

How I ought to respond to the “I AM” claims of Jesus

We are going through a series on the “**I am**” statements used by Jesus, all of which are recorded in John’s gospel. John has seven different ways that Jesus describes Himself, in which He Himself is the subject “I” followed by the verb “am,” with a description of Himself given as the predicate:

“I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51)

“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12)

“I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7, 9)

“I am the good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14)

“I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)

“I am the way the truth and the life (John 14:6)

“I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 5)

Thus, there are seven such claims that are made by Jesus. In biblical numerology, the number seven represents perfection, fulness or completion, and at times a divine work. With these, John’s gospel emphasizes who it is that is making these claims and how great these claims ought to be treated. For Jesus wishes for us to recognize by these statements who He is. He is the “I am” of the OT scriptures.

Now the basis for the identifying the meaning of the “I Am” is from the Exodus account of *YHWH*’s revelation to Moses through the burning bush. According to Exodus 3:2, it is **“the angel of the LORD”** who appears in the burning bush at Horeb. The OT often uses this appellative, “the angel of the LORD,” as a Christophany; that is, it often identifies a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the OT.

And when God meets with Moses, He first identifies Himself by saying in Exodus 3:6 **“I am...the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”** He is the God from whom the promise was given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore, as every Hebrew would have known, He must also be the eternal God of creation, *YHWH* Himself who had revealed Himself to the fathers.

Now the purpose for God revealing Himself to Moses is expressed in verses 7-12. God is going to redeem Israel from Egyptian bondage, and Moses is to go and tell the people of God’s deliverance, and then lead them in an exodus to the land of promise. This stated goal given to Moses should be kept in mind. When Moses receives this commission, he says to God in 3:13:

Exodus 3:13 “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”

Moses is asking for God’s name. ‘Who is it that is sending me to the people to lead this exodus; what is Your name that I might tell them?’ The LORD replies:

Exodus 3:14 “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

God does not use His personal name, *YHWH*, but identifies Himself by the verb, *hayah* (“I AM”); “**I am that I am**”; that is, “I am the ever present, eternal, self-existent One who cannot be described.” So as perhaps to imply, “That is all you need to know. Therefore, tell them that I AM has sent you.” Although He is *YHWH*, in the work of redeeming Israel from bondage and bringing forth the exodus of His people. He identifies Himself as “I AM.”

Now let’s fast-forward to John’s gospel. In the “I AM” statements of Jesus, He is identifying Himself as the “I AM” who now brings about the greater exodus that the prophets had predicted. Jesus has come to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and to lead them in a type of exodus that leads to salvation.

As John puts forth his gospel, the “I am” statements of Jesus become very significant in not only identifying who Jesus is, but also in identifying the nature of His work as one who has come to bring salvation to His people. So Jesus isn’t a mere man who makes these claims, but is God the Son, who has the power that these claims possess in order to bring about a type of exodus from the bondage of sin to salvation and life with God. We may now rely upon Him to take us through this second and greater exodus.

Indeed, John’s gospel portrays, as do all four gospels, an exodus that Jesus now leads and the “I am” statements are interwoven into that theme. So just as God’s presence in the tabernacle was placed in the midst of the congregation of Israel, so we read of Jesus:

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [*skēnóō*, “to tabernacle”] among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus is likened to the tabernacle that was placed in the midst of the people and from which the *shekinah* glory could be seen. John clearly uses Exodus 29:43-46 as the background for these words. Jesus now “tabernacles” among us to lead us from the bondage of sin and to God’s promised salvation. And although John may at times will make parallels between Jesus and Moses, other times he will identify Jesus with the God of the exodus. Jesus is God’s Son.

The parallels to the Exodus continue in John. For example, the terminology of John 1:14-18 alludes to Exodus 33:18-34:7.

John 1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

Just as Moses received the law and saw God face to face, so Jesus now presents grace and truth as the divine code as One who, not merely “seeing the Father,” but by being in His very “bosom”; that is, by a close and endearing relationship.

And when Jesus appears, John asks, “**Are you the prophet?**” (John 1:21), that is, who answers to Deut 18:15, the One who was to come as a prophet likened unto Moses. So Philip says to Nathaniel in John 1:45, “**We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote.**”

Also, the miracles that are recorded by John are not randomly selected. Although Jesus performed many more miracles than John records (John only records seven), the one’s selected by John are for specific reasons. Therefore, in the exodus led by Moses, the first plague that God produced through Moses, which resulted in some Israelites believing, was when God turned the water of the *Nile River into blood* (Ex 4:9, 28-31). Corresponding to this, the first miracle recorded in John that produces a response of belief among the people was when Jesus turned the *water into wine*. When one considers the various allusions to the exodus in the first two chapters of John, the correlation is unavoidable.

The same may be said concerning the last of His signs. Whereas the last plague of the Exodus was the death of the first-born in the Passover, the last sign recorded by John is the raising Lazarus from the dead (although the 10 lepers, the blind man Bartimaeus, and the guard’s ear that was cut off were later healings that took place after Lazarus), which is followed shortly by Jesus celebrating Passover. And there are other parallels one could draw.

At any rate, for an Israelite, the “I am” draws attention to the divine name of the God who brought Israel out of Egypt and led them to the promised land. Jesus use of the “I am” is to draw our attention to who Jesus Christ is and what He came to do. He is the “I am” who brings salvation to the world and who has the power to accomplish such a deliverance because of who He is. The “I am” is associated with an exodus.

