



10

Jesus Is the Great I AM

Key Theme

- God reveals His character in the Bible.

Key Passages

- Exodus 3:14; John 6:35, 8:12, 8:56–58, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1, 15:5, 18:1–9

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Jesus's claim to be God in the I AM statements.
- Identify the word pictures Jesus used to refer to Himself.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will review the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

- Write on the board, "Did Jesus ever claim to be God?"
- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God's Word

Jesus revealed His identity as God when He proclaimed, "Before Abraham was, I AM." The Jewish leaders were astonished and upset because they knew Jesus was saying He was God. Jesus also described Himself with word pictures that made the claim "I AM." I am the door; I am the way, the truth, and the life; and I am the good shepherd, to name a few. Jesus wanted people to know He was God.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Jesus—"I AM"

The students will examine all of the "I AM" statements of Jesus as He claims to be God. They will explore the metaphors that He attaches to several of those statements.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages along with this background.

We spoke in Lesson 9 about Jesus's teaching. He often taught in parables using images and analogies that those with eyes to see and ears to hear would understand (Matthew 13:16). These parables often left people wondering what He was teaching. And Jesus often privately explained the meaning and the lesson of the parable to His disciples.

However, Jesus didn't always speak in parables. He was at times direct, as we will witness in today's study.

The scribes and Pharisees were offended at what Jesus was doing and saying—especially at His claim that He came from God and was sent by God (John 8:42). The Pharisees could not fathom His teaching that those who would keep the word of Jesus would never see death (John 8:51). They claimed He had a demon and questioned how He could say such a thing since even their father Abraham was dead. Was Jesus claiming to be greater than Abraham (John 8:53)? That could not be so. And yet, yes, Jesus was claiming to be greater than Abraham. And the words He spoke stunned those who were listening to Him, because they did not really hear. He answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).

This enraged those arguing with Him, and they picked up stones to throw at Him. They decided then and there He was deserving of death because of that claim. What exactly was the claim He was making? These scribes and Pharisees were well versed in the Old Testament. They considered themselves experts in the Word.

They were very familiar with God's words to Moses as he revealed Himself at the burning bush when God said, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Of course, this is a name only the holy Creator God could have as it denotes complete independence and self-existence. In His self-existence, He is all-sufficient. He needs no one! It denotes eternity, one who always was and always will be. It could only describe the one true God. And this was Jesus's testimony—I AM God. And they hated Him even more.

Of course, Jesus would not be intimidated. And John recorded seven more instances where Jesus made

the claim, "I AM," to confirm that He is God in human form and the promised Messiah who would save His people from their sins. How did Jesus, the God-Man, describe Himself?

- "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). He is essential to life—not just physical life but eternal life.
- "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). There is no other source of spiritual light or truth. He alone can explain all things.
- "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). Salvation comes from no one else. Eternal life comes through Him alone—the only door.
- "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11; see Ezekiel 34). There is only one good shepherd—it is Jesus—who gave His life for His sheep. It is through Him alone that eternal life is gained. And through Him alone that we are guided, disciplined, comforted, and restored.
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). There is no resurrection or life without Jesus. He has conquered death forever. Trusting in this truth will bring comfort in the midst of the despair, sin, sickness, and evil of this present age.
- "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus again claimed Himself to be exclusive. He alone is the only way. He alone offers the only truth. And He alone promises eternal life with God the Father.
- "I am the true vine" (John 15:1, 15:5). As we grow, Jesus, as the true vine, will continue to provide us with the nourishment and sustenance we need to persevere. We must abide in the vine—Jesus—in order to bear fruit. And just like a branch cut off from the vine cannot continue to grow, we can do nothing without abiding in Jesus Christ (John 15:4–5).

Jesus is God. His claim to be "I AM" left no doubt in the minds of the unbelieving Jews. They accused Him of blasphemy, and the Bible records several times when the Jews attempted to stone Jesus because He made Himself equal with God (John 5:18, 8:59, 10:33). They did not succeed those times. But eventually God's perfect plan of redemption through Jesus would be fulfilled. And Christ would be crucified because of His

rightful claim that He is the great I AM, God in human form, the King of the Jews (John 19:19).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The truth that Jesus is God in the flesh, the second Person of the Trinity, and fully divine is an explicit teaching of the New Testament. Jesus Himself claimed equality with God the Father many times (e.g., John 8). Paul spoke of Christ's deity frequently (e.g., Colossians 1–2). The writer of Hebrews wrote of Christ's deity (e.g., Hebrews 1–2). And this view has been the dominant, orthodox view of the Christian church since its inception. However, there have been challenges to this truth in the past as well as today.

