

JESUS, THE GREAT I AM

- A. Introduction:** For several weeks we have been talking about who Jesus is according to the Bible. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses, men who walked and talked with Jesus. Their interaction with Him convinced them that He was and is God become man without ceasing to be God.
1. To fully appreciate all that this means, we previously discussed the Triune nature of God. The Bible reveals that God is one God who simultaneously manifests as three distinct, but separate, Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The Bible states that there is only one God (Deut 6:4; II Sam 7:22; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6; Isa 45:5; I Cor 8:4; I Thess 1:9; I Tim 1:17; etc.). Yet the Bible calls three distinct Persons God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (I Pet 1:2; John 20:26-28; Acts 5:3-4; Titus 2:10-13; etc.).
 - b. The nature of God (the Godhead, Rom 1:20; Acts 17:29; Col 2:9) is beyond comprehension, because we are talking about an Infinite, Eternal Being. And we are finite beings, who have only finite terms to describe Him. We simply accept it with awe, wonder, and worship—like the eyewitnesses did.
 2. God is invisible and dwells in unapproachable light. The full weight of God’s glorious nature is more than fallen finite humans can bear. I Tim 1:17; 6:16; Ex 33:18-23; Acts 9:8; Rev 1:17
 - a. Yet God wants to be known by and have relationship with the creatures He created. He wants a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live. Jer 9:23-24; Eph 1:4-5;
 - b. Two thousand years ago the second Person of the Godhead incarnated or took on a full human nature in the womb of a virgin named Mary. He took the name Jesus (Savior), and came into this world to die for sin. Luke 1:31-35; Heb 2:14-15
 1. Motivated by love, He voluntarily laid down His life as the final, once for all, sacrifice for sin, and opened the way for men and women to be reconciled to God. John 1:12-13; John 10:15-17; I John 3:16; Rom 5:6-8; I John 4:9-10
 - A. While on earth, Jesus didn’t live as God. He veiled His deity, put aside His rights and privileges as God, and limited Himself to all the limitations of being human. He lived as a man in dependence on God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Phil 2:6-8;
 - B. People sometimes draw wrong conclusion about who Jesus is because they don’t distinguish between Bible verses that refer to Jesus’ humanity and those that refer to His deity. Mark 11:12; Mark 4:38; John 10:29-33; John 20:17; 28
 2. Jesus is called the Word (*Logos*). Jesus is God’s message (Word) or fullest revelation of Himself to mankind. He is the visible image of the invisible God. John 1:1; Col 1:15
 - A. John 1:18—No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known (ESV).
 - B. Jesus said if you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father, not because I am the Father, but because I show His character. I am the fullest expression of His nature. John 14:9
- B. In this lesson, we have more to say about who Jesus is.** We begin with an incident recorded in the gospel of John, one of the twelve apostles, an eyewitness who spent over three years with Jesus.
1. By the time John wrote his gospel, false teachings had arisen that distorted who Jesus is and why He came into this world. These teachings denied the deity of Jesus (the fact that He is God) and His incarnation (the fact that He took on a human nature in Mary’s womb).
 - a. Although the other gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke) wrote accurately about who Jesus is (fully God, fully man), John included much material not found in the other three gospels.
 1. John 8:56-58—Among other things, John reported that Jesus, in an encounter with the Pharisees, applied the name I Am to Himself. I Am was the name that God gave for

Himself when He commissioned Moses to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery (Ex 3:14).

