

I AM THAT I AM

Is a title such as “I AM” truly a name of God? The clergy and ecclesiastical powers of certain Christian denominations believe that it is, and have conceived various explanations in defence of this belief. This study will attempt to examine the facts surrounding this belief. The querying of those quotes made by Jesus wherein he used the term “I am” is in reference mainly to those churches wherein they perceive Jesus as being the Eternal Father or God. We will examine those main quotes of “I am” made by Jesus in the New Testament and compare them to God’s words of “I AM THAT I AM” in Exodus 3:14.

It can said with confidence that the Gospel writers had no intention of implying that Jesus was the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14. Neither had the gospel writers ever implied in any form that Jesus was God, the “I AM” of Exodus 3. This belief came from the pagan traditionalism that entered into the church at a later date, that is, the doctrine of the Son and God as literally being the same being, and not simply that the Son was one with the Father in only the spiritual sense of unity as he spoke God's Word while on this earth.

Was it true that Jesus was all those things that he claimed to be in the Gospels? Yes, he was, therefore he answered always in the affirmative, “I AM”, “I am he”, etc. Jesus of Nazareth was ordained by God to be the Chosen One or Messiah, and we are told in scripture that the Messiah would be given all power upon heaven and earth. ***“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth,”*** Matthew 28:18; ***“Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, which he hath appointed heir of all things by [for] whom also he [God] made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”*** Hebrews 1:2 to 4. Jesus of Nazareth knew he was the Chosen One of God, the promised One that came out of the tribe of Judah from the loins of David by descent, and that he would speak the Word of God. The Word of God are the words of life, an attribute of God’s living Spirit. Jesus made known to his disciples who he was, that is, the promised and much besought Messiah of God. However, most of his own people did not recognize him as the Promised One. ***“But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.”*** Mark 6:4, 5.

There was no mysticism behind his words when Jesus of Nazareth declared ***“I AM HE”***, that is, the Son of God, and the Son of David. But never did Jesus say in any of the Gospels ***“I AM GOD THE FATHER”*** or ***“I AM THAT I AM”*** or ***“THE ETERNAL”***. Jesus knew the Jewish scriptures and from them, it was stated the Messiah would become the embodiment of the eternal Word of God. The Word would be manifested upon the Chosen man of flesh, a son of man, who would be humble, obedient and subservient to his fellowman. This man would be endowed with the Holy Spirit from above, the Word of God, which came from the Father. ***“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”*** John 1:14. Thus, the reason for the man of Nazareth, Jesus, saying that he came from the Father was that the Spirit that filled his body (mind) was that living Word of God. It was said in the Old Testament that God's Word would come out of the mouth of God's prophet. Moses spoke of God's prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18: ***“The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; ... “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”***

The hierarchy of some denominations will often justify their traditional beliefs by manipulating the words of scripture, construing them to conform to their sect’s doctrines, thereby, often not giving their congregations the correct interpretation on a particular subject. It is sad to say that for

many members of such denominations, the manipulation would not matter anyhow, there being more loyalty to belonging to a denomination than to the truth of the Holy Scripture.

Let us now turn our attention to those verses containing the phrase “I AM”. Following are four versions from different Bibles of the “I AM” verses. Beginning with the King James version of Exodus 3:13, 14, it reads as follows: ***“And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”***

The second version of the same text is taken from The Englishman’s Hebrew and English Old Testament, first published in 1899, the English text being translated at a later date by Joseph Magil (1871 to 1945): ***“And Moses said unto God; Behold, [when] I come unto the children of Israel, and I shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me: What [is] his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, “I WILL BE THAT I WILL” and he said, Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel “I WILL BE” has sent me unto you.”***

The third version is from the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament done between 280 and 130 B.C. ***“And Moses said to God, Behold, I shall go forth to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of our fathers has sent me to you and they will ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? And God spoke to Moses, saying, I AM THE BEING, and he said, Thus shall ye say, to the children of Israel, THE BEING has sent me to you.”***

Our fourth version of Exodus 3:13, 14 is from the Peshitta, the authorised Bible of the Church of the East (translated by George Lamsa): ***“And Moses said to God, Behold, when I go to the children of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, I AM AHIAH ASHAR HIGH (that is, THE LIVING GOD); and he said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: AHIAH has sent me to you.”***

After reading the preceding texts of the different version of Exodus 3:13, 14 and comparing them with the King James and the modern Jewish Masoretic text which quotes God as saying to Moses “I AM THAT I AM”, there may appear to be differences in the phrasing of the wording between the various Bibles. In reality, there is not a discrepancy in the wording since all versions refer to an ever-existence, the eternal state of being. All the previous texts referring to “I AM”, “I WILL BE”, “THE BEING”, and “THE LIVING GOD” all refer to a self-existence, the ever-present state of our Father, the Creator.

