

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them” (Matthew 15:30, RSV)—may claim that Yeshua was only acting like a Prophet from Ancient Israel, via such miracles, and/or just a supernatural but ultimately created agent sent from God. The response from the audience, to all that was taking place, as narrated in Matthew 15:31, was *kai edoxasan ton Theon Israēl* (καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν Ἰσραήλ), “And they praised the God of Israel” (TLV).¹²⁷

Immediately prior to Matthew recording how Yeshua was healing people along the Sea of Galilee, His encounter with The Syrophoenician or Canaanite woman (also Mark 7:24-30) is detailed:

“Yeshua went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.’ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, ‘Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.’ But He answered and said, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and *began* to bow down before Him¹²⁸, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’ And He answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ But she said, ‘Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Yeshua said to her, ‘O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish’ And her daughter was healed at once” (Matthew 15:21-28).

According to Mark 7:24, “Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth” (RSV). Recognizing how the region of the Galilee was not entirely Jewish, is important for readers to consider, especially as it concerns the point of Matthew 15:31: “and they glorified the God of Yisra’el” (HNV). Aaron M. Gale specifies in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, “Here the phrase might indicate a Gentile crowd.”¹²⁹ If indeed, the majority of the audience which was being healed were pagans, then a recognition of the power of the One True God of Israel would be necessary *first*, before any conclusions could be made or discerned about the nature of the Messiah present.

Polytheistic pagans, when seeing the God of Israel move, must first acknowledge Him and His exclusivity *before* they can deduce anything about the origins of the Messiah. In Yeshua’s prayer of John 17:3, the Messiah would later state, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Yeshua the Messiah whom You have sent.” If anyone is to have eternal life in the Messiah Yeshua, they must first recognize the Lord God or YHWH as the exclusive Deity, dismissing all other potential gods or goddesses (discussed further). Once this is accomplished, then it can be recognized—as those who advocate a high Christology would affirm—that Yeshua is integrated into the Divine Identity.

Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-20 **“Yeshua’s Disciples Confess Him to be the Messiah”**

“Yeshua went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ They told Him, saying, ‘John the Baptist; and others *say* Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.’ And He *continued* by questioning them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And He warned them to tell no one about Him” (Mark 8:27-30).

¹²⁷ The CJB actually has, “and they said a *b’rakhah* [blessing] to the God of Isra’el.”

¹²⁸ Grk. *hē de elousa prosekuneit autō* (ἡ δὲ ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνει αὐτῷ); or, “But she came and worshipped him” (American Standard Version).

¹²⁹ Aaron M. Gale, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 29.

“Now when Yeshua came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Yeshua said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My [assembly]; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.’ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Messiah” (Matthew 16:13-20).

“And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, ‘Who do the people say that I am?’ They answered and said, ‘John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.’ And He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Peter answered and said, ‘The Messiah of God’” (Luke 9:18-20).

In this narrative, the Disciples of Yeshua had apparently not just witnessed their Master enough—but also the responses of the people who had encountered Him, His teachings, and His miracles—to be asked the question by the Lord, “Who are people saying I am?” (Mark 8:27, CJB/CJSB) or “Who are the crowds saying I am?” (Luke 9:18, CJB/CJSB). The dialogue recorded in Matthew 16:13 actually invokes the titular “Son of Man” reference to Yeshua, which is taken from Daniel 7:9-14: “Who are people saying the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13, CJB/CJSB). The response of the Disciples to Yeshua is that the crowds who had encountered Him were saying that He was probably any one of the Prophets or significant spiritual leaders who had been seen in Israel’s past history, or that He was John the Immerser/Baptist (Mark 8:28; Matthew 16:14; Luke 9:19).

After stating what the people or crowds had been saying of Him, Yeshua then asks His Disciples: “But you...who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:29, CJB/CJSB; also Matthew 16:15; Luke 16:20). The response of Peter to Yeshua was, “You are the Messiah¹³⁰” (Mark 8:29, NRSV); “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God¹³¹” (Matthew 16:16, NRSV); “The Messiah of God¹³²” (Luke 9:20, NRSV). In Matthew’s record, Yeshua details to Peter how the Heavenly Father has revealed this truth to him (Matthew 16:17), and how on Himself some significant Kingdom activity will take place regarding the *ekklēsia* (Matthew 16:18).¹³³ Yeshua also directed His Disciples that it was not yet time for people to publicly know Him to be the Messiah (Mark 8:30; Matthew 16:20; Luke 16:21).

Yeshua did tell Peter “on/upon this rock” (Matthew 16:18), what the source text has as *epi tautē tē petra* (ἐπὶ τᾷ πετρᾷ), activity would take place. Those in Roman Catholicism have interpreted this as meaning that from the Apostle Peter to the present have passed a steady line of papal successors. Protestants have rejected this view, with many concluding that “this rock” spoken of is instead the Messiah, who would grant spiritual authority to those like Peter and

¹³⁰ Grk. *su ei ho Christos* (σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός); “You are the *Mashiach*” (Mark 8:29, CJB/CJSB).

¹³¹ Grk. *su ei ho Christos ho huios tou Theou tou zōntos* (σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος); “You are the *Mashiach*, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16, CJB/CJSB).

¹³² Grk. *ton Christon tou Theou* (τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ); “The *Mashiach* of God!” (Luke 9:20, CJB/CJSB).

¹³³ Consult the entry for Matthew 16:18-19 in the author’s publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*, for technical details on its connection to passages such as 2 Samuel 7:27; 1 Kings 11:38; Psalm 89:4; and most especially Jeremiah 31:4; 33:7, involving the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom.

