

# G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

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## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Sermon Notes

*Before Abraham Was, I AM*

John 8:52-59

October 2, 2005

#### Verse 52

- ❑ The Jews now believe that Jesus has confirmed their suspicions [of Verse 48], for they assert, “Now we **know** you have a demon!”
- ❑ They, then, proceed to explain their reasoning for such a conclusion: the greatest men of Israel’s past [i.e. Abraham and the prophets] heard God’s voice, obeyed His word [and even taught it], yet they **all died**.
- ❑ It is certainly clear to the modern believer that the Jews were focusing on the **physical** [death of Abraham and the Prophets], **not the spiritual**.
  - This may also be a case of classic irony in the Gospel of John, in that Jesus would, in fact die, just like the Prophets of Old; however, He would die as the perfect substitute (i.e. substitutionary atonement) for the Prophets and all who would believe in Him.

#### Verse 53

- ❑ The Jews correctly conclude that Jesus is claiming superiority to Abraham and the prophets.
- ❑ They, then, ask, “[W]hom do You make Yourself out to be?”
  - Such a question reflects a complete blindness to Jesus’ message. **Jesus did not make Himself out to be anyone**...as He was the model of obedience [to the will of God the Father], not regarding “equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

#### Verse 54

- ❑ Jesus states that it is the Father, the one of whom the Jesus say, “He is our God,” that glorifies Him.
  - Of course, in the Gospel of John, the nature of the glorification of Jesus Christ is seen, paradoxically, through the cross – the means of Jesus’ return to the glory He shared with the Father prior to the Incarnation.

- Read Hebrews 5:5-10

### Verse 55

- Jesus, here, makes it clear that His opponents “have not come to know” God.
- When Jesus makes this statement, He places the Jews, the teachers of the Law, in the same category as the wicked and ungodly Israelites during the days of the Prophets.
  - Read Hosea 4:1; 6:6
  - Yet, unlike the days of the Prophets, the days of Jesus would inaugurate a time when men and women would truly *know* God.
- Certainly, the Jews knew a lot *about* God; yet, they do not truly *know* Him.
- Jesus concludes this verse by asserting the reality of His intimate relationship with and knowledge of God [for Jesus is “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18)]:
  - “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.”
  - Notice, inherent to Jesus’ knowledge of the Father is His willingness and ability to “keep His word.”

### Verse 56

- As one scholar stated, “To say that Abraham saw the Messiah was neither new nor offensive to the Jewish teachers; it was its application to Jesus that was unbelievable.” (Beasley-Murray 1999: paraphrasing Schlatter)
- One ancient Rabbi [Akiba] believed that, based upon the account of the institution of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15:17-21, God revealed to Abraham the secrets of the future messianic age.
- Some have also proposed the possibility that Abraham rejoiced when he told Isaac, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Genesis 22:8
- However, despite much speculation, it appears rather clear that, given the context here, Jesus is stating that Abraham rejoiced to see the day of the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah, when the Word would become flesh.
- “Abraham’s joyful anticipation of the promise made to him [which involved a multitude of descendants] and of its (provisional) fulfillment in the birth of Isaac [and the subsequent binding of Isaac on Mt. Moriah] is placed here in the perspective of the eschatological salvation that has dawned with the coming (‘the day’) of Jesus.” Andreas Kostenberger
- D.A. Carson states that the statement by Jesus likely means that, at a minimum, Abraham received “some vision, however vague, of the promise inherent in the binding of Isaac or (better) of the covenant promising that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12).”

- ❑ One of the most significant truths we may gain from this verse, however, is an insight into **how the Old Testament saints were saved:**

They were saved just as we are today:  
**BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN THE ONE TRUE MESSIAH – THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

- ❑ Read Hebrews 11:13

### Verse 57

- ❑ The Jews respond to Jesus by criticizing Him based upon His age: “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”
  - On the surface, it appears that the Jews are ridiculing Jesus in a sense, by stating, “Abraham lived two thousand years ago, yet, you are only fifty...”
  - Also, in first century Palestine, fifty years old was viewed as the point of a man’s full maturity, as well as the age of his retirement (it seems that the Levitical priests retired at this age, Numbers 4:3).
    - Thus, the Jews are basically saying, “You are only 30 years old - you do not know what you are talking about.”
    - As one scholar noted, the Jews were probably “annoyed by his [Jesus] claims to authority despite his relative youth.”

### Verse 58

- ❑ This is one of the most powerful uses of **I AM**, *ego eimi* [egw ei mi ], in the Gospel of John.
- ❑ The phrase *ego eimi* is used twenty-four [24] times in the Gospel of John.
- ❑ Seventeen [17] of these times, the phrase, *ego eimi*, is followed by a clear predicate [e.g. “I am **the light of the world**”]
- ❑ There are seven [7] “absolute usages” of *ego eimi* in this Gospel. They are 8:24, 8:28, 8:58, 13:19, 18:5, 18:6, and 18:8.
- ❑ In order to fully understand the weight of this passage, one must first understand that many of the Jews of the first century read from the Septuagint – the Greek Version of the Hebrew Old Testament, translated in 250 B.C.
- ❑ Apologist James White, in his book, *The Forgotten Trinity*, writes,
 

Those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ deny that an immediate connection between Exodus 3:14 and John 5:58 cannot be made. The strongest argument they can present is that the *ego eimi* portion of Exodus 4:14 isn’t really the assertion of divinity: the *ho obn* portion is (*ho obn* being translated as “the Being” or “the One Existing”).

