

Reinhartz, in the relatively liberal *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, is notably forced to conclude for John 8:58, “I am, an allusion to God’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3.14), also perhaps a claim to preexistence (1.1-3).”¹⁶⁹

John 8:58-59 is an important passage that has led many over the centuries to correctly conclude that Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is indeed the LORD God, YHWH (יהוה), made manifest in the flesh. This is not only because of connections that can be made between Him saying “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM” (PME) and Exodus 3:14 or Isaiah 41:1, but also the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders in wanting to stone Him for blasphemy (John 8:59). While Yeshua’s statement of John 8:58, depicting His pre-existence of Abraham and invoking the burning bush theophany, is by no means exhaustive in explaining His nature and origins, **that John 8:58 is clear and decisive cannot be ignored or avoided by any honest reader.** Those who claim that John 8:58 is only a declaration of Yeshua’s Messiahship, have improperly examined the “I am” statement made, and irresponsibly evaluated the response of His opponents in wanting to see Yeshua stoned to death.

JOHN 9:35-38

“Yeshua heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ Yeshua said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him.”

In the previous encounter recorded in John 9:1-34, one sees Yeshua heal a blind man on the Sabbath, and as a result, questions about not only what happened, but about the identity of who performed this action, are seriously raised.¹⁷⁰ Various Jewish religious leaders question the man who was healed of his blindness, and he is subsequently ejected from the assembly. Yeshua then encounters him, asking whether or not he believes in Him, with an affirmative response from the one who was healed. Some form of honor is issued from the man, to the Messiah.

Upon seeing the man who was born blind, healed of his affliction, there was some debate as to the nature of this Yeshua who had taken it away. Notwithstanding internal Pharisaical debates over whether or not the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* had been violated or not (John 9:16), the immediate perception of the one who had been healed, was that Yeshua had to have been a prophet (John 9:17). And indeed, with some having said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” (John 9:16), just saying “He is a prophet” (John 9:17) would merit some strong opposition. When it is evaluated whether or not the former blind man “was to be

Abraam genesthai egō eimi (πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί), “Before Avraham came into being, I AM!” (CJB/CJSB), as *b'terem heyot Avraham ani hayiti* (בְּטֵרֵם הָיִיתָ אֲבִרָהָם אֲנִי הָיִיתִי), “before the existence of Avraham, I was” (DHE).

The Qal perfect first person singular verb *hayiti* (הָיִיתִי) is certainly witnessed in the Hebrew Tanach. In Joshua 3:7 we see, “Now the LORD said to Joshua, ‘This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses [ki k’asher hayiti im-Moshe, כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי עִם־מֹשֶׁה], I will be with you.’” The DHE rendering of John 8:58 can certainly be used to affirm Yeshua’s pre-existence of Abraham, but not necessarily Yeshua’s identification with the LORD or YHWH.

While the Hebrew *ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה) or “I AM” is seen in Exodus 3:14, and this was what we believe Yeshua orally spoke in the many places where the Greek *egō eimi* appears in the Gospels, the 1991 UBSHT has rendered John 8:58 with *ani hu* (אֲנִי הוּא). This simple present tense Hebrew expression for “I am” appears in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4 in reference to God, His supremacy, and His Deity. Why Delitzsch did not originally choose *ani hu*, which would have been far better than *hayiti* for his Hebrew New Testament translation, is probably unknowable, but is very problematic.

¹⁶⁹ Reinhartz, in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 177.

¹⁷⁰ Issues about whether or not Yeshua the Messiah actually violated the Sabbath are addressed in the entry for John 9:1-16 in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper*.

put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22), for recognizing Yeshua to perhaps even be the Messiah, the religious leaders insist, “we know that this man is a sinner” (John 9:24). Because of having been healed, all he can say is, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). And, because of the magnificence of the healing that had taken place, the one born blind cannot agree that Yeshua was a sinner, but rather that He was a person performing the will of God, and who was from God:

“We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing” (John 9:31-33).