Arius was a teacher in the early 4th century AD. Arius did not believe that Jesus was truly God in the flesh. Arius taught that Jesus was created by God as the first act of creation, so Jesus was a created being with divine attributes but was not divine Himself. This view came to be called Arianism, and his followers were Arians. The teachings of Arius had a significant impact on the early church which resisted the heresy by creating many of the early creeds. These creeds defined the biblical, orthodox view of Jesus's nature.

Though Arius was labeled as a heretic, his ideas did not die out completely. In fact, there are modern-day groups, which like Arius, deny the full divinity of Jesus. One of these groups is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Founded in the mid-nineteenth century by Charles Taze Russell, this false religion claims several million adherents around the world. Like the ancient Arians, these modern-day Witnesses have demoted Jesus to something much less than He is.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus was the first creation of God, thus denying His deity and eternal preexistence. They also teach that before His birth, Jesus was the archangel Michael. They claim that 2,000 years ago, God transferred the life of Jesus to Mary's womb. Though adherents to this false religion may seem sincere and persuasive, we must be on our guard against their teaching and point them to the biblical truth about Jesus.

Another group that denies the full deity of Jesus Christ is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

(LDS), or Mormons. Mormonism teaches that Jesus was first begotten as a spirit, the firstborn offspring of God the Father (Elohim) and one of His heavenly wives. According to Mormon beliefs, God the Father dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives, producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies. Jesus's incarnation is taught to be the result of sexual relations between the Heavenly Father (who has a physical body) and Mary. Again, despite the good image that Mormons may have in their communities and the zeal with which they seek converts, their beliefs are opposed to God's Word, and we must seek to share the truth with them.

Hundreds of years ago, after nearly a century of debate at early church councils, the Christian church officially denounced Arianism as a false doctrine. But it did not die out. It simply morphed and changed its name. But as we see in our lesson this week, the Bible is clear that Jesus is the great I AM. His full deity is proclaimed repeatedly in the New Testament. Jesus must be God in order to accomplish eternal salvation for sinners. The weak Jesus of the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others (e.g., Islam) cannot offer forgiveness of sins and save sinners. When Jesus is believed to be a mere man, stripped of His deity, the atoning effect of His death is also stripped of any and all of its eternal significance.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Jesus, Lord of all, you are the way, the truth, and the life. You are God. You are eternal; you are great; and yet you know me and my students by name. You rejoice when we study your Word. Omniscient God, glorify yourself through me, through this lesson, and in my students. May the awe of you, Jesus, the one true God, cause us to desire to follow you with all our hearts. You have come that we might have everlasting life. Satisfy our souls, for you are the living bread. Help us to see you with fresh eyes and hungry hearts.



Review

Our last lesson involved studying the teaching of Jesus through parables. We learned that Jesus often spoke in ways that were clouded in metaphor. In doing so, He knew that there were those to whom it had not been granted to hear and see the truths of the kingdom of heaven described in the veiled language.

Today our lesson takes us through several places where Jesus taught with metaphors but in a way that was not veiled. He made very bold claims about who He was and what He came to do, causing the Jews who heard Him to accuse Him of claiming to be God—exactly who He is.



► Write on the board, “Did Jesus ever claim to be God?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

We are going to tackle a big chunk of text in our first section today and examine the claims Jesus made to the Jews listening to His teaching. Let’s read John 8:12–59 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud. Consider breaking the passage into several pieces for different people to read (12–24, 25–41, 42–59).*

John 8:12–59

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? How did Jesus identify Himself in verse 12? *I am the light of the world.*
- ? What is true of those who follow Jesus? *They will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*
- ? What did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of in verse 13? *They accused Him of bearing an inadequate witness, claiming His own authority.*
- ? How did Jesus counter their accusation? *He clearly told them that His witness was true and that the Father bore witness of Him (v. 18).*
- ? Who did Jesus claim had sent Him? *His Father.*
- ? Why was it important for Jesus to have another witness to vouch for His claims? *Jesus pointed to what was written in the Jewish law—that two or three witnesses establish a matter. Deuteronomy 17:6 is one place where this concept is stated.*
- ? In verse 19, how did Jesus relate Himself to the Father? *He drew a very close connection—knowing the Son is knowing the Father.*
- ? What did Jesus reveal to the Jews about their fate in verses 21 and 24? *He told them they would die in their sins.*

