

The I AM

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The apostle John presents some of the clearest statements in the Bible explaining the existence and relationship of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. John's perspective as the longest living apostle, as well as the fact that he wrote toward the close of the new testament, allowed him to add details and explanations that are unique in the record of scripture. Also, what God showed John in the book of Revelation details how the relationship of God and Christ will extend and continue on into eternity.

John referred to the Father as "**the only true God**" (John 17:3; also 1 John 5:19-20) and yet he also clearly showed that Jesus Christ was God when he stated "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God**" (John 1:1-2). There is no conflict. John's statement in John 17 was to the Father as supreme. The Greek text of John 1:1-2 supports that supremacy as it actually states "**the Word was with the God**" and "**He was in the beginning with the God**". Jesus is God, but the Father is "**the God**".

Some of the titles for God and Jesus Christ are unique to them individually and some are shared. An obvious reference to them individually is to the Father and the Son. By contrast, a title they share is "**Savior**" (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3-5; Titus 1:4). In Titus, both "**God our Savior**" and "**Jesus Christ our Savior**" are referred to in the same place (1:3-4; also 2:10,13). John's reference to them in this way is "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). God the Father is our Savior because He offered the sacrifice for our sins, and Jesus Christ is our Savior because He was the sacrifice for our sins.

That same basic relationship is expressed in other shared titles such as "**King**" and "**Shepherd**" and even "**Rock**". A description of how God and Jesus Christ sometimes have similar roles and how they work together in perfect unity is in 1 Corinthians 8:6. There the apostle Paul states "**there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live**". In short, all things are of God and through Jesus Christ.

An example of God acting through Jesus Christ in the Old Testament is in Exodus 3. There "**the Angel of the LORD**" appeared to Moses "**in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush**" and "**when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush**" (verses 2,4). The "**Angel of the LORD**" is not "**the LORD**". The Hebrew for Angel is malak, and malak can also be rendered as messenger. Either way, the "**Malak**" appeared to Moses, and then God spoke to Moses.

The God who spoke to Moses is the Father. This is confirmed by Jesus when He was being tested by some Sadducees with a theoretical question about seven brothers who had the same wife, and then all died. The Sadducees didn't actually believe in a resurrection, but their specific question was "**Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be?**" (Mark 12:23). Jesus responded with "**Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the scriptures nor the power of God?**" (verse 24). He then followed up and said "**But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken**" (verses 26-27).

What is evident from Jesus' response is that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Exodus 3:15 is the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Acts 3:13. God does not change (Malachi 3:6-10) and Jesus Christ does not change (Hebrews 13:8). The God who spoke to Moses is the Father. Jesus, in Mark 12, not only referred to Him as God, but also as, He.

The passage in Exodus 3 continues with God declaring His name to Moses stating **"I AM THAT I AM"** and then He said **"Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you"** (verse 14). The following verse continues **"Moreover God said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations"** (verse 15). The **"LORD God"** is the **"I AM"**.

Hosea confirms that **"the LORD"** [YHWH] is **"the LORD God of hosts...memorable [KJV – memorial] name"** (12:5). The name **LORD** is also in agreement with Psalms 83 which describes various nations that come up against Israel and then calls on God to bring them to shame **"That they may seek Your name, O LORD"** (verse 16) and **"That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth"** (verse 18). There is only one **"whose name alone is the LORD"** and who is **"the Most High over all the earth"** and it is God the Father. Only the Father is **"the LORD God"** (Hosea 12:5), **"the I AM"** (Exodus 3:14), and **"the Most High"** (Psalms 83:18). Psalms 84 then continues and shows that **"the LORD God"** (verse 11) is the **"LORD God of hosts"** (verse 8) and **"the living God"** (verse 2) and the **"God of Jacob"** (verse 8). Still, **"the LORD"** (Psalms 84:2,11) is God's primary name.

The words **"I AM"** and **"LORD"** in Hebrew are closely related and have the same basic meaning. William D. Mounce in his Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words [copyright 2006, p 422] states "The connection between **"I AM"** and **"Yahweh"** is only of verbal person. **"I AM"** is the first person form of the verb **"to be"** (haya; GK 2118; see be), while **"Yahweh"** represents the third person form of the same verb, perhaps **"HE IS"** or **"HE WILL BE"**." Whatever the best translation would be, both **"I AM"** and **"LORD"** [YHWH] portray God as eternally existing and not created. God is self-existent and He will always exist. James Moffat, in his translation of the Bible, attempted to portray that meaning by translating **"LORD"** as **"the Eternal"** and that is probably as good as anyone has done.

In the New Testament, in an account where Jesus was being confronted and accused by some of the Jews, He stated **"It is My Father who honors Me"** and then He said **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad"** (John 8:54,56). Then upon being accused further He added **"Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM"** (verse 58). Reading **"I AM"** in the English does indeed give the impression that it is a formal name, but the letters are not capitalized in the Greek. The Greek does not portray it as a name and a Greek reader would not see it stand out in the text in the same way.

Still, in stating **"I AM"** Jesus is connecting Himself with the God of Exodus 3, but He is not stating that He is the God of Exodus 3. That God is His Father. Rather, His statement was in response to those who claimed that He had only existed in the flesh and He was affirming that He had existed before Abraham. In fact, He had existed eternally. Jesus is **"I AM"** in existence, but he is not the **"I AM"**. The **"I AM"** is the Father.

In Exodus 3 the Hebrew for **"I AM"** is a single word just as **"LORD"** is. **"I AM"** as Jesus used it in John

8:58 conveys the same meaning, but that doesn't hold for the use of the words "**I am**" throughout the rest of the New Testament. In Greek, "**I am**" is "ego eimi", and beyond its specific use in John 8:58 it is hard to attribute to it any special meaning. When John the Baptist stated "**I am not the Christ**" (John 1:20) he used "ego eimi" and he certainly wasn't stating that he was like God. Another use of "ego eimi", this time with Jesus Christ, is in His discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well. There He responded to the woman's statement regarding the coming of the Messiah with "**I who speak to you am He**" (John 4:26). The Greek word order is different from the English, but word for word, it would literally be "**I am who am speaking to you**". "**I am**", again, is "ego eimi" and carries no additional meaning.

Jesus stated "**I AM**" in John 8:58 because the Jews recognized it as God's name and He was stating that He had always existed just as the Father. Further, to take expressions such as "**I am the bread of life**" (John 6:35), and "**I am the light of the world**" (John 8:12), and "**I am the good shepherd**" (John 10:11), as being unique in the use of "ego eimi" as compared to "**I am not the Christ**" (John 1:20), is simply reaching beyond the intent of the Greek. These additional "**I am**" references were recorded by the same author in the same book and do not differ either in context or in meaning. The use of "ego eimi" in these cases is simply to state a matter of identity or fact and has nothing to do with Jesus' name.

Both God and Jesus Christ have always existed, but there is still a clear distinction between them. Jesus Christ is "**God**" but He is not "**the God**". And in much the same way, Jesus Christ is "**I AM**" but He is not the "**I AM**". The "**I AM**" is the Father.