

Jesus Is The Great “I Am”

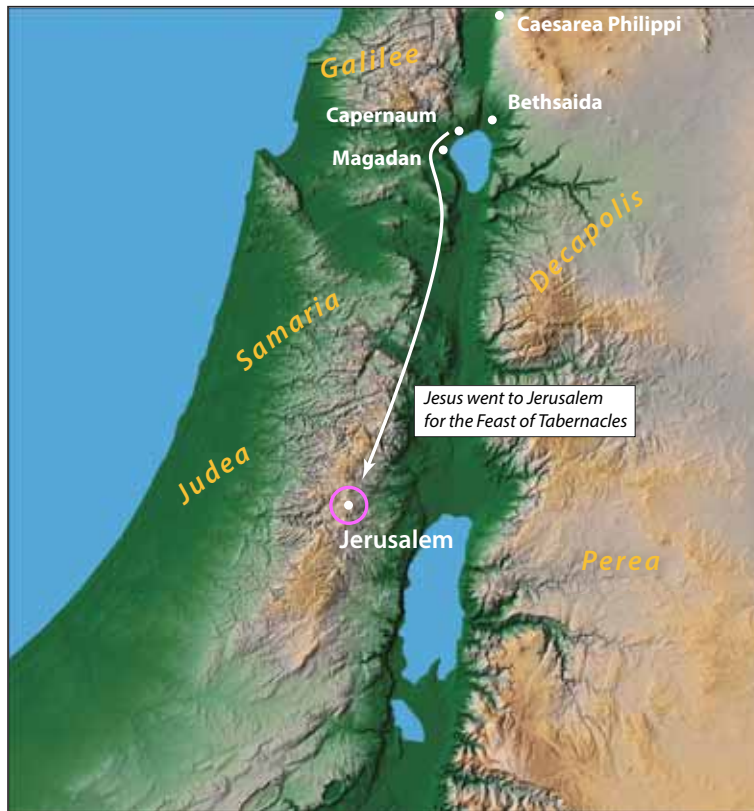
Politics is usually a dirty business. Maybe someone desires to become the president of the United States so that they can determine the philosophical positions and future of a nation. Therefore, they spend money and make commitments to donors and voters in the hope that they will gain enough votes to become the president. Politics also exists in the business world among employees and the management or between church leaders and those who attend the church. Politics exists everywhere and it existed in Jesus day too! Jesus was a threat to the religious leaders - Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Envy can exist in the political arena. On the day Jesus died on that old rugged cross we are told that Pontius Pilate knew the religious leaders were envious toward Jesus (Matthew 27:18). They were envious of Him because He was an incredible teacher (Mark 1:27) and knew the scriptures better than they did (Matt. 22:33-34, 46). Jesus told them that their root problem was spiritual blindness (John 8:37-38, 40, 43, 44-47) and so they did not believe He spoke truth (John 8:31-32) and as a result they could not and did not believe He was their God. Their irritation grew into hatred and finally His murder.

YOU HAVE A DEMON. Our study starts with John 8:48 where we are told that the religious leaders insulted Jesus by calling Him a Samaritan and accusing Him of having a demon.

of Israel and the southern portion was called the kingdom of Judea. The region of Samaria was located in the lower part of the old northern kingdom of Israel, sandwiched between Galilee and Judea. When the Pharisees accused Jesus of

THE JEWS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HIM, “DO WE NOT SAY RIGHTLY THAT YOU ARE A SAMARITAN AND HAVE A DEMON?” John 8:48 (NASB)

In Jesus’ day the Jews in Judea hated the Samaritans. The Samaritans lived in the region called Samaria which was located between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. The name Samaria originally came from the capital city of Samaria which was part of the northern kingdom called Israel. The original

