

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 3: THE NAMES OF GOD

Lesson 8

The Name Above Every Name — God Revealed in Christ

New Testament Revelation of the Divine Name

Key Texts: John 8:58; John 14:9; Philippians 2:9–11; Matthew 28:19

The I AM of the Burning Bush Walks Among Us

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Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Introduction

In Lesson 7 we lingered in the richness of the Old Testament's revealed names for God, *Elohim*, *YHWH*, *Adonai*, *El Shaddai*, *El Elyon*, and the six great compound Jehovah-names that mark the high moments of God's redemptive self-disclosure to His people. We found in each name not merely a theological label but a window into the inexhaustible character of God, and a ground of confidence upon which faith may build and from which prayer may spring. We closed with the recognition that the names of God are not information to be filed; they are invitations to be accepted, invitations to dwell in the shelter of the Most High and abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

Now, in this eighth lesson and the closing lesson of Unit 3, the entire stream of Old Testament name-revelation reaches its appointed destination: Jesus Christ. All that the Old Testament names disclosed about the character, the power, the covenant faithfulness, and the saving purposes of God finds its final, climactic, and inexhaustibly full expression in the Person of the incarnate Son. He is not a new God, introduced to replace or supplement the God of Israel; He is the same God, now present in human flesh, walking the roads of Galilee and Judea, bearing in His person the fullness of all that the divine names promised. As the author of Hebrews declares, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2, NASB 1995). The Son is not a word spoken about God; He is the Word who is God, the final, unsurpassable, personally present self-revelation of the One who spoke the burning bush, who named Himself I AM, who appeared to the patriarchs as El Shaddai.

In this lesson we will trace the New Testament revelation of the divine name through four great movements: the Lord Jesus' deliberate and theologically loaded use of the "I AM" formula in the Gospel of John; the absolute "I AM" of John 8:58 as the most direct and irreducible New Testament assertion of Christ's identity with YHWH; the Father's revelation of Himself through and in the Son; and the exaltation of Christ to the Name above every name and the bestowal of the Trinitarian Name at the great commission. We will close with the pastoral and doxological significance of the whole: that the God of the burning bush is the God of the empty tomb, and that the name by which the universe was created is the same name by which the world is redeemed.

I. "I AM" (Ego Eimi) in the Gospel of John: A Deliberate Claim to Deity

The Gospel of John is, among all four Gospels, the most explicitly and theologically concentrated on the divine identity of Jesus Christ. Its opening verse establishes the Christological ground from which everything that follows proceeds: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1, NASB 1995). The Word who is God becomes flesh and dwells among us (John 1:14), and the entire Gospel is the account of that dwelling, the personal presence of the One who is God among those who were made by Him (John 1:3).

Within this theological framework, the formula *ego eimi*, "I AM" in Greek, carries an enormous freight of Old Testament allusion and Christological claim. The Greek *ego*

eimi is the Septuagint's standard rendering of the Hebrew *'ehyeh*, the first-person singular form of the verb "to be" that God uses in His self-disclosure at the burning bush: "I AM WHO I AM" (*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, Exodus 3:14). And the shortened form "I AM" (*'ehyeh*), "Tell them I AM has sent me to you", is the form that most directly echoes in the *ego eimi* of John's Gospel.

The Gospel of John contains two distinct types of "I AM" statements by Jesus. The first type, the seven "I AM" statements with predicates, are declarations in which Jesus identifies Himself as the fulfillment of specific redemptive realities that His people need: the bread that sustains life, the light that illumines darkness, the door that provides access, the shepherd who lays down His life, the resurrection that conquers death, the way and truth and life that leads to the Father, and the vine that nourishes the branches. The second type, the absolute "I AM" statements without predicates, are the most direct and theologically explosive, because they identify Jesus with the divine name itself, without any qualification or supplement.

In each case, the formula is not an accident of Greek idiom; it is a deliberate theological declaration. The Jewish listeners in the Gospel of John consistently understand the absolute "I AM" statements as claims to divine identity, which is precisely why they respond to them with attempts to stone Jesus for blasphemy (John 8:59; 10:31). Their response is not theologically confused; it is, on the premise of Jewish monotheism, the only appropriate response to what they have heard. The question is not whether they understood the claim; it is whether the claim is true. And the Gospel of John, and indeed the entire New Testament, insists with one voice that it is.

