

**Question: "What are the seven I AM statements in the Gospel of John?"**

**Answer:** In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven statements beginning with the words *I am*. Each of these "I am" proclamations furthers our understanding of Jesus' ministry in the world. They also link Jesus to the Old Testament revelation of God.

In the Old Testament, God revealed His name to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). Thus, in Judaism, "I AM" is unquestionably understood as a name for God. Whenever Jesus made an "I am" statement in which He claimed attributes of deity, He was identifying Himself as God.

Here are the seven metaphorical "I am" statements found in John's gospel:

*"I am the bread of life"* (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51). In this chapter, Jesus establishes a pattern that continues through John's gospel—Jesus makes a statement about who He is, and He backs it up with something He does. In this case, Jesus states that He is the bread of life just after He had fed the 5,000 in the wilderness. At the same time, He contrasts what He can do with what Moses had done for their ancestors: "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die" (verses 49–50).

*"I am the light of the world"* (John 8:12; 9:5). This second of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel comes right before He heals a man born blind. Jesus not only says He is the light; He proves it. Jesus' words and actions echo Genesis 1:3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

*"I am the door"* (John 10:7 and 9, ESV). This "I am" statement stresses that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven by any other means than Christ Himself. Jesus' words in this passage are couched in the imagery of a sheepfold. He is the one and only way to enter the fold. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber" (verse 1, ESV).

*"I am the good shepherd"* (John 10:11, 14). With this "I am" statement, Jesus portrays His great love and care. He is the One who willingly protects His flock even to the point of death (verses 11 and 15). When Jesus called Himself the good shepherd, He unmistakably took for Himself one of God's titles in the Old Testament: "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1).

*"I am the resurrection and the life"* (John 11:25). Jesus made this "I am" statement immediately before raising Lazarus from the dead. Again, we see that Jesus' teaching was not just empty talk; when He made a claim, He substantiated it with action. He holds "the keys of death and the grave" (Revelation 1:18, NLT). In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed how He can

fulfill Yahweh's promise to ancient Israel: "[God's] dead shall live; their bodies shall rise" (Isaiah 26:19, ESV). Apart from Jesus, there is neither resurrection nor eternal life.

*"I am the way and the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). This powerful "I am" statement of Christ's is packed with meaning. Jesus is not merely one way among many ways to God; He is the only way. Scripture said that "The very essence of [God's] words is truth" (Psalm 119:160, NLT), and here is Jesus proclaiming that He is the truth—confirming His identity as the Word of God (see John 1:1, 14). And Jesus alone is the source of life; He is the Creator and Sustainer of all life and the Giver of eternal life.

*"I am the true vine"* (John 15:1, 5). The final metaphorical "I am" statement in the Gospel of John emphasizes the sustaining power of Christ. We are the branches, and He is the vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it is joined in vital union with the vine, only those who are joined to Christ and receive their power from Him produce fruit in the Christian life.

There are two more "I am" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. These are not metaphors; rather, they are declarations of God's name, as applied by Jesus to Himself. The first instance comes as Jesus responds to a complaint by the Pharisees. "I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). The verbs Jesus uses are in stark contrast with each other: Abraham *was*, but I *am*. There is no doubt that the Jews understood Jesus' claim to be the eternal God incarnate, because they took up stones to kill Him (verse 59).

The second instance of Jesus applying to Himself the name *I AM* comes in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the mob came to arrest Jesus, He asked them whom they sought. They said, "Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus replied, "I am he" (John 18:4–5). Then something strange happened: "When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground" (verse 6). Perhaps explaining the mob's reaction is the fact that the word *he* has been provided by our English translators. Jesus simply said, "I am." Applying God's covenant name to Himself, Jesus demonstrated His power over His foes and showed that His surrender to them was entirely voluntary (see John 10:17–18; 19:11).