Is the “I AM” then a personal name of God? When we read the three verses following verses 13 and 14, the answer is given. But before we look into those verses, let us analyse verses 13 and 14 from the King James version. Moses asks God what name should he give for the name of the God of their fathers, should he be asked by the children of Israel for the name of God who sent Moses. In verses 13 and 14, God does not say that he gave His name. God said “I AM THAT I AM” and told Moses that he should say that the “I AM” sent him. God did not say this was His personal name, and it can be proven by verses 15, 16a and 18b of Exodus 3. So let us now read these following verses from the King James version: ***“And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations ... Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers ... thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us; and now let us go, we beseech thee, three day’s journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.”*** The Englishman’s Hebrew and English Old Testament reads as follows for the

same preceding verses: *“And God said moreover unto Moses: Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD [Yahveh] the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me unto you: this [is] my name for ever, and this [is] my memorial for generation [and] generation. Go, and assemble the elders of Israel, and say unto them: The Lord [Yahveh], the God of your fathers, has appeared unto me ... and you shall say unto him,: The Lord [Yahveh], the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, let us go, we pray thee, a journey of three days in the wilderness, and let us sacrifice to the Lord our God.”* Out of these last two versions, the latter is a superior translation into the English language, and although most readers will find the translations near identical, with the exception of the wording “THE LORD GOD” and “THE LORD, THY GOD”, the latter is a more correct translation into English, rendering it “Yahveh, the God” or “Jehovah, the God” – either term can be used for God’s name, being that the true spelling or pronunciation is actually unknown.

So what can we conclude from all five verses of Exodus 3:13 to 18 with regard to God’s name? Did the two identifying terms “I AM” and “YAHVEH” cause confusion among the children of Israel? There is no indication from Scripture that the terms confused them. The Jews would have understood the interpretation of these verses. In verses 15 to 18, which are ignored by many of the hierarchy of the Christian denominations, appears the scriptural information that enlighten us to the understanding of the phrase “I AM THAT I AM”. In verses 15 to 18, where the word “LORD” is used, it represents the name of the God of the Hebrews, the One God. The correct pronunciation of the name has been lost to time because the name was only uttered verbally by Jewish high priests upon entering into the Holy of Holies. When it was to be put into written form, the vowels were not used, because the name of God was considered too sacred for it to be written or uttered by the general population, therefore, only the consonants of the sacred name are known and were used to represent God Almighty. These four consonants are known by the Greek name tetragrammaton which means “a word of four letters”. The Hebrew letters (consonants) of God’s name is Yod, He, Vau, He, written in English as YHWH (see the booklet “The Tetragrammaton” on our website which provides additional details).

The forementioned tetragrammaton (or Yahveh) appears four times in Exodus 3 – verses 15, 16 and 18. In writing the following quotes, we will use the term 'Yahveh', having preference for this form of the Jewish name. Here are the quotes from Exodus 3 wherein 'YHWH' was used: Verse 15: “...Yahveh (LORD), the God of your fathers...”; verse 16: “...Yahveh (LORD), the God of your fathers...”; and verse 18: “...Yahveh (LORD), the God of the Hebrews... sacrifice to the Yahveh (LORD) our God.” Note that we believe God is One, so He does not need to distinguish Himself from others, therefore, does not need a name – we know Him from His attributes of being the Creator and Ever-existing. Jesus did not use a 'secret' name for God for Jesus knew the Jewish name for God came from man, so he simply referred to God as the progenitor of life, the Father. So in these “I AM” subject verses, we read God’s Jewish name “YAHVEH” being used in the three verses after verse 14 in the same chapter.

So again the question is asked, 'What name was given as God's proper name by Moses amongst the other names for God?' The word 'LORD' is used four times in three of the five verses quoted. Let us prove to ourselves by scripture what this particular “LORD” represents from original writings. From Strong’s Hebrew-English Lexicon, the word “LORD” is derived from the Hebrew word listed under reference # 3068: ***“Yehovah from 1951; (the) self-existent or Eternal: Jehovah, Jewish national name of God; Jehovah; the LORD.”*** We know from scripture that when God spoke to Moses, He spoke His name four times in connection with those verses of the “I AM”, telling Moses “to say” unto the children of Israel and to Pharaoh, by the words of “Yahveh” (the self-existent, the eternal). Remember God said “moreover” (that is, “beyond what has been said; further; besides; in addition”). So God told Moses to tell the children of Israel that 'Yahveh', the self-existent, the eternal, which is the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had spoken to them.

