

THE “I AMs” OF JESUS (Scripture)

Hebrew (אֶהְיֶה, ehyeh); Greek (ἐγώ εἰμι)

Last week we introduced the “I AMs” of Jesus Christ by looking at the connection between God as the “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14-15) and God as Yahweh/Jehovah/LORD of the Old Testament (His covenant name with Israel and meaning “I Am” as the third person version of ehyeh). We then looked at the 12 times that “I am” is used in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). We discovered that the use of “I am” is not exclusive to God or Jesus Christ. We also discovered that Jesus did declare Himself as the “I AM” with four titles in the Synoptic Gospels. He declared that “I AM” the Christ (Messiah/Anointed One), The Son of the Blessed One (worthy of praise), the Son of man, and the Son of God (Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:70).

This week we are going to look at some of the uses of “I am” in the Gospel of John. There is what is known as the “7 Great I AMs of John” that give seven magnificent declarations about who Jesus was, is, and forever will be. We will not be looking at those tonight, but will in future studies.

“I am” is used 24 (or 25) times in the Book of John; all but one of these by Jesus or in reference to Jesus. Tonight, we will briefly look at 12 of the uses. The following 12 uses are found in John (apart from the uses relating to the “7 Great I AMs”):

- 1) It is used of the blind man (John 9:8-11), when asked by neighbors and others if he was the blind beggar. He said “I am (he)” v.9. Then, they asked how his eyes were opened, and he told them by Jesus.
- 2) It is used separated by two Greek words in John 4:25-26. It says, “Jesus said unto her: I who speaks unto you am.” Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman, replies to her statement that the Messiah (called Christ) will come and tell all things. He says: I (who speaks to you) am. A clear declaration that He is the promised Messiah.
- 3) It is used in John 6:20 as we pointed out last week. In the miracle of Jesus’ walking on the water, Jesus was unrecognized by the disciples, and says: “It is I (literally “I am”), be not afraid.” Jesus is the visible “I AM,” the self-revelation of God, and is identifying Himself to calm their fears.
- 4) It is also found four times in John 8:23, 24, and 28. To get the whole context, we will start with Jesus speaking in the temple to the religious leaders, and read John 8:21-30. Jesus tells them that He will go where they cannot come and they will die in their sin (singular- sin of unbelief- 8:21-22). In verse 23, I am is used twice as Jesus declares that “I am” is from “above” and is not of this world (as opposed to “beneath” and of this world). In verse 24, He repeats that if they believe not that “I am,” they will die in their sins (plural- particular attitudes, words and actions demonstrating unbelief). Jesus is saying that unless they believe that He is God (I AM) the Son and the promised Messiah, they will die in their sins. After further discussing with them Who He and His Father are,

they understood not (8:25-27). So, in verse 28, Jesus repeats “I am” the fourth time, saying: “When (as soon as) you have lifted up (exalted; elevated) the Son of man, then you will know (experientially) that I AM” and that I always do those things that please My Father (8:28b-29). Jesus is referring back to John 3:12-15 where the bronze snake raised up in the wilderness became a prophetic symbol of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. The result of this interaction with those in the temple was “many believed on Him” (8:30).

- 5) A very significant usage is found in John 8 when Jesus says: “Verily, verily, (amen, amen; truly, truly), before Abraham was (became), I AM” (8:58). Jesus, having declared “I am” three times earlier in John 8, gets into a lengthy discussion with the Jewish religious leaders, who are declaring themselves as “Abraham’s seed” and that God is their Father (8:33-41). Jesus said: If God is your Father, you would love Me; but you seek to kill Me; so, the devil is your father (8:42-44). They, then, ask if He is greater than their father Abraham (who is dead)? Jesus said: Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day (8:45-56). They ask: How? You are not even 50 years old; and have you seen Abraham? (8:47). Note: Why 50; Jesus was 33? Barclay notes that 50 was the age the Levites retired from their service in the temple (Numbers 4:3).

Jesus replied that He (I AM) existed before Abraham. Thus, He was claiming to be God (the preexistent I AM; a title of Deity). His words were considered by these Jews as openly blasphemous; and they picked up stones to cast (throw) at Him (8:59). Jesus was hidden and went out of the temple. This is one of the strongest statements of the Deity of Jesus Christ in all of Scripture because of its grammatical structure lacking a predicate (a word that predicates something about its subject; like bread of life; Messiah; etc.).

- 6) We next look at John 13:19 for another interesting I am. Jesus, having washed His disciple’s feet and told them to be servants that wash one another’s feet (13:4-17), also tells His disciples that He speaks not of them all (knowing who would betray Him - 13:2, 11). In verse 18, He goes on to say He knows (perceives) whom He chose (divine selection), thus fulfilling Scripture. Then, the verse (13:19): Where Jesus tells His disciples before it happens (prophecy), so that (purpose), when it happens, they will believe that “I AM.” The Omniscient Lord knows and declares things before they come to pass, then Sovereignly directs those things as only the Eternal God (Son of God) can do. He then declares to them all; that one of them will betray Me (13:20-21).
- 7) Three more occurrences are in John 18:5, 6, and 8. Having finished His High Priestly prayer (John 17), Jesus and His disciples cross the brook Kidron into the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives (18:1-2). Judas accompanied by a band (large group) of soldiers come at night with lanterns, torches, and weapons to arrest Jesus (18:3). Jesus knowing (omnisciently) all things about to happen, “goes forth” (no attempt to escape) and asks them: Whom seek you? They answered; Jesus of Nazareth (His human name). Jesus said unto them: I am. Here He declares Himself to be the God-man, (18:5). Then, “as soon as He said, I AM,” they (all those arresting Him including Judas that “stood with them”) went backward (departed away backward) falling to the ground” (18:6).

This stunning effect on Jesus' arresters was like a blast of Divine power at the moment of the spoken words (I AM). Commentators say there is no proof that this was a display of miraculous power as they were just simply recoiling from surprise and abhorrence of what they considered blasphemy.

Note: They did not (and they should have) fallen forward to their knees worshipping the Great I AM and humbling themselves before the God-man (Christ Jesus).

Then, in verse 7, Jesus asks them the second time: Whom seek you? And they answer again: Jesus of Nazareth.

Note: They obviously didn't believe that He was the God-man, because they still just answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Then, "Jesus answered: I have told you that I Am" (third usage in this passage- 18:8). Jesus, then, goes on to command them to let the disciples go.

Note: Jesus is totally in charge of the situation (though He was willingly being arrested). With all of them lying on their backs, Jesus could have just walked away. Though they had come to arrest Him, He was the one giving orders and He Sovereignly directed the whole situation. They obeyed Him and let the disciples go. The arrest continues and He ultimately goes to the cross for us all. Thank you, Jesus!

In summary, John has reiterated and/or declared what the Synoptic Gospel revealed about the Great I AM: that Jesus is the Messiah (4:25-26), God the Son (8:23); the Messiah (8: 24); the Son of man (8:28); the Preexistent, Eternal God (8:58); the Omniscient Eternal God (13:19); and He is Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man (18:5, 6, 8).