II. The Seven "I AM" Statements of John: The Shape of the Divine Self-Giving

The seven predicated "I AM" statements of the Gospel of John are among the most theologically luminous and pastorally rich declarations in all of Scripture. Structured around the number seven, the number of completeness and divine perfection in biblical numerology, they disclose the comprehensive sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to meet every dimension of human need. Each one takes the formula of the divine name and fills it with specific redemptive content, declaring not only who Jesus is but what He provides for the souls of those who come to Him.

1. "I AM the Bread of Life", John 6:35

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst'" (John 6:35, NASB 1995). Spoken in the aftermath of the feeding of the five thousand and in the context of the discourse on the true bread from heaven, this declaration identifies Jesus as the ultimate satisfaction of the deepest human hunger. As manna sustained Israel in the wilderness, so the Lord Jesus, as the true bread from heaven who gives life to the world (John 6:33), is the One in whom the soul that was hungry finds not temporary provision but abiding satisfaction. The Jehovah-Jireh of the wilderness provision is now present in Person as the Bread that never perishes.

2. "I AM the Light of the World", John 8:12

“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life’” (John 8:12, NASB 1995). Spoken in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, with its great lamp-lighting ceremony that illuminated the temple courts in celebration of the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness, this declaration presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the divine light-presence that guided the covenant people. The God who said “Let there be light” in Genesis 1, and who guided Israel by the pillar of cloud and fire, is now walking among them as the One who is Himself the light that no darkness can overcome (John 1:5).

3. “I AM the Door”, John 10:9

“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9, NASB 1995). In the context of the discourse on the Good Shepherd, Jesus declares Himself to be the exclusive means of access to the flock, the only legitimate entry point into the saving relationship with God that the shepherd metaphor describes. The declaration carries a profound exclusive claim: not a door among many, but the door, the only legitimate and saving passage from the lostness of the flock to the safety and provision of the fold. The salvation and freedom and pasture promised to those who enter through Him are descriptions of the comprehensive well-being of the soul that is truly in relationship with the God who is its Shepherd.

4. “I AM the Good Shepherd”, John 10:11

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NASB 1995). This declaration stands in direct continuity with the great Old Testament shepherd passages, where YHWH Himself is the Shepherd of Israel: “The LORD is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1, NASB 1995); “Like a shepherd He will tend His flock” (Isaiah 40:11, NASB 1995); “I Myself will shepherd My sheep” (Ezekiel 34:15, NASB 1995). The promise of Ezekiel 34, where YHWH declares that He Himself will come to shepherd the flock that the false shepherds of Israel have scattered and exploited, is now fulfilled in the One who lays down His life for the sheep, the ultimate act of shepherd-devotion that no human shepherd could or would perform.

5. “I AM the Resurrection and the Life”, John 11:25

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die’” (John 11:25–26, NASB 1995). Spoken at the tomb of Lazarus, in the presence of death’s most visceral and undeniable reality, this declaration is among the most audacious in the Gospel. Martha believes in a future resurrection; Jesus relocates the resurrection from the future to a present Person. He does not merely promise resurrection; He is resurrection. He does not merely possess life; He is life. The implication is that death, in the presence of the One who is the resurrection and the life, has met its match, and the subsequent raising of Lazarus is the enacted demonstration of the declared truth.

6. “I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”, John 14:6

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’” (John 14:6, NASB 1995). Spoken in the upper room discourse, in response to Thomas’ confession of ignorance about the way to the Father, this is

perhaps the most comprehensive of all the “I AM” statements. The three predicates, way, truth, life, constitute a complete description of the divine self-giving in Christ. He is the way: the only path by which fallen creatures return to the Father from whom they have been separated by sin. He is the truth: the personal embodiment and utterance of all divine reality, the One in whom there is no discrepancy between appearance and being. He is the life: the One who has life in Himself (John 5:26) and who gives that life to all who come to Him. The exclusivity of the claim, “no one comes to the Father but through Me”, is not spiritual arrogance; it is the inevitable implication of the identity being claimed.