[Notice, for example, The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ own translation, the new World Translation, renders *ego eimi*, here, “I have been.”]

The closest and most logical connection between John’s usage of *ego eimi* and the Old Testament is to be found in the Septuagint rendering of a particular Hebrew phrase, *ani hu*, in the writings (primarily) of Isaiah. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew phrase *ani hu* as *ego eimi* in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; and 46:4. In each of these instances the phrase *ani hu* appears at the end of the clause, and is so rendered (or punctuated) in the Septuagint (just as in the seven “absolute usages” in John)...In 45:18 we find *ego eimi kurios* for *ani Yahweh*”

- READ Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4; and 45:18
- White also states, in his article, “Purpose and Meaning of ‘Ego Eimi’ in the Gospel of John In Reference to the Deity of Christ”:

“It could fairly be admitted that an immediate and unqualified jump from the *ego eimi* of John 8:58 to Exodus 3:14 is unwise. The connection that is much more properly traced is the one given here, that of *ego eimi/ani hu* as found in Isaiah. **The connection between Isaiah and Exodus 3:14 is so obvious as to be undeniable.**

- Now read Exodus 3:14
- Jesus’ use of *ego eimi* in John 5:58 is clearly an elaboration of the true meaning of the name Yahweh:

The name “Yahweh” comes from an archaic form of the verb meaning “to be” in Hebrew...Some scholars suggest this name originally meant “He causes to be,” others, “he exists,” still others “the Eternal” or “the Ever-living,” and one has simply, “He who is.” One suggested derivation maintains “Yahweh” means “Was-Is-Will Continue to Be.”  
Eric Snow

#### THE EGO EIMI “THREAD” THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

**Note: To the First Century reader of John, this thread would have been obvious!**

<b>Exodus 3:14</b> (in the Septuagint)							
kai	ei	pen	o	qeoß	proß	Mwushn	ego ei mi o wn
And	God	said		to	Moses	<b>I am</b>	the One being
kai	ei	pen	outwß	erei	ß		toi ß ui oi ß
I srah			o wn				
	And	He	said	Thus	you shall say	to the sons of Israel	The One
being							
a	pe	sta	ke	me	proß	umaß	
has	sent	me	to	you.			

**Isaiah 43:10** (in the Septuagint)

genesqe moi martureß kai egw martuß I egei  
kuri oß o qeoß kai o paiß mou  
Be to me witnesses, and I am a witness, says the LORD God, and my servant  
on exel examhn i na gnwte kai  
ti steushte kai sunhte oti  
whom I have chosen; so that you know, and should trust, and should  
perceive that

ego ei mi emprosqen mou ouk egeneto alioß  
qeoß kai met eme ouk estai  
**I AM!** Before me did not exist another God, and after me it will not be.

**John 8:58**

Ei pen autoiß o Ihsouß Amhn Amhn I egw  
umi n prin Abraam  
Said to them Jesus Amen Amen I say to you before Abraham  
genesqai egw ei mi  
came to be **I AM**

**Revelation 22:13** (also written by John)

egw ei mi to A kai W arch  
kai tel oß o prwtoß  
**I AM** the Alpha and Omega beginning and Ending the First  
kai o escatoß  
and the Last

□ Augustine wrote:

Weigh the words, and get a knowledge of the mystery. 'Before Abraham was made.' Understand, that 'was made' refers to human formation; by 'am' to the Divine essence. 'He was made,' because Abraham was a creature. He did not say, 'Before Abraham was, I was;' but, 'Before Abraham was made,' who was not made save by me, 'I am.' Nor did He say this, 'Before Abraham was made I was made;' for 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;' and 'in te beginning was the Word.' 'Before Abraham was made, I am.' Recognize the Creator – distinguish the creature. He who spake was made the seed of Abraham; and that Abraham might be made, He Himself was before Abraham.

□ Martin Luther wrote:

The Lord Christ is angry below the surface and says, 'Do you want to know who I am? I am God, and that in the fullest sense. Do as you please. If you do not believe that I am He, then you are nothing, and you must die in your sin.'

- ❑ Therefore, here, in John 5:58, Jesus is stating that “**I AM God: the uncreated, self-existent, eternal Word, equal in essence with the Father.**”

### Verse 59

- ❑ If there was any doubt as to what Jesus meant by His words in Verse 58, one should look at how the Jews reacted to our Lord’s statement: “they picked up stones to throw at Him.”
- ❑ Stoning was the prescribed punishment for the offense of blasphemy in the Old Testament Law (Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 13:6-11)
- ❑ After the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus, John states, “but Jesus hid Himself.”
  - This phrase is **passive** in the original Greek; therefore, should, likely, be translated: “but Jesus *was hidden*.”
  - This, quite possibly, reveals the work of the Father in perfectly and sovereignly preserving the life of Jesus until “his hour had come.”
- ❑ Finally, John states that Jesus “went out of the temple.”
- ❑ Some have suggested that this phrase symbolizes the shekina glory of God leaving the temple.
  - Augustine wrote, “As man [Jesus] flees from the stones, but woe to those whose heart of stone God flees!”  
*(In Joban. Tract. xliii. 18)*