2. By calling Himself I Am Jesus was claiming to be God. The Pharisees who heard Jesus take that name were enraged, and picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy. John 8:59
- b. Jesus wasn't making an empty claim. When we examine the Old Testament, we find that Jesus did appear to Moses—Preincarnate Jesus, or Jesus before He took on a human nature.
 1. Jesus (the Word) did not come into existence in the womb of Mary. He has always existed because He is God. He has only had a human nature for two thousand years.
 2. The Old Testament record reveals that Preincarnate Jesus was very interactive with His people before He incarnated and was born into this world.
- c. In these appearances Preincarnate Jesus is most often referred to as the Angel of the Lord. This is not an angel (a created being). He is the Angel.
 1. The Hebrew word translated angel means messenger or one who is sent. Jesus is the sent one, the message or Word of God, in both the Old and New Testaments.
 2. These appearances are known as theophanies. The term comes from two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *phaino* (to appear). It wasn't an incarnation. It was an appearance or manifestation of God, often in a visible, bodily form.
2. Some historical background. Jesus was born into the nation of Israel (the Jewish people). They were descendants of a man name Abraham. About 1921 BC God promised him that he would become the father of a great nation and all families would be blessed through him. Gen 12:1-3
 - a. In the third generation, Abraham's descendants (75 in all) travelled from Canaan (modern Israel) to Egypt during a time of famine and stayed for 400 years, much of that time as slaves.
 1. God raised up a man named Moses from among the Israelites and commissioned Him to lead Abraham's descendants out of Egypt and back to their ancestral land.
 2. Through a series of power demonstrations, Almighty God persuaded the king of Egypt (Pharaoh) to release the Israelites. As part of their escape, God parted the waters of the Red Sea, and His people passed through on dry ground.
 3. Paul the apostle, another eyewitness of Jesus, and one of the main authors of the New Testament, reported that it was Jesus who led the Israelites back to Canaan. I Cor 10:1-4
 - b. I Cor 10:4—For they all drank from the miraculous rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ (NLT). The Rock was Preincarnate Jesus, the Angel of the Lord.
3. Ex 3:1-6—The events Paul was referring to began to unfold when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire and spoke to him from a burning bush.
 - a. Note the Angel is identified as God, and claimed to be the God of Moses' ancestors. He told Moses to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Moses acknowledged Him as God. Although the Angel is God He's distinct from God; He's the Messenger of God.
 - b. The Angel told Moses that He was going to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage. When Moses asked, who shall I say has sent me to my people (Israel), the Angel called Himself by a name that can only be used of God—I Am. Ex 3:14
 1. I Am is from a Hebrew word that means to exist or to be. The root idea is underived existence. He is the Self-Existent One. He is because He is.
 2. When Jesus took the name I Am centuries later, He was telling His audience: I predate you entire existence as a nation, from Abraham down to Moses, because I Am the Pre-existent One. I am the Eternal God. To the Pharisees, this was blasphemy.
 - c. Ex 13:20-22—When Pharaoh finally sent the Israelites out of Egypt and they began their journey back to Canaan, the Lord guided them in a pillar (or column) of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The cloud was not only a guide for them, it was light and warmth at night, and protection from the desert sun during the day.

1. Pharaoh soon changed his mind and led his army after the Israelites to recapture them (Ex 14:5-9). As the Egyptian army approached, the pillar of cloud moved in between Israel and the Egyptians.
2. Ex 14:19-20 identifies the Lord who was leading the Israelites in the cloud as the Angel of the Lord, the visible manifestation of the Lord's presence with them.
4. Once Israel was through the Red Sea and out of Egypt, the first thing God did was reveal Himself more fully to His people. Ex 19:1-20
 - a. God descended visibly, in a thick cloud, at Mount Sinai, a mountain in modern Saudi Arabia (Ex 19:9; 16). One to two million people (Ex 12:37-38) witnessed the biggest and most powerful theophany in recorded history.
 1. They saw fire, heard God's voice thunder, and felt the earth shake when He spoke. God appeared as fire, not because He is fire, but to help them understand something about His person and work: I am the Only God, I am All Power, and I am here to help you.
 2. Moses went up the mountain and met with God. Moses was given God's Law which he then recorded in the portion of Old Testament documents that he himself wrote.
 - b. Ex 23:20-23—While Moses met with the Lord on Sinai, God promised Moses that His Angel would go with him to lead the Israelites safely back to Canaan. God said: Beware of (give heed to) Him, obey His voice, and don't provoke (rebel or defy) Him. The Angel has already been identified as the Lord (Ex 14:19-20). Note two other indicators of His identity.
 1. My name is in Him. In the ancient world, name was equivalent to the person. God's name represents all that He is: He is my representative—he bears my name (v21, NLT).
 2. The Angel will not pardon your transgressions—He will not forgive your sins (v21, NLT). Only God can forgive sin.
 - c. As we read the account of the journey back to Canaan, we see that these people did disobey the Lord (the Angel) and reaped the consequences of their disobedience (lessons for another day). But, despite their rebellion, the Lord (the Angel) never abandoned them. He met their needs, guided them, and protected them from their enemies. Ps 105:39-44
5. Israel remained at Sinai for over a year while they prepared for the journey back to Canaan. In that time, as per God's instructions, they constructed a Tabernacle (dwelling place)—I want the people of Israel to build me a sacred residence where I can live among them (Ex 25:8, NLT).
 - a. While this was in process, Moses set up a tent outside the camp to consult with the Lord. Whenever Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud came down and hovered at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses, as a man speaks to a friend. Ex 33:7-11
 - b. At one point Moses asked the Lord, who will you send with me on this journey? The Lord replied, my Presence will go with you (Ex 33:14). The idea in the original language is: "I will personally go with you, Moses. I will give you rest—everything will be fine" (NLT).
6. The Bible is fifty-percent history. It was written by real people who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded what they saw and heard as God worked out aspects of His plan of redemption in their generation. All these events became part of Israel's national consciousness.
 - a. Note something that Isaiah the prophet wrote many centuries later. Why he wrote is a lesson for another time, but he conveyed the idea that the Lord is with His people and saves them.
 1. Isa 63:8-9—He was a Savior to them [in all their distresses]. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old (Amp).
 2. The last phrase (carried them all the days of old) indicates that the Lord (the Angel of the Lord, Preincarnate Jesus) was with them from the beginning of their national history.
 - b. On resurrection day, when Jesus appeared to His original apostles for the first time, He went