7. “I AM the True Vine”, John 15:1

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1, NASB 1995). The vine is one of the richest Old Testament images for Israel as the covenant people of God (Psalm 80:8–16; Isaiah 5:1–7; Ezekiel 15; Jeremiah 2:21). Israel as the vine was called to bear the fruit of covenant faithfulness; Israel as the vine consistently failed, producing wild grapes where good grapes were expected. Now the Lord Jesus declares Himself to be the true vine, the One who is the reality of which Israel was the type, the One in whom the covenant vocation of fruit-bearing is perfectly fulfilled, and in union with whom the branches, His disciples, bear fruit that abides. Abiding in Christ, the true vine, is the New Testament equivalent of dwelling in the name of YHWH.

III. The Absolute “I AM” of John 8:58: Before Abraham Was, I Am

If the seven predicated “I AM” statements are the Gospel of John’s most pastorally rich Christological declarations, the absolute “I AM” of John 8:58 is its most theologically explosive and most personally direct identification of Jesus with the covenant name of God. The context is a controversy with Jewish leaders about the nature of Jesus’ relationship with Abraham. Jesus has declared that whoever keeps His word will never see death (John 8:51), and His interlocutors press the claim to its limit:

“The Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.”, John 8:57–59, NASB 1995

The syntax of the declaration is grammatically jarring in a way that is fully intentional. “Before Abraham was born” uses the aorist infinitive *genesthai*, a past, completed act of coming into being. “I am” uses the present indicative *eimi*, not “I was,” not “I existed,” not even “I have been,” but the eternal, timeless, self-existent present: I AM. The juxtaposition of Abraham’s historical beginning (“was born”) with Jesus’ eternal self-existence (“I am”) is the precise grammatical structure of a claim to deity: Abraham came into being at a point in time; Jesus inhabits an eternal present that precedes and encompasses all time.

The Jewish leaders’ response, picking up stones to throw at Him, is the definitive confirmation that they understood exactly what He was claiming. Under the Mosaic law, blasphemy was a capital offense (Leviticus 24:16), and the blasphemy in question, the claim to be God, to bear the divine name, to exist in a manner that transcended all

created being, was precisely what the absolute *ego eimi* of John 8:58 asserted. The stoning was theologically informed; what was lacking was the recognition that the claim was not blasphemy but truth.

The absolute “I AM” appears in other significant contexts in John’s Gospel as well. In John 18:5–6, when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus in the garden and He identifies Himself with the words “I am He” (*ego eimi* in the Greek, without the pronoun “He” that most English translations add for clarity), “they drew back and fell to the ground.” The involuntary prostration of the arresting party at the utterance of the divine name is one of the most quietly dramatic moments in the Gospel, the soldiers who came to arrest the prisoner falling before the One who is the I AM. And in John 8:24 and 8:28, Jesus warns His hearers that unless they believe that “I am He” (*ego eimi*), they will die in their sins, placing eternal life and death on the recognition of who He is.

IV. The Father Revealed Through the Son: “He Who Has Seen Me Has Seen the Father”

One of the most staggering claims in the entire New Testament is the Lord Jesus’ declaration in John 14:9: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” The context is the upper room discourse on the night of His betrayal. Philip has asked, with an earnestness that speaks for every inquiring soul: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8, NASB 1995). The answer Jesus gives to that plea is the most radical possible:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.’”, John 14:9–10, NASB 1995

The claim is not that seeing Jesus is a useful analogy for understanding something about the Father, or that Jesus’ teachings give us information about what the Father is like. The claim is ontological and direct: the One standing before Philip is the Father’s full and personal self-disclosure. To see Jesus is to see God. Not to see a representation of God, not to see a messenger from God, not even to see an image of God, but to see God, present and personal, in the fullness of His character and glory, veiled in human flesh but not for that reason any less than who He is.

The author of Hebrews provides the theological precision that undergirds this claim: the Son is “the radiance of His (the Father’s) glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3, NASB 1995). The Greek word translated “exact representation” is *charaktēr*, from which the English word “character” derives, and it originally referred to the impression made by a seal or stamp upon wax: the precise, complete, point-for-point correspondence between the die and its impression. The Son is to the Father as the impression is to the seal: the exact, complete, unabbreviated representation of the Father’s being in a form that created minds can encounter.