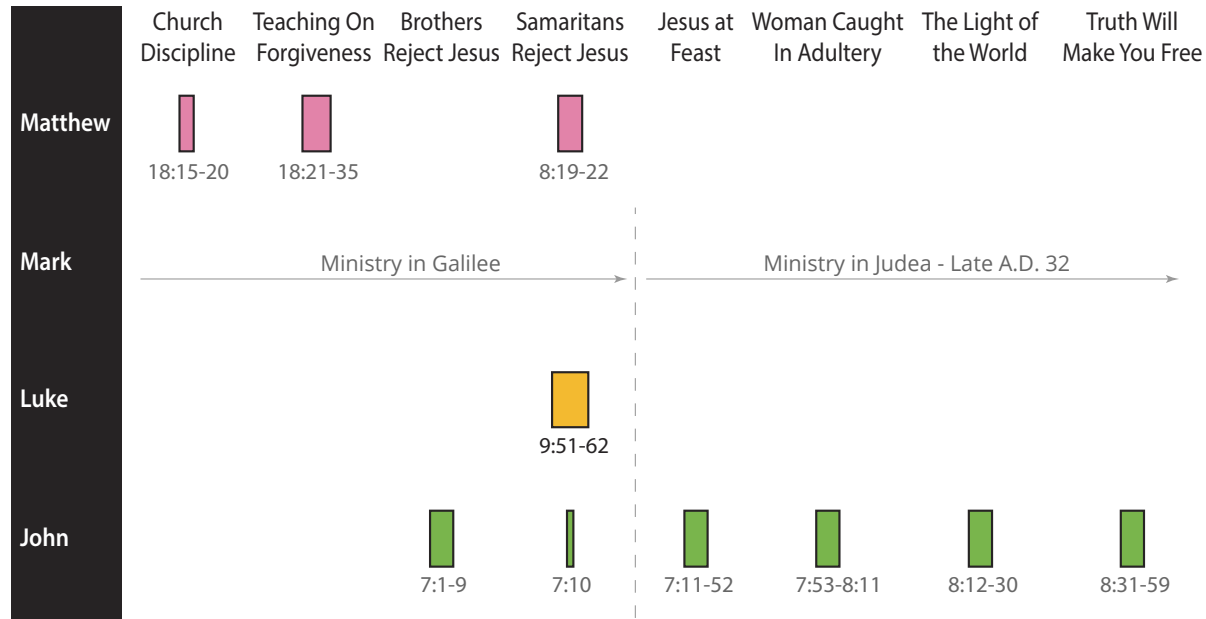


nation of Israel had been divided into two kingdoms after the death of King Solomon (1 Kings 11:11; 12:16-20). The northern portion of the divided land was called the kingdom

being a Samaritan the accusation erupted from their hatred for these people. The Jews hated the Samaritans because they separated from the kingdom that had been established by God under Saul, David and Solomon (1 Kings 11:11-13; 12:16-19). The Samaritans believed that they were the true observers of the law or the Torah. The name *Samaritan* means “observers of the Torah.” The Samaritans accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. They believed that true worship should occur only at Mount Gerizim and not in Jerusalem. So the tensions and hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews could be intense (John

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4:9).

The religious leaders of Judea believed that they were the most godly men in the nation and had an inside connection to God. They considered themselves the defenders of the scriptures and of God. In Matthew 23:2 Jesus tells us that they thought they knew the truth. They were like Moses in all things related to the sacred scriptures.

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses . . . Matt. 23:2 (NASB)

Their nasty and insulting comment that Jesus was a Samaritan and had a demon revealed their heart and a wish to gain victory over Jesus in their struggle to gain superiority and control.

Therefore, it appears the Pharisees' comment was designed to hurt Jesus' reputation with the crowds. They threw at Him the most insulting remarks they could think of. The accusation about being demon possessed was an old one (Mat-

thew 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:15; Luke 11:15). The accusation had been hurled at Jesus earlier in His ministry. The earlier encounter reveals that the religious leaders were becoming more intolerant of Him. Consequently, the crowds wondered if Jesus was demon possessed too (John 7:20; 10:20-21)! The crowds were most likely influenced by the Pharisees. Also, the religious leaders had accused the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, of having a demon (Luke 7:33). The accusation in that passage appears to have meant that He was insane or mentally crazy. So if you did not agree with the Pharisees there was something mentally wrong with you.

Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me." John 8:49 (NASB)

JESUS ANSWERS. Jesus' reply is truly amazing. First, He answers their accusation. He says that He did not have a demon and that He had been honoring the Father throughout their discussion. He was honoring the Father by speaking truth and accurately describing man's incredibly horrible

condition and spiritual blindness. This is an important lesson for us. We honor God when we speak truth about the Father, Jesus Christ and anything else, including the condition of every man and woman. Jesus' reply also reveals the sad condition of the religious leaders. Jesus honored the Father and they dishonored Christ and the Father. Out of Christ's mouth came honor and out of their mouth came dishonor for their God who was standing right before them. They called Him a demon. They were wicked creatures that Christ had once created (Col. 1:15-17). While their accusation was an incredible insult it also revealed their heart. They had committed the unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:30-32). That is, after they had seen all that Christ did and heard all that He taught they came to the wrong conclusion and rejected Him. They credited the work of the Holy Spirit through Christ to demons. At that point, what more could have been done to help them believe? The answer is nothing! After having full light and watching and hearing Him for years they came to the wrong conclusion.

When Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon", He spoke the truth. To most of us this might appear to be a defensive response but it was more than a defensive comment. Jesus was simply telling the truth once again. When Jesus told them that He was honoring the Father He was referring to the fact that He was simply trying to tell them the truth about the Father. That was what He had already said was His goal in verse 40. In verse 32 He had said if they knew the truth the truth would make them free. So He was teaching them truth but they did not accept it and as a result they would never be free!

Earlier in John 8:24 He told them that He was the great *I AM* (see the study *Who Are You?*). Jesus had communicated that He was God earlier in John 5:18 and He continued sending them that same message repeatedly. We must remember God's character when we want to understand what we read in scripture and understand Christ. When we think about His attributes we will discover mysteries about the triune God and understand certain problem passages in scripture. It is important to remember that Jesus was God and, therefore, He could not sin (James 1:13) and when He spoke, He spoke truth. In sharp contrast the religious leaders were

slaves of sin (John 8:34-36) and lied like the devil (John 8:44) who ran the world system in which they lived.

Then Jesus moved to a new topic.

"But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." John 8:50-51 (NASB)

When Jesus said that He was not seeking His own glory He used the Greek emphatic "I" which is *ego*. He emphasized that He was not seeking His own glory, and they should be concerned because the Father sees and knows everything and He is their judge. The message was that they could not escape the judgment of God when it comes to their sin. Christ's words remind us of His earlier words in Matthew,

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. Matthew 12:36 (NASB)

The message is clear. They did not watch their words. They did not watch their accusations. They were not concerned that God the Father was the ultimate judge and Jesus represented Him. Those who ignore Christ's words will die but those who kept His words will never experience spiritual death.

YOU HAVE A DEMON, AGAIN. Once again the religious leaders accuse Him of having a demon.

The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.' Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?" John 8:52-53 (NASB)

Once again they accuse Christ of being mentally incompetent. To them the comment that those who keep "My word he will never see death" was crazy. They reasoned that Abraham and the prophets had died already and since they, the religious leaders, did not believe that Jesus was greater than

any of them, He must be insane to make such a claim.

But their assault did not cause Jesus to change His words.

Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word." John 8:54-55 (NASB)

Jesus' words are clear and accurate. He says that His father is their God. He says that they call His father "our God." Now that is specific and pointed. But first Jesus says that He is not bragging and trying to claim that He is something that He isn't when He says these things. Then Jesus stuns them by saying that only He knows their God. Wow, what a stunning statement since they claimed to be the religious leaders of Israel - the spiritual leaders. On another occasion Jesus said that they considered themselves the authoritative teachers of Israel (Matthew 23:2).

Then Jesus dropped the first of two unbelievably shocking statements.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. John 8:56 (NASB)

First, He reveals that Abraham knew about Him and was glad to know about Him. Galatians 3:16 drops a hint that Abraham knew about the Messiah when God told him in Genesis 22:18 that "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." The seed referred to the Christ. Galatians 3:16 says,

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. Gal. 3:16 (NASB)

1 Peter 1:10-12 also indicates that prophets knew about the coming Christ when they wrote scripture. It is also possible that when Christ appeared as a theophany to Abraham in Genesis 18 that He talked with Abraham about His future coming in human form. Scripture does not tell us everything that occurs in the conversations mentioned in scripture. However, it happened, Abraham knew about Jesus' coming and he was glad. What an incredible statement for the religious leaders to accept. So, they didn't.



So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" John 8:57 (NASB)

They could see that Jesus' human body was less than fifty years old. So for Jesus to claim that Abraham knew

about Him, was just unacceptable.

JESUS IS GOD. Then Jesus makes His most shocking and unacceptable statement,

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." John 8:58 (NASB)

When Jesus says that He existed before Abraham and then that He was the God who met Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3, they believed that He had committed blasphemy. The first claim is obvious to us, that is, Jesus existed before Abraham. The second point, that He was and is God, is revealed in the phrase "I am." The Greek text reads "*ego eimi*." The Greek word *eimi* corresponds to the English verb

"to be." Therefore, Jesus said that He was "being." *Ego* is the emphatic "I". That is, *ego* emphasizes that Jesus said He is "continually being" or "existing." That is, He was existing before Abraham. In Exodus 3 God told Moses that His name was "I AM."