through the Scriptures pointing out how He fulfilled everything that was written about Him (Luke 24:44-47). He was able to say: That was Me who spoke to Moses in the burning bush, Me who led Israel out of Egypt and back to Canaan, Me who met with Moses on Mount Sinai.

c. Acts 7—Stephen, the man who became the first person martyred for his faith in Jesus, was accused of blaspheming Moses. Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin (a religious court) and the High Priest asked him if the charges were true.

1. As part of his testimony, Stephen recounted Moses' history and used it as an opportunity to proclaim the fact that Moses prophesied about the coming Messiah (Jesus).

2. Note one statement Stephen made: Moses was with the assembly of God's people in the wilderness. He was the mediator between the people of Israel and the angel who gave him life-giving words on Mount Sinai to pass on to us (Acts 7:38, NLT).

d. Last week we referred Jesus' transfiguration (Matt 17:1-3). For a brief time, His veiled deity shone through. This was an outshining of the glory that was (and is) His as Almighty God.

1. Luke 9:30-31—Then two men, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking of how he was about to fulfill God's plan by dying in Jerusalem (NLT).

2. What was like for Moses who interacted with the Angel of the Lord at Sinai and was now interacting with God incarnate? What was it like for the apostles to witness all of this?

C. Conclusion: Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God, one Person, two natures—human and divine. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God, Old Testament and New.

1. Almighty God, who is incomprehensible and transcendent, who is invisible and dwells in light that no man can approach, wants to be known by and have relationship with those He created.

a. Back to John's gospel. John opened his gospel with a clear statement that at a specific point in time Jesus took on a human nature and was born into this world, to make Himself know—the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us. John 1:14; John 1:18

b. The phrase dwelled among us had great significant for 1st century Jews, based on their nation history. Remember, God told the generation that came out of Egypt that they were to construct a Tabernacle (or tent) so that He could dwell among them. Ex 25:8

1. Israel was instructed to build the Ark (a box or chest) with a lid, known as the mercy seat, with two golden cherubim (angelic beings) on either side. Once all was completed, the cloud of God's presence would rest between the cherubim on the lid. Ex 25:22; Lev 16:2

2. The cloud became known as the Shekinah (from a Hebrew word that means residence). This was the same cloud that went with Israel from Egypt to Canaan. Ex 40:33-38

c. John's opening statement is clear. As God manifested His presence in the Tabernacle (tent) Moses made, He manifested His presence on earth in the Word made flesh—and we saw Him.

2. The Old Testament records numerous appearances of Jesus before He took on flesh. All of them reveal something about Almighty God's nature. Consider one more as we close. Gen 16:1-16

a. Hagar was a maid servant to Sarah, wife of Abraham. God promised the couple that they would have children, but they took matters into their own hands. Abraham slept with Hagar and a child was born. Sarah became jealous, mistreated Hagar, and she ran away.

b. The Angel of the Lord heard her cries, appeared to her, and gave her comfort and help.

From that point on, "Hagar referred to the Lord who had spoken to her, as the God who sees me...I have seen the one who sees me" (Gen 16:13, NLT).

3. God wants to be known by, and have relationship with, us. Let's get to know Him more fully through the most reliable source of information we have about Him—the written Word of God that reveals the Living Word. Much more next week!!