This declaration has enormous significance for the study of the divine names. In Lesson 7 we surveyed the names by which God revealed Himself in the Old Testament and

found in each one a window into the divine character. In John 14:9, those windows converge in a single pane: the Lord Jesus Christ is the living, personal, embodied fulfillment of every name. He is Elohim, the Creator who sustains all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:16–17). He is YHWH, the I AM who dwells among His people as the tabernacle of God’s presence (John 1:14; Revelation 21:3). He is Adonai, the Lord to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Philippians 2:10–11). He is El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). He is El Elyon, the Most High, exalted above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Ephesians 1:21). He is Jehovah-Jireh, who did not spare His own Son (Romans 8:32). He is Jehovah-Rapha, by whose stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24). He is Jehovah-Shalom, our peace through His reconciling blood (Ephesians 2:14–16). He is Jehovah-Tsidkenu, who became to us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is Jehovah-Shammah, Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23), and the One who promises never to leave or forsake His people (Hebrews 13:5). In the face of Jesus Christ, every name of God is not superseded but fulfilled; not replaced but embodied.

V. The Name Above Every Name: Philippians 2:9–11 and the Universal Lordship of Christ

The climax of the New Testament’s revelation of the divine name in Christ is reached in Philippians 2:9–11, one of the most majestic passages in the Pauline letters and, indeed, in the entire New Testament. The passage is the concluding movement of the great Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:6–11, which moves from the eternal pre-existence of Christ in the form of God (v. 6), through His self-emptying descent into human flesh and servant-obedience to the point of death on a cross (vv. 7–8), to the sovereign divine response to that obedience:

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”, Philippians 2:9–11, NASB 1995

Several features of this passage demand close attention. First, the name that is bestowed upon Christ at His exaltation is described as “the name which is above every name”, the superlative of all divine nomenclature, the name to which no other name can be compared. There is only one name in Jewish and Christian theology that fits this description: the Tetragrammaton, YHWH. The name “bestowed” upon the exalted Christ is not a new name invented for the occasion; it is the eternal covenant name of God, now publicly and triumphantly ascribed to the One who has accomplished the redemption that name had always promised.

Second, the universal acclamation called forth by this name, “every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess”, is drawn directly from Isaiah 45:23, where the LORD declares: “I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance” (Isaiah 45:23, NASB 1995). In Isaiah 45, this universal acclamation is

directed to YHWH alone; there is no God but Him (Isaiah 45:5). Paul's application of this text to Jesus Christ in Philippians 2 is not a departure from the monotheism of Isaiah; it is the disclosure of the full identity of the One who is YHWH. The universal homage that belongs to YHWH alone is rendered to Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is YHWH, the covenant God of Israel, the I AM of the burning bush, now exalted in His human nature to the throne of cosmic lordship.

Third, the confession "Jesus Christ is Lord", *Kyrios Iēsous Christos* in Greek, is the New Testament's most compact and comprehensive confession of faith. Kyrios (Lord) is the Greek translation of YHWH in the Septuagint, the word by which the covenant name of God was rendered for Greek-speaking Jewish readers. To confess "Jesus Christ is Lord" is therefore, in the fullest sense, to confess "Jesus Christ is YHWH." This is the faith upon which the New Testament church was founded, for which the early martyrs died, and which continues to be the irreducible center of all Christian confession: Jesus is Lord, and Lord, in the deepest New Testament sense, means the covenant God of Israel who spoke at Sinai, who redeemed at the Exodus, who promised through the prophets, and who has now accomplished all that He promised through the death and resurrection of His incarnate Son.

VI. The Trinitarian Name: Matthew 28:19 and the One Name of Three Persons

Our study of the divine name in the New Testament reaches its most explicitly Trinitarian expression in the great commission of Matthew 28:18–20. The risen Lord, possessing all authority in heaven and on earth (v. 18), commissions His disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (v. 19, NASB 1995). This baptismal formula is a Trinitarian declaration of the first order, and its grammar is as theologically precise as anything in the New Testament.

Notice that the Lord does not say "in the names (plural) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." He uses the singular: "in the name (onoma, singular) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." One name, three Persons. The singular name encompasses and identifies all three Persons together, which is precisely what the doctrine of the Trinity affirms: there is one divine Being (one name, one nature, one essence) who exists eternally and perfectly as three co-equal, co-eternal, consubstantial Persons. The baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 is the most compressed and complete Trinitarian formula in Scripture, and it is spoken by the risen Christ Himself as the summary of who the God is into whose life the nations are to be baptized.