This is also the case with the “I Am” passages as Jesus uses them to describe Himself and what He is able to do.

1. The manna

- **John 6:35, 41, 48, 51** “I am the bread...of life...that came down from heaven.”
- **Ex 16:4, 15** The Lord said, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you...”

Just as God was able to feed the people with bread to keep them alive and nourished, so Christ is the bread that comes down from heaven to give life and nourishment spiritually to His people.

2. The light

- **John 8:12** “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”
- **Ex 13:21-22**, “The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.”
- **Ex 25:37** the lampstand in the tabernacle also shed light continually in and it was never to be extinguished.

As the Shekinah glory led Israel through their wilderness journey. So also Christ is the light of the world that enlightens every man so that we may know God’s way fully. “Light” in Scripture represents knowledge and understanding. “Absolute Truth both intellectual and moral, free from all ignorance and all stain. The Source of life is the Source of light.” (*Cambridge Bible* on John 1:4). Paul wrote: “The world through its wisdom did not know God.” One does not come to know God through the world’s wisdom. More important that school education is the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

3. The door

- **John 10:7, 9 “I am the door of the sheep”**
- **Ex 29:42ff The door of the tent of meeting...**

As the door represented the way into the tent of meeting into God’s presence, so also Christ is the door who is the way in which His sheep may enter into God’s presence. Jesus said:

John 10:9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Through Christ we are able to enter into the presence of God and to receive His provisions.

4. The good Shepherd

- **John 10:11, 14 “I am the good shepherd”**
- **Moses prayed in Num 27:16 “May the LORD ... appoint a man over the congregation (17) who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”**

Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. In this passage Jesus speaks of others, that is the Scribes, Pharisees and Jewish leaders, who were thieves and robbers and wolves and hirelings. They did not take good care of the flock. But Jesus has such a deep concern for us that He laid down His life.

5. The resurrection and the life

- **John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life”**

Just as God was able to bring about the death of some (the first born of Egypt) and the life of others (the first-born of Israel), and to permit Israel to cross the Red Sea, yet destroy all of Pharaoh’s army, so Christ has the power to raise the dead and give life to whomever He chooses. He exhibits the same authority as the God of the exodus.

6. The way, the truth and the life

- **John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life**
- **Ex 13:21-22, The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night...**
- **Ex 32:8 “They have quickly turned aside from the way which I have commanded them”** thus, having made a molten calf to worship.

In all three ways (the way, truth, life) Jesus Christ exhibits the same power and authority in guidance, truth and life as the God of the exodus. But under the New Covenant, He provides these in a more dynamic way than before. Jesus is the way, not merely to the land of Canaan and through Law, but the direct way to God and salvation through faith.

He is the truth: He is the completed revelation of God’s revealed will. Jesus said:

John 18:37, “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.

Jesus came to testify to the truth; that is, to bring about the truth of God’s revelation to the world, as it is fulfilled in Him.

“And the life”

The OT regards that God gave life to Israel when He delivered her out of Egypt. Israel’s existence was totally founded by Him. Ezekiel symbolizes this by the image of an infant who was left to die.

Ezekiel 16:6 Then I passed by and saw you [Israel] squirming in your blood [as one who had just been born], and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, ‘Live!’ There I said to you, ‘Live!’

John 5:21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

John 5:26 “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; (27) and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man.

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth and the life. Now one comes to

the Father except by Me!”

7. The vine

- **John 15:1, 5 “I am the true vine”**
- **Deut 32:32 “For their [Israel’s] vine is from the vine of Sodom, [they are rooted in the nature and character of Sodom] and from the fields of Gomorrah [emblems of utter depravity]; Their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters bitter.**

Although Israel was called by God and planted from a “choice vine” (Isaiah 15:2), they did not produce the fruit that God intended. Rather, their vine from which they receive their nourishment, was Sodom and their field Gomorrah. They followed the sinful and depraved nature of the world.

So whereas the Israel of the first exodus were of the vine of Sodom and not from the vine of the LORD, in the new exodus, God’s people will be attached to the true vine, Jesus Christ. If anyone attaches himself to Jesus, then he will bear fruit to God. He will demonstrate a life that belongs to God.

The expression “I Am” is used a number of times in the gospel of John, but two others are worth noting before we close:

Just as God identified Himself in the burning bush as the “**I am**” who is “**the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob**” (Exodus 3:6), Jesus makes this claim concerning His identity in John 8:58: “**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.**”

Then at the end, when He has finished the Passover with His disciples and the enemy comes to arrest Him, we read:

John 18:4 “So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” (5) They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I am *He*.” And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. (6) So when He said to them, “I am *He*,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

Both, verses 5 and 6 use the “I am” address, as we have seen throughout John. What John wishes for us to recognize is the response that Jesus receives. When Jesus says, “I am,” those, even who do not believe draw back and fall to the ground. Such a response is likened to that found in the OT, when one realizes

that he is standing before God in a theophany (an appearance of God). What caused these guards to do this with Jesus is not certain, but, no doubt, what John realizes is that gives the realization that Jesus is no mere man.

Finally, we close with the purpose that John gives for writing these things concerning the Christ. He says:

John 20:30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; (31) but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

As mentioned, Jesus performed many more signs than just the seven recorded here, and of course, the eighth which was His own resurrection from the dead. But what has been written, climaxed by His resurrection from the dead, and the various claims that He made, all has been written that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And that by faith, we may have life, not just life after death, but a life-changing experience, a life that is lived according to Him, all of this be done in His name. (See also 2 Peter 1:3).