- ? **Why did Jesus say they would die in their sins?** *In verse 24, He said that they would die in their sins because they did not believe that Jesus is "I AM."*
- ? **Where did Jesus's message come from according to verse 26?** *He spoke what He heard from the Father.*
- ? **Did the Pharisees understand His reference to God the Father?** *No, they did not (v. 27).*
- ? **What event was foreshadowed in verse 28?** *"Lift up the Son of Man" is a foreshadowing of the Crucifixion.*
- ? **What was the result of this dialog in verse 30?** *Many believed in Him.*
- ? **Who did Jesus turn His attention to in verse 31?** *He was no longer speaking to the Pharisees directly but to those who believed what He was saying.*
- ? **What makes someone a disciple of Jesus?** *Abiding in His word (teaching).*
- ? **What is the result of knowing the truth?** *Knowing the truth sets people free.*
- ? **Based on the reaction from the Jews in verse 33, what type of freedom did they think Jesus was talking about?** *They must have thought He was talking about freedom from political or personal slavery rather than spiritual slavery since they claimed to have never been in bondage to anyone. Actually, this is a silly claim since the Jews had been under slavery to many different people groups since Abraham.*
- ? **How did Jesus correct their misconception in verses 34–35?** *He told them He was speaking of slavery to sin, not another form. He had come to set them free from their slavery to sin.*
- ? **What did Jesus say the people desired to do to Him?** *He said they were seeking to kill Him.*
- ? **How did Jesus use the contrast of two fathers to point to the sinfulness of the people?** *He told them that if they were of His Father, God, they would believe Him fully. Since they did not, the devil was their father.*
- ? **From verses 45–47, why did these people not fully believe in Jesus?** *Jesus gave two reasons: because He told them the truth, and they were not of God, so they did not hear His words.*
- ? **How did they seek to discredit Jesus in verses 41, 48, and 52?** *They said He was born of fornication, said He had a demon, and said He was a Samaritan (a slur to say He worshipped God wrongly). All of these were false attacks since there was no actual sin in His life to discredit Him. In verse 46, Jesus asked who could convict Him of sin, knowing that no one could.*
- ? **When Jesus said that all who keep His word will never see death, who did the Jews point to as someone who had died?** *They pointed to Abraham (and the prophets) as someone who had died even though he was righteous. This reinforces that they were still thinking in earthly terms, not heavenly/spiritual terms.*
- ? **What did Jesus say Abraham rejoiced to see?** *Abraham saw Jesus's "day" and was glad for it. We should understand this as Abraham seeing forward by faith to the day when the Messiah would come. He saw the beginning of the promise fulfilled in the birth of Isaac—the son of promise.*

Exodus 3:14

eternal
independent

- ? **How did the Jews misunderstand Jesus’s claim about Abraham?** *Again, they saw it as an earthly expression since Jesus was not yet 50 years old, and Abraham could not have been alive at the same time.*
- ? **How did Jesus respond in verse 58?** *He told them that “before Abraham was, I AM.”*
- ? **What was Jesus claiming?** *He was claiming to be God and to have existed before Abraham. This was a clear claim of deity.*
- ? **Did the Jews understand His claim accurately?** *Yes, because they took up stones to stone Him. They recognized His claim identifying Himself as God. They considered this blasphemy and were prepared to punish Him.*
- ? **How did Jesus escape their wrath?** *He hid Himself and walked through the midst of them. Looking back to verse 20, we know that “His hour had not yet come.”*
- ? **What passage from the Old Testament would the Jews have connected to Jesus’s claim to be I AM?** *They would have thought of the identification of God to Moses as “I AM” in Exodus 3:14. Have someone read that verse aloud.*

Discover the Truth

As Jesus carried this dialog with the Pharisees and the other Jews, He repeatedly pointed them to His connection with the Father. The Father had sent Him, and He spoke the words the Father gave Him—He always did what pleased the Father.

