

- Craig S. Keener: “In 7:28 Jesus may speak on two levels: although his opponents do not know that Jesus is from ‘above,’ judging purely on the basis of appearance (7:24), they are correct concerning his earthly origin. Even their knowledge of his earthly origin may be partly incorrect, however...Conversely, Jesus may say ‘you know’ only in the sense that he had made the knowledge available to them (14:4). But whatever else they knew or did not know, tragically they did not know God (7:28). Jesus, by contrast, knew him, because (cf. 3:13; 6:46) God was where Jesus was really from, and Jesus was God’s agent or representative (7:29).”¹³⁷

It is entirely inappropriate to quote John 7:28a, “You both know Me and know where I am from,” to claim an entirely terrestrial origin for the Messiah, when John 7:28b-29 speak to the Messiah’s origins as coming from the Father in Heaven: “and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me.” The audience who heard Yeshua knew that He was presenting Himself in terms of coming from a place greater than Planet Earth, and was claiming a knowledge and experience with the Heavenly Father that they did not, or could not, have. The hostile reaction of many to the words of Yeshua, bears ample testimony to how He was presenting Himself as having significant supernatural origins: “Then they were trying to seize Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come” (John 7:30, TLV).

Yeshua the Messiah is One who has been sent from the Father in Heaven (John 7:29). Our investigation as to who He truly is *begins* with this; our investigation as to who He truly is *does not begin* with approaching Him solely as a compelling teacher from Nazareth.

JOHN 8:12-20

“Then Yeshua again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’ So the Pharisees said to Him, ‘You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.’ Yeshua answered and said to them, ‘Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me. Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.’ So they were saying to Him, ‘Where is Your Father?’ Yeshua answered, ‘You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.’ These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.”

Yeshua the Messiah delivered some very significant statements about His mission, identity, and even nature during the scene recorded during the Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot*. Previously, it has been narrated how during the water drawing ceremony or *Simchat Beit ha-Sho’evah* (rejoicing of the house of water drawing), that Yeshua bid all to come to Him so that they would never go thirsty (John 7:37-39). Following this, in what are statements familiar to all Bible readers, “I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light which gives life” (John 8:12, CJB/CJSB), it is commonly and rightly concluded that the light of truth and salvation is found in the person of Yeshua of Nazareth. Following Yeshua as His disciple not only involves being redeemed from the powers of darkness, but experiencing a great life of fulfillment and blessing.

¹³⁷ Keener, *John*, 719.

What can often go overlooked by your basic Bible readers, is how with the water drawing ceremony of *Sukkot* or Tabernacles in the background, that Yeshua's statement of "I am the light of the world" in John 8:12, was quite apropos. The Mishnah records how *Sukkot* in Jerusalem was not only a significant time of fellowship and rejoicing, but how lamps would be lit all over, illuminating the crowds:

"Flute playing is for five or six days: This refers to the flute playing on *bet hashshoebah*, which overrides the restrictions of neither the Sabbath nor of a festival day. They said: Anyone who has not seen the rejoicing of *bet hashshoebah* in his life has never seen rejoicing. At the end of the first festival day of the Festival [the priests and Levites] went down to the women's courtyard. And they made a major enactment [by putting men below and women above]. And there were golden candleholders there, with four gold bowls on their tops, and four ladders for each golden candlestick. And four young priests with jars of oil containing a hundred and twenty *logs*, [would climb up the ladders and] pour [the oil] into each bowl. Out of the worn-out undergarments and girdles of the priests they made wicks, and with them they lit the candlesticks. And there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem which was not lit up from the light of *bet hashshoebah*. The pious men and wonder workers would dance before them with flaming torches in their hand, and they would sing before them songs and praises. And the Levites beyond counting played on harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets, and [other] musical instruments, [standing, as they played] on the fifteen steps which go down from the Israelites' court—corresponding to the fifteen Songs of Ascents which are in the Book of Psalms—on these the Levites stand with their instruments and sing their song. And two priests stood at the upper gate which goes down from the Israelites' court to the women's court, with two trumpets in their hands. [When] the cock crowed, they sounded a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained note on the *shofar*. [When] they got to the tenth step, they sounded a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the *shofar*. [When] they reached the courtyard, they sounded a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the *shofar*. They went on sounding the *shofar* in a sustained blast until they reached the gate which leads out to the east. [When] they reached the gate which goes out toward the east, they turned around toward the west, and they said, 'Our fathers who were in this place turned their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east (Ez. 8:16) But as to us, our eyes are to the Lord.' R. Judah says, 'They said it a second time, "We belong to the Lord. Our eyes are toward the Lord"' (m.*Sukkah* 5:1-4).¹³⁸