The significance of the baptismal formula for the study of the divine name is profound. In Lesson 7 we noted that the Shema's use of YHWH twice, "THE LORD is our God, THE LORD is one", hints at an internal differentiation within the divine unity that the Old Testament progressively discloses and the New Testament fully reveals. The Matthew 28:19 formula is that full revelation: the one name of God is the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The God into whose name we are baptized, into whose life and covenant we are initiated, is the Trinitarian God, the God who is one in Being and

three in Person, the God who has now disclosed in the fullness of New Testament revelation what the divine name has always encompassed.

The early church understood this formula with great seriousness. It was the ground of their baptismal practice, their doxological life (the Gloria Patri: “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit”), their prayer (“through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the Spirit, to the Father”), and their theology. The Apostolic Benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all”, is the Trinitarian Name in doxological form, addressed to a congregation as the comprehensive summary of what God has given in Christ. There is one name, and it is the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

VII. The Pastoral Significance: The God of the Old Testament Is the God of the Empty Tomb

We close Unit 3 with its most important pastoral and doxological affirmation: the God of the Old Testament, the God of the burning bush, the God of the Exodus, the God of the patriarchs, the God of the prophets, the God who gave His name as I AM WHO I AM, is the same God who walked out of the tomb on the third day. There is not a God of the Old Testament and a different God of the New Testament, as the ancient heretic Marcion proposed. There is one God, one covenant Lord, one YHWH who has been revealing Himself across the sweep of redemptive history in an ever-clarifying, ever-deepening, ever fuller disclosure, and who in these last days has spoken His final and unsurpassable Word in His Son.

This continuity between the Old Testament names and the New Testament Christ is the ground of several vital pastoral convictions. First, it means that the character of God does not change between the Testaments. The God who is El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One who appeared to Abraham in his impossibility, is the same God who raised Christ from the dead and who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). The God who is Jehovah-Rapha, the Healer who made the bitter waters sweet, is the same God who heals through the suffering of the incarnate Son. The God who is Jehovah-Shammah, the One who will be present with His people in the new Jerusalem, is the same God who is present with His people now through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17), and who will be present with them fully and finally in the consummated new creation.

Second, it means that every promise God made under the Old Testament names remains valid and in force, not because the Old Covenant still governs the relationship between God and His people, but because the One who made the promises is immutable and faithful, and His Son is the Yes and Amen of every one of them (2 Corinthians 1:20). The Christian who prays to Jehovah-Jireh is praying to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all” and will therefore “freely give us all things” (Romans 8:32, NASB 1995). The provision promised in the name is guaranteed by the cross.

Third, and most doxologically, it means that the study of the divine names culminates not in a richer theological vocabulary but in a deeper personal knowledge of the Lord

Jesus Christ. He is the Name above every name. He is the one in whom every name of God finds its personal, living, inexhaustible fulfillment. He is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of His nature. He is the way to the Father, the truth about the Father, and the life of the Father extended to all who believe. He is the Bread who satisfies every hunger, the Light who illumines every darkness, the Door through which every needy sinner passes into the safety of God's fold, the Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, the Resurrection who conquered death, the Vine in whom fruitfulness abides, and the I AM who was before Abraham, is now, and will reign forever. Knowing His name is knowing Him, and knowing Him is eternal life.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

John 8:56–59

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.”

John 14:8–10

“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?’”

Philippians 2:9–11

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Matthew 28:18–19

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’”