- ? **What two attributes of God are found in Jesus’s claim to be I AM?** *Identifying Himself as God who existed before Abraham, He was claiming to be eternal. In the name I AM is a statement of God’s independence. Refer to Attributes of God Poster.*

While there were many times that Jesus’s words were misunderstood or totally missed, there was no doubt among the crowd that Jesus was claiming to be God. They were so convinced that He was committing blasphemy by claiming to be God that they had the rocks in their hands to put Him to death. They thought they were honoring God by defending God’s name, but they were really missing the fact that God was standing right in front of them. Rather than defending God, they were ready to kill God the Son. Jesus is God, and there is no mistaking His claim to be God.

Many skeptics and false teachers (Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, etc.) claim that Jesus never said He was God, so Trinitarians, like us, are worshipping a false idea of God. However, Jesus used this name of God, I AM, to identify Himself on many occasions, and the Jews clearly understood what He was saying. To claim that Jesus never claimed to be God is a blasphemous claim in itself.





Jesus—"I AM"

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

We have just read about Jesus claiming to be God by using the name God had given to Moses—I AM. But this was not the only instance of Jesus using this phrase. John records eight different instances of Jesus using this phrase, often attaching it to another descriptive metaphor to teach the people and disciples about Himself. In your Student Guide, you will find the Jesus—I AM activity. Work in small groups to complete the activity and learn a bit more about the attributes of God demonstrated in Jesus as Messiah. *Have the students work in small groups to complete the activity. Refer students to the Attributes of God Poster for help.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's take a few minutes to talk about each of these I AM statements from Jesus. *Consider having each group share their answers to one question so that everyone is involved in the discussion.*

1. **John 6:35, 6:41, 6:51, 6:58** *I am the bread of life: Jesus is the true sustenance from the Father, sustaining the soul. God's grace and mercy are displayed.*
2. **John 8:12** *I am the light of the world: Jesus is the light that allows all to see and walk in truth. God's holiness and wisdom are displayed.*

3. **John 8:58** *I AM before Abraham was: Jesus identifies Himself as the eternal and infinite God. God's independence, eternity, and infinity are displayed.*
4. **John 10:7, 10:9** *I am the door of the sheep: Jesus is the only entrance by which the sheep enter the flock. God's grace and mercy are displayed.*
5. **John 10:11** *I am the good shepherd: Jesus gives His life for the sheep, sacrificing Himself that they may have life. God's holiness, justice, mercy, and grace are displayed.*
6. **John 11:25** *I am the resurrection and the life: Jesus offers eternal life after death to all who trust in Him. God's omnipotence and faithfulness to His promises are on display.*
7. **John 14:6** *I am the way, the truth, and the life: Jesus is the only way to receive salvation and eternal life. God's wisdom, holiness, and mercy are displayed.*
8. **John 15:1, 15:5** *I am the vine: Jesus is the source of life for all those who abide in Him. God's grace and love are displayed.*

Encourage students to use these as a chain reference in their Bibles, writing the next verse reference by the previous (e.g., John 8:12 next to John 6:35, John 8:58 next to John 8:12, and so on).

Wow! What glorious truths to ponder. All of these are names we could use in times of prayer or meditation to help us to know and love God the Son more fully. We can offer Him praise for all of these names and the attributes they represent and thanks for all of the benefits we receive as a result. We can use all of these things to exalt the name of Jesus—our great God and Savior.



READ THE WORD

We have looked at eight of the I AM statements of Jesus in John's Gospel, so let's close our lesson with the final reference in John 18:1-9. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **When did this account take place?** *This is at the very end of Jesus's earthly ministry on the night of His arrest.*
- ? **Where were Jesus and the disciples?** *They were in a garden outside of Jerusalem.*
- ? **Which disciple was not with them?** *Judas Iscariot.*
- ? **Who did Judas lead to the garden?** *Judas brought a detachment of troops.*
- ? **What was their purpose?** *They were seeking to arrest Jesus.*
- ? **Was Jesus surprised?** *No, He knew what was happening as verse 4 makes clear.*
- ? **What attribute of God is attributed to Jesus in verse 4?** *Omniscient—He knew all things. Refer to Attributes of God Poster.*
- ? **When the guards said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, how did Jesus respond?** *He said, "I am He."*
- ? **What happened as Jesus spoke these words?** *The crowd of guards drew back and fell to the ground.*
- ? **What does this indicate about the words Jesus spoke?** *These words were spoken with power and authority.*
- ? **Does anyone notice anything odd about the words "I am He" in verse 5?** *In some versions (KJV, NKJV, and some others), the "He" will be italicized. This indicates that the "He" is not in the original text but is included by the translators for clarity. The words Jesus spoke were "I AM" just as in John 8:58. The Greek words are ego eimi and is the way the translators of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translated the I AM name in Exodus 3:14.*

