crime of self-deification. If Yeshua were a mortal claiming to be God, then Yeshua would be guilty of blaspheming the God of Israel, being found in sure violation of principles such as what is seen in Deuteronomy 32:39a: "See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life." On a lesser scale, Yeshua portraying Himself as having a special relationship with God the Father could merit Him an

⁸⁷ Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 30.

⁸⁸ Bruce, *John*, 127.

⁸⁹ Morris, *John*, 310.

⁹⁰ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 169.