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Meaning and Significance
Ego Eimi (εγώ εἰμι)	Greek for “I AM,” the formula used by Jesus in the Gospel of John. The Septuagint’s standard rendering of the divine name in Exodus 3:14. In John’s Gospel, used both with predicates (the seven “I AM” statements: Bread of Life, Light of the World, Door, Good Shepherd, Resurrection and the Life, Way/Truth/Life, True Vine) and absolutely without predicates (John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5–6), directly identifying Jesus with the covenant name YHWH.
The Seven I AM Statements	Seven predicated “I AM” declarations in John’s Gospel in which Jesus identifies Himself as the fulfillment of specific redemptive realities: Bread of Life (6:35), Light of the World (8:12), the Door (10:9), the Good Shepherd (10:11), the Resurrection and the Life (11:25), the Way, Truth, and Life (14:6), and the True Vine (15:1). Each fills the divine name formula with specific saving content.
Absolute I AM (John 8:58)	The most direct Christological claim in John’s Gospel: “Before Abraham was born, I am.” The grammatical juxtaposition of Abraham’s past becoming (aorist: “was born”) and Jesus’ eternal self-existence (present: “I am”) is a claim to the divine name. The Jewish audience’s response (picking up stones for blasphemy) confirms their understanding of the claim’s scope.
Charaktēr (χαρακτήρ)	Greek term in Hebrews 1:3, translated “exact representation.” Originally the impression made by a die or seal on wax, the precise, point-for-point correspondence between the stamp and its impression. Used to describe the Son’s relationship to the Father: not a resemblance or a representation but the exact, complete, unabbreviated impress of the Father’s very being in the Person of the Son.
Kyrios (Κύριος)	Greek for “Lord.” The standard Septuagint translation of YHWH. In the New Testament, applied to Jesus as the definitive confession of His divine identity: “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Kyrios Isēsous Christos, Philippians 2:11) is the claim that Jesus is YHWH, the covenant God of Israel. The earliest Christian confession, for which martyrs died.
Philippians 2:6–11 (Christ Hymn)	One of the earliest and most theologically comprehensive Christological passages in the New Testament. Moves from Christ’s pre-existent equality with God (v. 6), through His incarnational self-emptying (v. 7), servant obedience, and death on the cross (v. 8), to His exaltation and the bestowal of the Name above every name (vv. 9–11), generating universal acclamation drawn from Isaiah 45:23.
Trinitarian Name (Matthew 28:19)	The baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19: “in the name (singular) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The singular “name” encompasses all three Persons, declaring the one divine Being as Trinitarian in His eternal existence. The most compressed and explicit Trinitarian formula in Scripture, spoken by the risen Christ as the summary of who the God is into whose life disciples of all nations are to be initiated.

Incarnation	From the Latin <i>incarnatio</i> (“enfleshment”). The doctrine that the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, took on full human nature, body, soul, and spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, becoming truly and fully human while remaining truly and fully divine. John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The incarnation is the supreme act of divine name-revelation: the I AM dwelling among us in person.
Emmanuel (עִמָּנוּאֵל)	Hebrew for “God with us.” The name given to the promised child in Isaiah 7:14 and applied to Jesus in Matthew 1:23. The fulfillment of Jehovah-Shammah (“The LORD Is There”) in the person of the incarnate Son. Declares that the divine presence once localized in the Tabernacle and the Temple is now personally present in the human nature of Jesus Christ.
Progressive Revelation	The theological principle that God’s self-disclosure in Scripture moves through stages of increasing clarity and fullness, from the partial and shadowy disclosures of the Old Testament to the final and complete revelation in Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2). Applied to the divine names: each Old Testament name disclosed a genuine dimension of the divine character; the incarnation of the Son brings all of those disclosures to their personal, living, and inexhaustibly full fulfillment.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that Jesus Christ is not a religious teacher who illumined the character of a God who existed independently of Him; He is Himself the personal presence of the God whose names we have been studying throughout Unit 3. To know Christ is to know God, not merely to know about God, but to be in genuine, saving, covenantal relationship with the One whose name is I AM, who is the Father’s exact representation, and who bears the Name above every name. We must also believe that the seven “I AM” statements are not rhetorical flourishes or spiritual metaphors; they are ontological declarations about who Jesus is and what He provides. He is not like the bread of life; He is the bread of life. He is not like the resurrection; He is the resurrection. The names are promises, and He is their personal fulfillment. Finally, we must believe that the confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” is not a pious sentiment; it is the most theologically loaded declaration available to a human mouth, the confession that the eternal covenant God of Israel has accomplished redemption in His incarnate Son and now reigns as Lord of the universe.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The revelation that the seven “I AM” statements are personal declarations of divine self-giving, that in each one, Jesus is offering Himself as the precise supply for a specific dimension of human need, should produce in us a deep and living gratitude. He did not