OMNISCIENT

Discover the Truth

Even as the guards, guided by Judas Iscariot, came to arrest Jesus, He declared Himself to be God. The power and authority that He exercised in claiming to be God brought these soldiers to their knees. John even acknowledged this truth by describing Jesus as omniscient in verse 4. Jesus knew that He was about to drink the cup of wrath that the Father had prepared for Him (John 18:11), and He gave Himself to the guards to be led away for the trial. The great I AM was about to be put to death as a substitute that would secure the redemption of everyone who would look to Him in repentance and faith.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

There have been many people over the last two millennia who have tried to discredit Jesus as the God-man. Men like Arius, a false teacher from the fourth century, have denied the deity of Jesus and taught others to do the same. But these claims do not agree with the teaching of Scripture. Today, there are groups like the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and others who also deny the distinct deity of Jesus as God—they think He was a god among other gods. The goal of John's Gospel is to point people to the deity of Jesus, and his repeated quotations of the I AM statements we have examined today drive this point home. These false teachers need to be called out for their error and told of the true Jesus revealed to us in Scripture—the only one who offers true salvation from sins.

Not only did John present Jesus as God, Jesus Himself claimed to be equal with God and took the name of God to Himself. There is really no disputing the fact that Jesus claimed to be God, despite the arguments of those who are skeptical of His deity. Jesus's claim to be God was so clear that those Jews who heard His proclamation were willing to stone Him to death for blasphemy. Jesus is God, and we must embrace that truth by faith, trusting in what has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

As we consider all of the ways Jesus demonstrated the character of God for us, our hearts should soar in worship to the bread of life, the resurrection and the life, the true vine, and the good shepherd who laid down His life for us, His sheep.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **What did you learn about the unity of the testimony of Scripture as we examined these passages today?** *In the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented in a consistent way, pointing to His deity. All of the passages examined today are also connected to truths in the Old Testament (Jesus as the manna/bread of life) that were expressed in their fullness in the person and work of Jesus on the earth. The Bible is an amazingly cohesive book—a testament to its Divine authorship through the men the Spirit moved to record its words.*
- ? **As we have worked through this lesson, what doubts or questions have come to light?** *Encourage the students to talk about the things that they are struggling with, pointing them to the Bible as the source of truth. If questions arise that you are not able to answer immediately, work to find an answer to assure the student of the truthfulness of God's Word.*
- ? **As you consider one of the key ideas you learned today, is there a brother or sister in Christ you can share this with as a way to encourage him or her in the faith?** *Encourage the students to share with a coworker, sibling, or friend, opening up their Bibles and sharing a moment of worship in exalting the name of Christ.*

- ? Since Jesus claimed to be God is it possible for Him to simply be a good teacher? *Discuss various answers pointing out the fact that if He claimed to be God, and is not, then that makes Jesus either a liar or a lunatic, but not a good teacher.*
- ? As we seek to defend the faith, we are sure to encounter someone who is going to make the claim that Jesus never claimed to be God. How can you use the passages we have studied today to show them the error in their thinking? *Using the example of John 8:58 and the crowd's reaction should be sufficient explanation to the reasonable person. Jesus was claiming to be God, and the crowd recognized His claim as such. However, we know that the god of this age has blinded the mind of many, and we should pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal those truths to them. Further, the power demonstrated in John 18:1–9 is another example that can be used. Connecting these passages to Exodus 3:14 provides a clear demonstration of the deity of Jesus and His claim to that role.*
- ? Once we have shown someone that Jesus clearly claimed to be God, what is the next essential step we must take? *The next step is to show them their need for Jesus as Savior, calling them to recognize their own sinfulness and to repent of those sins and trust in Jesus for forgiveness. We must be intentional about directing our apologetics toward evangelism, giving a defense for the hope we have in Christ.*



MEMORY VERSE

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for revealing Himself to us in Jesus.
- Praise God for His glories revealed in the Son.
- Ask God for wisdom in understanding more fully who Jesus is and proclaiming those truths to others.