Of course, a city of Jerusalem widely basking in the light of lamps during *Sukkot*, is not the only significant factor in play when Yeshua declared "I am the light of the world." There are significant Tanach descriptions to be recalled, such as the pillar of fire which guided the Ancient Israelites in the Exodus (Exodus 14:19-25); in Psalm 27:1, David issues the exclaim, "The LORD is my light and my salvation"; light is representative of the saving activity of God (i.e., Isaiah 60:19-22; Ezekiel 1:4, 13, 26-28; Habakkuk 3:3-5). The Servant of the Lord is prophesied to display light of truth and redemption to both Israel and the world (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). Among Tanach passages traditionally considered during the Feast of Tabernacles would have been Zechariah 14:5b-7:

"Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light."

Advocates of either a high Christology of Yeshua being God, or a low Christology of Yeshua being a supernatural yet created entity—do both agree how Yeshua the Messiah in His mission and declarations, embodies all of the hopes represented by these Tanach passages.

¹³⁸ Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 288-289.

Believing in Yeshua is surely the means by which people can fully participate in God's light. Yet, when one encounters the source text of John 8:12, Yeshua's placement within the Divine Identity is certain: *egō eimi to phōs tou kosmou* (ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου), "I AM the light of the world" (PME). This invokes the "I am" formula spoken by the LORD or YHWH at the burning bush theophany of Exodus 3:14, which itself was obviously a light shining forth.

The Pharisees present question Yeshua, stating, "You are testifying about Yourself, so Your testimony is not valid" (John 8:13, TLV). They were likely reminding Yeshua of a previous statement that He had made: "If I testify about Myself, My witness is not valid" (John 5:31, TLV). And so, Yeshua having just stated something very strong and forthright about His mission and identity, informs His detractors that their motives for questioning Him are dishonorable:

"Yeshua answered them, 'Even if I do testify on my own behalf, my testimony is indeed valid; because I know where I came from and where I'm going; but you do not know where I came from or where I'm going. You judge by merely human standards. As for me, I pass judgment on no one; but if I were indeed to pass judgment, my judgment would be valid; because it is not I alone who judge, but I and the One who sent me'" (John 8:14-16, CJB/CJSB).

Yeshua informs His detractors that He knows where He is from and the mission that He is on (John 8:14b), even though they do not (John 8:14c), because they are only capable of judging according to the flesh or human standards (John 8:15). Even though Yeshua had the authority from His Father to judge (John 5:22), Yeshua's mission in coming to the Earth was not one of judgment, but rather in bringing salvation (John 3:17; 12:47). Yet, reflective of His Divine origins, Yeshua tells His opponents that "if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone" (John 8:16, NIV). Yeshua is not an independent actor, "because I am not-alone" (Brown and Comfort),¹³⁹ *hoti monos ouk eimi* (ὅτι μόνος οὐκ εἰμι), but He acts in accord with having been sent from the Father. Yeshua the Son acting in accord with the will of the Heavenly Father who sent Him, is based in a Torah ethos—the same Torah that these Pharisees doubtlessly held in high regard—as seen in Yeshua's statement, "And even in your *Torah* it is written that the testimony of two people is valid" (John 8:17, CJB/CJSB). Multiple human witnesses being required for the confirmation of facts is an imperative dynamic of the Torah (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15), and from this basis, the words and activities of Yeshua are done in conjunction with His Heavenly Father, confirming Yeshua's authentic service and mission.

What can easily escape English readers, of John 8:18 following, is how a repetition of the "I am" formula from Exodus 3:14, appears. Yeshua says, "I AM He who bears witness of Myself [*egō eimi ho marturōn peri emautou*, ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ], and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me" (PME). As Beasley-Murray observes of this, "Two complementary ideas are presented here: on the one hand the unity of the Father and the Son in the testimony and judgment declared by the Son and on the other hand their distinction."¹⁴⁰ It would not 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).

¹³⁹ Brown and Comfort, 352.

¹⁴⁰ Beasley-Murray, 129.

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

“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