merely tell us about the bread of life; He became it. He did not merely describe the light of the world; He is it. He did not merely teach us about the resurrection; He is it. The whole weight of the divine character, disclosed across the sweep of the Old Testament in name after name, is concentrated in a single Person who offers Himself to us without reservation or condition. The only appropriate response to that offer is the response of the disciples: Lord, give us this bread always (John 6:34); Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life (John 6:68). Let the “I AM” statements of Christ kindle in our hearts a renewed and deeper love for the One who is everything we need.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Meditate on each “I AM” statement in relation to a specific need.** The seven “I AM” statements are not to be learned in sequence and stored; they are to be inhabited one at a time in the context of the specific needs they address. If you are spiritually hungry, meditate on “I AM the Bread of Life.” If you are walking in confusion or darkness, meditate on “I AM the Light of the World.” If you are facing death or grief, meditate on “I AM the Resurrection and the Life.” Let the “I AM” that speaks most directly to your present need be the center of your Scripture meditation and prayer.
2. **Confess “Jesus Christ is Lord” with theological seriousness.** The Kyrios confession is not a liturgical formality; it is the most theologically saturated confession available to a Christian. When you say “Jesus is Lord,” you are saying: Jesus is YHWH, the covenant God of Israel; He is the One whose name is above every name; He is the One to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess. Say it slowly, with the full weight of what it means. Let it be, as it was for the early martyrs, the confession for which you are willing to give everything.
3. **Trace the continuity between Old and New Testament names.** Take the Old Testament names from Lesson 7 and trace each one through to its fulfillment in Christ, using the connections laid out in Section IV of this lesson. Create a personal study, or a teaching tool for your family or Sunday school class, that shows how each Old Testament name finds its personal, living embodiment in the Lord Jesus Christ. The exercise will deepen both your knowledge of the names and your wonder at the Christ who fulfills them all.
4. **Pray the Trinitarian Name.** Let the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 shape your prayer life. Pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, the Trinitarian grammar of all authentic Christian prayer. Let your praise be directed to the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let your intercessions be brought “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Let your confidence rest on the Spirit who intercedes for you with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26). The one Name that encompasses three Persons is the Name into which your life has been baptized.
5. **Proclaim Christ as the fulfillment of every divine name.** In your evangelism, your teaching, and your preaching, make the connection between the Old Testament names and the New Testament Christ explicit. The person who is hungry for God does not need an abstract theological presentation; they need to

meet the One who says “I AM the Bread of Life” and “He who comes to Me will not hunger.” The person who is walking in darkness does not need a philosophy of light; they need to encounter the One who says “I AM the Light of the World” and “He who follows Me will not walk in the darkness.” Proclaim the Person. The names are in Him.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: The seven “I AM” statements of John are among the most accessible and most transforming Christological declarations in the New Testament. They are simple enough to memorize and deep enough to sustain a lifetime of meditation. Begin with the one that speaks most directly to where you are right now, and let it be the center of your devotion until you have inhabited it fully. Then move to the next. There is no end to what each one contains.

For the one who doubts: Philip’s request, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us”, is the prayer of every honest doubter. And Jesus’ answer is given not to Philip alone but to every person who has ever looked at the universe and wondered whether God is there, whether He is good, and whether He can be trusted: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” The answer to every honest question about God is found in the face of Jesus Christ. Look at Him. Study Him. Follow Him. In Him, you will find the Father.

For the one who is suffering: The “I AM” statements are not merely doctrinal propositions; they are the words of the One who is present with you in your suffering, offering Himself as the precise supply for your specific need. In the darkness, He is the Light. In the hunger, He is the Bread. In the death and grief, He is the Resurrection. In the lostness, He is the Way. He has not promised to give you these things from a distance; He has promised to be them for you, personally and permanently, in the intimacy of a relationship that no circumstance and no power can sever.

For the pastor and teacher: Unit 3 on the names of God closes with its most doxological and most evangelistically potent lesson. The “I AM” statements of John’s Gospel are among the richest homiletical resources in the New Testament, each one a self-contained sermon waiting to be preached, each one a window into the Person of Christ that opens onto an infinite panorama of grace, truth, and saving power. Preach the “I AM” statements. Let the people of God hear, from the lips of their Lord, what He is for them and what He offers them. And let the proclamation end where the Gospel of John ends: “These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, NASB 1995).