The “I AM” as spoken of by the Jewish theologian, Moses Maimonides (1135 to 1204 A.D.), says this is one of the many derivatives: ***“God taught Moses how to teach them, and how to***

establish amongst them the belief in the existence of Himself [Yahveh] namely by saying, Ebyeh asher Ebyeh, a name [phrase], derived from the verb 'hayah in the sense of "existing" for the verb 'hayah denotes "to be" and in Hebrew no difference is made between the verbs "to be" and "to exist". The principal point in this phrase is that the same word which denotes "existence" is repeated as an attribute. The word asher, "that", ... is an incomplete noun that must be completed by another noun;...The first noun which is to be described is ebyeh; the second, by which the first is described, in likewise ebyeh, the identical word, and as if to show that the object which is to be described and the attributes by which is described are in this case necessarily identical. This is, therefore, the expression of the idea that God exists, but in the ordinary sense of the term, in other words, He is "the existing Being which is the existing Being" that is to say, the Being whose existence is absolute. The proof which he was to give consisted in demonstrating that there is a Being [Yahveh] of absolute existence, that has never been and never will be without existence." Guide For The Perplexed by Moses Maimonides, Part 1, Chapter 61. So what God had said to Moses in these verses was "I the ever-existing Yahveh is the God of your fathers." Exodus 3:15b: "...This is my name [Yahveh] for ever and this is my memorial [ever-existence] unto all generations." Exodus 3:16a: "Go, and gather the elders of Israel, together, and say unto them, THE LORD [Yahveh] God..." Exodus 3:18b: "...and ye shall say unto him, The LORD [Yahveh] God of the Hebrews..."

Following is the Hebrew definition of the word "AM" as found in Strong's Hebrew-English Lexicon, reference #1961: *"AM – hayah - a prim. root [comp. 1933]; to exist, i.e. be or become, come to pass. (always emphatic, and not a mere copula or auxiliary.)"* The meaning of the Hebrew verb word "hayah" is "existence" or "To be" and is comparative with #1933: *"havah – a prim. root supposed to mean prop. to breathe; to be (in the sense of existence): be + have"*

In concluding this section on the "I AM" as to the term meaning "of being", "to be" or "the self-existent". When a person only reads Exodus 3:14 in isolation, they can not expect to get the correct understanding of the "I AM". One needs to read from verse 13 to 18 to be able to interpret the words correctly and get the full understanding of the definition of the Hebrew words for the "I AM" and "THE LORD" that appears in these verses.

In the past, a branch of the Church of God wrote an article in their magazine about the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14. The article gave several other verses from the Old Testament as evidence for their belief of "I AM" as literally being a name of God. The writer of the article proceeded to provide Exodus 20:2; Leviticus 22:2, 3; 23:43; 26:45; Numbers 3:13; 15:41 and Isaiah 42:8; 43:11, 15 as examples, allegedly showing that these verses use the wording "I AM". We will examine only two of the forementioned verses since all the referenced verses reflect the same format: Isaiah 42:8a: *"I [am] the LORD: that is my name..."*; Isaiah 43:15a: *"I [am] the LORD, your Holy One..."* If you have the King James Version and the Jewish Masoretic Bibles, you will notice in all of these previously mentioned verses that the "AM" is in Italics, indicating that the "AM" does not appear in any of the original texts. The "I" does appear in these verses, so the word that is translated as "I" in the verses is given from Strong's Hebrew-English Lexicon, reference #589: *"aniy - I (as for) me, mine, myself, we, x which, x who."* In all these verses the word 'Lord' appears capitalized, which as we have already discussed previously, refers to God's Jewish name which was too sacred to be uttered nor written. Thus, the proper reading of Isaiah 42:8a would be *"I Yahveh, that is my name..."* and Isaiah 43:15 should be *"I Yahveh your Holy One..."* What is being brought to the reader's attention is that the verses referenced in the church article are not proof of the term "I AM" being related to a name: firstly, because the verses provided were not the same wording as was used in Exodus 3:14; and secondly, "I AM" was not a name given by God but a description of His attribute of being eternal or ever-existent. In other words, God is an unending power or omnipotent, and all things are unlimited to Him. Jesus never gave God a name, but spoke of Him with a title. During his ministry, Jesus referred to God as 'My Father' or 'Our Father', given that God is the progenitor of mankind and to all things in our universe.