Here, having briefly encountered Yeshua, who healed him of his blindness—and being pressured to denounce Yeshua as a sinner—the healed man recognizes Yeshua as being “from God” (*para Theou*, παρὰ θεοῦ). This alone was enough to see him expelled or thrown out of the synagogue (John 9:34), the CJB having a rather forceful rendering: “‘Why, you *mamzer!*’ they retorted, ‘Are you lecturing us?’ And they threw him out.” The man who was healed thought that Yeshua was a prophet (John 9:17). And indeed, recognizing Yeshua as a prophet is critical—if He is to be recognized as being anything greater or more substantial.

After having been cast out of the synagogue for thinking that Yeshua was a prophet or holy man, Yeshua then encounters him. It is narrated, “Yeshua heard that they had thrown him out. Finding him, He said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’” (John 9:35, TLV). Yeshua notably refers to Himself here by the Daniel 7:13-14 title of the “Son of Man,” to whom all of Creation will have to acknowledge as supreme. Yeshua has presented Himself to the one healed of blindness, as being more than just a prophet or holy man.

There is some variance in English versions as to how Yeshua is addressed: “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” (John 9:36, RSV/ESV) or “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” (NASU). When it is inquired *kai tis estin, kurie* (καὶ τίς ἐστιν, κύριε), should the title *Kurios* (κύριος) be rendered as “sir,” or the more proper, “Lord”? While the healed man was doubtlessly expressing respect to Yeshua, *Kurios* is appropriately rendered as the formal title “Lord” (KJV/NKJV, LITV, NASB/NASU) in view of the action that is witnessed in John 9:38 following.

Yeshua had responded to the man’s question in the affirmative: “You have seen Him; in fact, He is the One speaking with you” (John 9:37, HCSB), as there is no doubt that the formerly blind man has encountered the prophet (John 9:17) who had healed him. That some kind of honor is issued toward Yeshua by the man recently expelled from the synagogue, is clear enough from any English rendering of John 9:38. From the source text, the man exclaims, *pisteuō Kurie* (πιστεύω, κύριε), “I believe, Lord!” (HCSB), and then it is stated *kai prosekunēsen autō* (καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ). This latter clause does include a usage of the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) or “worship,” with a selection of English versions rendering it as “a/And he worshiped h/Him” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU, NIV/TNIV, HCSB). What makes the rendering “And he worshiped Jesus” (NLT; also Common English Bible) so significant, is that the man who had been healed, is portrayed as giving to Yeshua the Messiah the same honor due to the God of Israel. The thoughts of a number of commentators are worthwhile to note here:

- Leon Morris: “The verb occurs several times in ch. 4 of worshipping God, and it is found in the same sense in 12:20. It can be used of paying very high respect to men, but in John it is more natural to understand it of paying divine honors. The man has already recognized that Jesus came from God (v. 33). Now he goes a step further. He gives to Jesus that reverence that is appropriate to God.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Morris, *John*, pp 495-496.