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Which of the seven “I AM” statements of John’s Gospel has been most meaningful to you personally, and why? Is there a particular season of your life when one of these statements became an anchor for your faith? Share briefly with the group.

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read John 8:56–59. What specific claim does Jesus make about His relationship to Abraham? How does the grammar of the declaration, “before Abraham was born, I am”, signal something more than a claim to temporal priority? What does the crowd’s response tell us about how they understood the claim?

3. Read John 14:8–11. What is Philip asking for? How does Jesus’ answer in verse 9 reframe the question? What does Jesus say in verses 10–11 about the relationship between His words, His works, and the Father? What kind of belief does He call Philip to?

4. Read Philippians 2:6–11. Trace the movement of the Christ-hymn from pre-existent equality with God to exaltation and universal acclamation. What is “the name which is above every name”? What Old Testament passage does Paul quote in verse 10–11, and what is the significance of that quotation? What does it mean that this universal acclamation is “to the glory of God the Father”?

5. Read Matthew 28:18–20. What authority does the risen Christ claim before issuing the commission? Notice the grammar of verse 19: “the name” (singular) of three Persons. What does this grammatical choice declare about the nature of God? What are the three components of the commission Jesus gives?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

6. Select three of the seven “I AM” statements and explain for each: (a) what specific human need it addresses, (b) what Old Testament background or imagery it evokes, and (c) how it points to the fulfillment of a specific Old Testament divine name or promise.

7. What is the connection between the absolute “I AM” of John 8:58 and the divine name revealed in Exodus 3:14? How does the Greek of John 8:58, the juxtaposition of *genesthai* (past becoming) and *eimi* (eternal present), make the claim to divine identity linguistically explicit?

8. Explain the significance of Paul’s use of Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10–11. In Isaiah 45, to whom is the universal acclamation directed? What does Paul’s application of that text to Jesus Christ declare about Jesus’ identity? How does this serve as a defense of the full deity of Christ?

9. How does John 14:9 (“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”) connect with the study of the Old Testament names from Lesson 7? In what sense is the incarnate Christ the living fulfillment of every divine name disclosed in the Old Testament?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

10. The lesson argues that the “I AM” statements are invitations, not merely declarations, that each one offers the Person of Christ as the specific supply for a specific dimension of human need. What is the greatest need in your life at this moment? Which “I AM” statement speaks most directly to it? How will you bring that statement into your prayer and Scripture meditation this week?

11. The confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Kyrios) was the confession for which early Christians were martyred. What does it cost, in your cultural context, to make this confession? Are there areas of your life where your practical allegiances contradict your confessed lordship of Christ? What would wholehearted allegiance to the Name above every name look like in your daily life?

12. As we close Unit 3 on the names of God, reflect on the arc of Lessons 7 and 8 together: the Old Testament names disclosed the character of God in specific redemptive encounters; the New Testament reveals the personal fulfillment of all those names in the Lord Jesus Christ. How has this study of the divine names changed the way you think about Jesus? How has it changed the way you think about God? What is the single most transformative insight from Unit 3 that you will carry into the rest of this series?

Prayer Focus

Close Unit 3 in prayer that moves through the “I AM” statements of Jesus as acts of personal address and praise. Begin with the confession of His identity: Lord Jesus, You are the I AM, the same God who spoke from the burning bush, who led Israel through the wilderness, who appeared to the patriarchs as El Shaddai. You are the radiance of the Father’s glory and the exact representation of His nature. In You, every name by which God has made Himself known finds its personal, living, inexhaustible fulfillment.

Then move through the “I AM” statements as petitions and praises: Lord, You are the Bread of Life, feed our hungry souls with Yourself. You are the Light of the World, illumine our darkness with Your presence. You are the Door, keep us safe in Your fold. You are the Good Shepherd, seek the lost among us and tend the weary. You are the Resurrection and the Life, speak life into the places in us that have been given over to death. You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, keep us from the detours that lead nowhere, and hold us on the road to the Father. You are the True Vine, keep us abiding in You, that we may bear fruit that remains.

And close with the doxology of Philippians 2: For this reason also, God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, and so, with every tongue, we confess: Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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