Last, but not least important to our discussion is the implication by some denominations to suggest that by Jesus using the phrase "I AM" as stated in the gospel is showing that Jesus is literally God. Verses used to imply this include the following: John 8:58: **"...Before Abraham was, I am."**; John 6:35: **"...I am the bread of life..."**; John 8:12: **"... I am the light of the world..."**; John 10:11: **"I am the good shepherd..."**; John 15:5: **"I am the vine..."**; John 14:6: **"... I am the way, the truth, and the life..."**; John 11:25: **"I am the resurrection, and the life..."**; etc. The "I am" as was used by Jesus was in the same manner as we would use it, that is, as the present indicative, as the first person, as pronoun singular, representing the only of its kind or type, embodying something specific or individual in nature. Just as God our Father is One by being self-existing and eternal, Jesus is the ONLY one ordained by God to be His Christ (Word) on earth. God created mankind in His image and His works were "very good" therefore it is only understandable that a man should arise that on his own initiative should overcome the evils of Satan, and in doing so, showing that God's works were not in vain. We will now analyse the verses wherein Jesus supposedly was using "I AM" in reference to himself being God. We will start with John 11:24 to 27: **"Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."** There is no place in these verses that Jesus indicates that he is God simply because he uses the term "I AM". In fact, verse 27 tells you who he is, that is, the chosen of God, the Son of God, His Christ or Word on earth. In other words, Jesus was the Word made flesh. All things were put into Jesus' hands, and if you believe in his teachings, which is the Word of God speaking through him, those Words will bring you eternal life at the resurrection of the righteous. The "I AM" used in the passage was an expression of speech and nothing more. Next, let's read John 6:34, 35: **"Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."** When Jesus said "I am the bread of life", he was speaking of the Word of God which came from heaven and was manifested in him. There is no place here or in the entire Scripture where it indicates Jesus is God. He was granted the Holy Spirit at his baptism, for God gave it to him at that time without measure, but that did not make him God. John 4:25, 26: **"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."** The woman here makes the remark that when Christ comes, he will tell them all things. Jesus responds and says "I AM HE", in other words, "I am the Christ". To imply here that Jesus is saying "I am God" is pure interpolation and misinterpretation. Luke 9:18 to 20: **"And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I Am? They answering said, John the Baptist, but some say, Elias, and other say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God."** Again, Jesus is not using "I am" in reference to the name for himself, but as in a question regarding his identity. Jesus was asking Peter who he thought Jesus was and was not making a statement that he was God. Further to this, Peter doesn't say he believes Jesus is God the Father, but that Jesus is the Christ, the Word of God manifested to mankind. The last verse we will analyse is John 8:56 to 58: **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."** Without getting deep into another topic, the Jewish teachers often misunderstood the words spoken by Jesus, not having a spiritual understanding of God and His Will. Throughout the Old Testament, prophets such as Moses, Isaiah and others prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, yet when he came, they did not recognize the words he spoke. The prophets who lived hundreds of year before Jesus also foretold of the cessation of ritual sacrifices, and how God preferred people to live from the heart rather than from outward acts of obedience, and they were often abused or even killed for saying such things by the Jewish leaders of their day. We say all this because in John 8, Jesus spoke in the spiritual sense, not in a literal sense. We believe that Jesus was saying his coming into this world as the Saviour was known to Abraham and even before him. Verse 56 states Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day. What did Abraham have to rejoice about?

Read Genesis 12:1 to 3: ***“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”*** This passage describes the promise made by God to Abraham about the establishment of Israel and of the Messiah to come. The coming Messiah is alluded to in the statement that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Abraham is renowned for his faith in God so when God made the promise that he would be a father of a great nation and from that nation, the Saviour would come, that would have been a great honour to him and Abraham would know that it would come about as God had foretold. But since Jesus also said “before Abraham was, I am”, where else was the Messiah mentioned that occurred before the time of Abraham? The answer is in Genesis 3:15: ***“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”*** This prophecy was made near the time of Creation after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and was God's response to Satan after he tempted God's creation to sin. The promise of a Saviour of mankind had existed from the beginning of his creation, thus, by Jesus stating he existed before Abraham, he was referring to his Messiahship, not him as a being.

In conclusion, we should not introduce mysticism into Scripture where it is not indicated. The churches that exaggerate the meaning of Jesus' use of “I am” this or that are misleading people to induce them into believing their conceived notions and doctrines. Jesus' use of “I am” during his ministry was NOT in the same context as was used in God's talk with Moses in Exodus 3:14. God's use of “I AM THAT I AM” was a description of the essence of His being, not a name to be shared with the children of Israel.