- D.A. Carson: “The NIV reports that *he worshipped him*: The Greek verb *proskyneō* means to prostrate oneself before’, ‘to do obeisance to’, and frequently occurs in contexts where there is no notion of worship or adoration. The verb takes on the force of ‘to worship’ when the person before whom one prostrates oneself is God. It is not clear that the healed man is yet ready to address Jesus as Thomas did after the resurrection, ‘My Lord and my God’ (20:28). It is likely that the healed man is offering obeisance to Jesus as the redeemer from God, the revealer of God. That is already a great step forward from his earlier reference to Jesus (vv. 11, 17, 33). But the Evangelist, who knows that the Christological confessions in his Gospel will climax with 20:28 (cf. 1:1, 18), doubtless understands that the healed man is ‘worshipping’ better than he knew.”¹⁷²
- Colin G. Kruse: “He was making his final step to faith in Jesus. That he ‘worshipped’ him shows he identified Jesus as the glorious Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14.”¹⁷³
- Craig S. Keener: “The healed man responds with a heightened Christology as soon as the word makes a more adequate interpretation possible (9:38). Gentiles sometimes prostrated themselves before rulers, and Jewish people apparently often followed suit; even looking at another’s feet instead of another’s face showed respect for the other’s higher status. It could connote intense respect (e.g., Rev 3:9) or that one was begging or seeking mercy. Thus the term by itself need not indicate worship of a deity; but in its broader Johannine context (4:20-24; 12:20-21), including John’s Christology (1:1, 18; 20:28), it fits the Johannine portrait of Jesus’ deity and invites John’s own audience to worship Jesus.”¹⁷⁴
- J. Ramsey Michaels: “The verb ‘worshipped’ implies a visible act of obeisance, signaling his allegiance to Jesus as ‘Lord’ by falling prostrate at his feet. In this sense, he could not ‘worship’ Jesus until he had seen him face to face. Jesus’ silence signals his acceptance of the man’s worship, in contrast to the angel in the book of Revelation in the presence of the prophet John (Rev 19:10; 22:9), or Peter in the presence of Cornelius. Even though he is ‘Son of man’ (v. 37), Jesus does *not*, like Peter, tell the prostrate worshiper, ‘Get up. I myself am a man too!’ (Acts 10:26; see also Acts 19:15). By giving no answer, he acknowledges his deity.”¹⁷⁵

Yeshua the Messiah being shown worship, by a mortal human being, would be considered idolatry, if He were not genuinely God. All readers of John 9:38 recognize that Yeshua was honored, with many concluding that He was actually worshipped by the man healed of blindness. But, not all examiners¹⁷⁶ are agreed that Yeshua was shown worship in John 9:38. Some, who do hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, are unsure in this instance, as to whether or not Yeshua was actually “worshipped.” Milne thinks, “He ‘prostrated himself’ is more accurate, yet it is impossible to think that worship is not implicit. Jesus certainly does not disavow it.”¹⁷⁷ This leaves the activity directed toward Yeshua open-ended. And initially, it does have to be recognized the man healed of blindness, may have first intended to simply prostrate or bow down to Yeshua as a sign of respect and honor. However, readers of the Gospel of John—and indeed the entire Apostolic Writings—are aware that all forms of honor,

¹⁷² Carson, *John*, 377.

¹⁷³ Kruse, *John*, 230.

¹⁷⁴ Keener, *John*, 795.

¹⁷⁵ Michaels, pp 568-569.

¹⁷⁶ Beasley-Murray, pp 159-160.

¹⁷⁷ Milne, 143.

respect, prostration, and obeisance directed toward the Lord Yeshua, **are ultimately forms of worship**, even if applied retroactively. Witherington, noting that prostration does take place before Yeshua, stresses that this action has to be taken within a wider reading of the Fourth Gospel:

“[I]t is an important foretaste of what the evangelist is wishing to be the outcome of the pilgrimage of faith (cf. John 20:28)—an adequate confession and worship of Jesus. This story then could be used as a paradigm to reveal the progress of a soul and so lead others in the same direction.”¹⁷⁸

John 9:38 includes a definite employment of the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) or “worship.” However, it is to be witnessed that various versions which are employed in either Messianic Judaism and/or the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, indicate that their translators or publishers, are unsure about the kind of honor or veneration issued by the man healed of blindness, to Yeshua in John 9:38:

- “‘Lord, I trust!’ he said, and he kneeled down in front of him” (CJB/CJSB).
- “And he said, ‘I believe, Lord:’ and he fell down and prostrated himself before Him” (Power New Testament).
- “And he said, ‘Master, I believe,’ and bowed before Him” (ISR Scriptures-2009).
- “He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ and he bowed down before him” (The Messianic Writings).

While lexically, John 9:38 can be rendered with “he prostrated himself at his feet” (Montgomery New Testament), theologically, and in the scope of the wider issues of the nature of the Messiah in play, the verb *proskuneō* should be rendered as “worship.” Thankfully, among Messianic versions, the TLV has rendered John 9:38 with, “He said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.”

¹⁷⁸ Witherington, *John*, 184.