Then Moses said to God, "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?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:13-14 (NASB)

It is so clear that Jesus claimed that He was Jehovah God. Deuteronomy 32:39 and Isaiah 41:4; 43:10 are three more clear statements that God said He was the "I AM." Therefore, when Jesus said that He was self-sustaining or "self-existing" in John 5:26 He claimed to be God, an aseity. Some modern day writers, authors and speakers have never studied the Bible or are in denial when they say that Jesus never claimed to be God. Such statements reveal that they never read the Bible or they read it and did not pay close attention to what they read.

The religious leaders had also missed the message of Malachi 3:1. In that verse, the Father tells us that He will send a messenger before the Messiah, that is, Jesus Christ. Mark 1:2-3 tells us that John the Baptist was that messenger and he cleared the way for Jesus Christ (Isaiah 40:3). Next, the Father says the messenger would clear the way before Me. The Me refers to Himself. That is, He sent John the Baptist before Himself, that is, before Jesus Christ. This is a clear proof that Jesus is God.

Zechariah 12:10 tells that on some future day the nation of Israel will realize that they killed their Messiah, Jesus Christ. But notice carefully, that God the Father says, "they will look on Me whom they have pierced." That is, the Father and Jesus Christ are both God.

Also, the Bible teaches repeatedly that there is only one God. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6; Mark 12:29-32; and James 2:19. Isaiah 43:10; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 21 and 46:10). Starting with Isaiah 43:10 to Isaiah 48:16, God tells us that there

is only one God and no other. Then in Isaiah 48:16 God says, "Lord God has sent Me and His Spirit." The speaker is the second person of the trinity, Jesus, the son of God. God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Together, they are the one and only God.

In Micah 5:2 we are told that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and then we are told that the Messiah was eternal. No human being has existed in eternity past. These are clear proofs from the scriptures that the Messiah was to be God. Jesus Christ was and is God.

These and other verses clearly prove that He was God and did, in fact, claim to be God. The next verse proves that they understood that He was claiming to be God.

Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. John 8:59 (NASB)

It is ridiculous to think that we know better what Jesus was claiming than those who were standing there listening to Jesus thousands and thousands of years ago. Those who say that Jesus did not claim to be God reveal their bias and spiritual blindness and not their intelligence. Later in John 10:30-33 the Jews will try to stone Him again and for the same reason. Verse 33, reveals that Jesus claimed to be God. Earlier in John 5:18 the religious leaders understood that He had claimed to be God then also. Then in John 5:26 Jesus claimed that He was self-existing - God in human flesh. Jesus not only claimed to be God but throughout His adult ministry He displayed the powers of God by healing, calming the waves, winds and multiply food during the feeding of five thousand. He knew the thoughts of people (Luke 9:47; 11:17). Jesus gave every evidence that He was God. When Christ died on the cross a non-Christian soldier declared, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54). The phrase "son of God" was another way say, "God." Just check out John 10:30-33, 36. Later in John 20:28 one His disciples blurted out, "My Lord and my God." The disciple was an eyewitness of Christ and would have understood better than we can or will ever.

In Titus 2:13 the Greek text makes it clear that Jesus was both God and Savior. The Granville Sharp rule reveals that

God and Savior refers to the same person which is Christ Jesus. Another use of the Granville Sharp rule is also in force in 2 Peter 1:1 where once again we are told God and Savior refers to Jesus Christ. Then in 1 John 5:20 we are told that Jesus Christ is the "true God and eternal life." These are just a few samples of New Testament statements that reveal Jesus was, is and will always be our God and Savior.

CONCLUSION. We believe that the events recorded in John 8 occurred less than six months before He would die on the cross. He would die because in John 10:17-18 Jesus said that he would lay down His life, but from a human perspective He would die because the religious leaders rejected His claim to be God and rejected the conclusion that His miracles, wonders and signs pointed to - He was God. Later in John 12:37 we will read,

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. John 12:37 (NASB)

The religious leaders were so jealous of the crowds that followed Him and of His wisdom and skill and their hatred was so great that they would murder Jesus as soon as they could politically afford to. One wonders did they stop to think what if He was God? If He is God what would be the consequences of their actions? This a good question for each one of us. What if He really was and is God? The proof that He was God is written in these historical records called the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are also historical secular records which scream the same Message. They say that Jesus did perform miracles and died.¹ Then He arose from the grave after three days.

1. Justin Martyr, First Apology 35, 48.