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the Apostles. If Yeshua is indeed to be considered “the rock,” then the fact that God is often referred to as “rock” in Tanach or Old Testament, is something important to factor in. As seen in David’s prayer of 2 Samuel 22:3:

“My God, my rock [Elohei tzuri, אֱלֹהֵי צוּרִי], in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence” (2 Samuel 22:3).

TWOT summarizes various uses and associations of the Hebrew *tzur* (צוּר) or “rock,” the Greek equivalent being *petra* (πέτρα), and how it is frequently related to God:

“Yahweh himself is many times called a Rock; 1Sam 2:2 says, ‘There is no rock like our God.’ Yahweh is a Rock, not in being represented as an idol carved from stone, but in that he is totally reliable. He is a sure source of strength and he endures throughout every generation. There is no unrighteousness found in him; he is completely upright (Deut 32:4; Psa 92:15 [H 16]). God is a Rock of salvation (Deut 32:15; Psa 89:26 [H 27]). He is a strong refuge in which his people may take shelter from any difficulty (cf. Psa 94:22). In distress the psalmists cry out to Yahweh so that they may experience the security of his steadfast endurance (Psa 27:5; Psa 28:1). *šûr* thus appears in theophoric names: Zuriel (Num 3:35, ‘my Rock is El’); Zurishaddai (Num 1:6, ‘my Rock is Shaddai’). The man who relies on God as his Rock will not be greatly moved (Psa 62:2, 6, 7 [H 3,7,8]). When Israel strays, Isaiah exhorts them to ‘look to the Rock from which you were hewn’ (Isa 51:1). Perhaps he is alluding to Deut 32:4. Yahweh gave birth to Israel through Abraham’s faith in him. Isaiah encourages the people to trust in Yahweh; as a result they shall have perfect peace (Isa 26:4ff). The quality of strength connoted by ‘rock’ applies not only to defense but also to aggressive leadership in battle (Psa 18:3 [H 32-49]; Psa 144:1). The quality of authentic endurance assures Habakkuk that Yahweh will bring the wicked to judgment (Hab 1:12). Yahweh’s ability to protect and to help his people as a Rock sets him apart as the only true Rock (2Sam 22:32; Isa 44:8).”¹³⁴

If “this rock” in Matthew 16:18 is a reference to Yeshua, as many conclude, then it can be taken as supporting or ancillary evidence in favor of Yeshua’s Divinity, as the LORD or YHWH is frequently associated to be “the rock” in the Tanach or Old Testament. More critically to the record, of Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-20, is how the Disciples’ response to their Teacher’s question, was an affirmation of His Messiahship. Yeshua’s Disciples concluded that He was the Messiah, while the crowds at large were mostly thinking that Yeshua was one of the Prophets or John the Immerser/Baptist.

Theological examiners in the Twentieth and now Twenty-First Centuries take for granted the Messiahship of Yeshua, as they have been often raised in a Christian environment where Jesus was already affirmed to be the Messiah. For many First Century Jews who encountered Yeshua—hearing His parables and teachings, witnessing His miracles—they were often at a conundrum of what to think of Him. *Was this Yeshua just another prophet?* The Disciples’ declaration that this Yeshua was the Messiah was most imperative, as it indicated their own association with and commitment to the Messianic mission as foretold in the Tanach. Enough investigation and reasoning had been conducted for the Disciples to recognize that Yeshua was more than just some interesting teacher, or even anointed prophet.

While Yeshua is declared to be the Messiah by His Disciples, there was no doubt more investigation and reasoning to take place, especially in terms of what it mean for Him to be “the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). And indeed, the point should be well taken that in order to consider *any* sort of supernatural origins for the Messiah, He must first be recognized as more than just a good teacher or an anointed prophet. Subsequent to recognizing Yeshua as

¹³⁴ John E. Hartley, “צוּר,” in TWOT, 2:762.

the Messiah of Israel, *then* can it best be recognized how His origins are from eternity (cf. Micah 5:2).

Mark 8:31-9:1; Matthew 16:27-28; Luke 9:21-27

“Yeshua Will Return in Glory to Triumphantly Judge”

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’ And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. And Yeshua was saying to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power’” (Mark 8:31-9:1).

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS [Psalm 28:4; 62:12; Proverbs 24:12]. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matthew 16:27-28).

“But He warned them and instructed *them* not to tell this to anyone, saying, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.’ And He was saying to *them* all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels. But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:21-27).

Yeshua the Messiah taught His Disciples that not only would He be betrayed and executed (Mark 8:31; Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22), but that those who would be His followers would have to make significant sacrifices, putting aside themselves (Mark 8:34-37; Matthew 16:25-27; Luke 9:23-25). Those who might claim Yeshua as the Messiah, but later find themselves ashamed of Him, will find themselves ashamed by the Lord when He returns and the Messianic Kingdom is fully consummated. Yeshua makes light of His future, triumphant arrival in glory, invoking Himself as the Daniel 7:9-14 Son of Man (discussed previously)—and activity which is not at all isolated from that of either the Heavenly Father or wider Heavenly host (Mark 8:38; Matthew 16:27; Luke 9:26). Yeshua informs His Disciples how some of them will be alive to see this (Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:28; Luke 9:27), as textually what immediately follows is Peter, James, and John experiencing the supernatural realities of the Kingdom in the scene of Yeshua’s Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13; Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36).

That Yeshua is going to return in glory, is certain enough from this direction He issued to His Disciples: “when he may come in the glory of his Father, with the holy messengers” (Mark 8:38, YLT); “For, the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of his Father, with his