

THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2024

Unit: Gospel of John (Part 2)

Theme: I AM

Overview: Jesus made several claims about himself in the Gospel of John. These claims connected the dots between his name, his identity, and his mission. They all have Old Testament antecedents with additional connections to Israel. In Part 2 of this three-month study in the Gospel of John, students will learn of Jesus' superiority to Abraham, how Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the exclusive way of salvation, and the true vine (new Israel). This LORD is the great I AM.

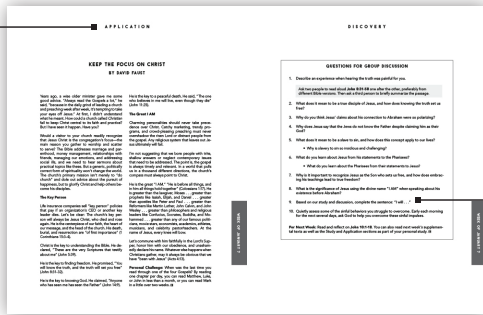
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JANUARY 7, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Do the work of the Father,
who has set you free and
claims you as his child.**

UNIT: Gospel of John (Part 2)

THEME: I AM

LESSON TEXT: John 8:31-58

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 1:1, 12; Exodus 3:13-15; Matthew 1:1;
3:7-9; Romans 9:6-8

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM

BY MARK SCOTT

It is hard to overstate the significance of Abraham. Today he is looked to as the father of three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His name is mentioned 11 times in this lesson text. In the music department, I've heard people say, "It all goes back to the polka"; in the Bible, we could say, "It all goes back to Abraham" (Genesis 12:1-3).

The controversy about Jesus continued to swirl in this "festival section" of John's Gospel (chapters 5-10). His claims and miracles had the religious leaders nearly in a fit. Whether the festival was Passover, Tabernacles, or Dedication, Jesus was a lightning rod of controversy. Jesus finally came up to Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles (John 7:10), and the dialogue there led to an aggressive and pointed confrontation.

Abraham and Israel*John 8:31-47*

Some Jews believed Jesus' word and were being liberated to the freedom that only he could give (v. 31). In these verses, John clearly juxtaposed the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus. Those leaders had heard Jesus teach about his Father, so they made this bold claim intending to one-up Jesus' Father: "*We are Abraham's descendants*" (v. 33). They obviously said this in a boastful manner, and then they claimed to not have been enslaved. They had a bad case of spiritual amnesia. Can you say, "400 years in Egypt?"

The term *slavery* was not always literal for Jesus, however. Slavery to sin can be a form of terrible solitary confinement. Only Jesus (not Abraham) can set those prisoners free. Jesus agreed with those debating him that they were Abraham's "physical" descendants, but they were not living up to the spiritual legacy of Abraham. Evidence of this was their desire to kill Jesus.

Jesus told the leaders that they had another father; this statement angered them, so they said, "*Abraham is our father*" (v. 39). Jesus took them to the woodshed by accusing them of being very unlike Abraham (vv. 39-41). This sounded to the Jewish leaders like a charge of spiritual illegitimacy, so they went in for the kill, "*The only Father we have is God himself*" (v. 41). Jesus' logic was impeccable. If God really was their Father, they would love his Son and hear what he wanted them to hear.

Jesus asserted that their real father was the devil. Therefore, their father was a *murderer*, their father was not

holding to the truth, their father had no truth *in him*, and their father was *the father of lies*. Jesus was not afraid to relate the truth to anyone. He asked a question no other human would be willing to ask: "*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*" (v. 46). Only an extremely confident or foolish person would possibly expose themselves to such potential criticism. The bottom line was that Israel's leaders did not truly *belong to God*.

Abraham and Jesus*John 8:48-58*

The Jewish leaders responded to Jesus' words with name-calling and charges. They charged Jesus with being a *Samaritan* and being *demon-possessed*. Jesus denied these accusations by saying he sought no glory for himself but only for his Father. Jesus was so "other-centered" that there was no way he was making bogus claims. If people would just obey Jesus, they would be spared from death.

This was preposterous to the leaders, so they reminded Jesus that Abraham had died, as had the prophets. So, they asked him two questions: (1) Was Jesus greater than Abraham, and (2) Who are you? Jesus responded by talking about how the Father and Son *glorify* (a key word in John's Gospel) each other, and how he knows the Father intimately. In fact, Jesus said, if he did not know the Father, then "*I would be a liar like you*" (v. 55). That statement angered them.

Jesus then verbally needed them by saying, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad*" (v. 56). (Note: Momentarily, and for the sake of the argument, Jesus agreed that Abraham was their father; compare this with v. 39.)

The religious leaders were thinking only on a physical plane. They could tell that Jesus was not 50 years old. How could he know Abraham? Then Jesus made one of his most stunning claims ever, "*Before Abraham was born, I am*" (v. 58). Critics who contend that Jesus never claimed to be God need to read this verse again. The leaders knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. It is why, a verse later, they moved to stone him. Jesus refused to be polarized, and yet he is the most polarizing figure in history. ■

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APPLICATION

KEEP THE FOCUS ON CHRIST

BY DAVID FAUST

Years ago, a wise older minister gave me some good advice. “Always read the Gospels a lot,” he said, “because in the daily grind of leading a church and preaching week after week, it’s tempting to take your eyes off Jesus.” At first, I didn’t understand what he meant. How could a church called *Christian* fail to keep Christ central to its faith and practice? But I have seen it happen. Have you?

Would a visitor to your church readily recognize that Jesus Christ is the congregation’s focus—the main reason you gather to worship and scatter to serve? The Bible addresses marriage and parenthood, money management, relationships with friends, managing our emotions, and addressing social ills, and we need to hear sermons about practical topics like these. But a generic, politically correct form of spirituality won’t change the world. The church’s primary mission isn’t merely to “do church” and dole out advice about the pursuit of happiness, but to glorify Christ and help others become his disciples.

The Key Person

Life insurance companies sell “key person” policies that pay if an organization’s CEO or another key leader dies. Let’s be clear: The church’s key person will always be Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. He is the centerpiece of our faith, the heart of our message, and the head of the church. His death, burial, and resurrection are “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Christ is the key to understanding the Bible. He declared, “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39).

He is the key to finding freedom. He promised, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

He is the key to knowing God. He claimed, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

He is the key to a peaceful death. He said, “The one who believes in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25).

The Great I AM

Charming personalities should never take precedence over Christ. Catchy marketing, trendy programs, and crowd-pleasing preaching must never overshadow the risen Lord or distract people from the gospel. Any religious system that leaves out Jesus ultimately will fail.

I’m not suggesting that we bore people with trite, shallow answers or neglect contemporary issues that need to be addressed. The point is, the gospel is always timely and relevant. In a world that pulls us in a thousand different directions, the church’s compass must always point to Christ.

He is the great “I AM.” “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). He is greater than the lawgiver, Moses . . . greater than prophets like Isaiah, Elijah, and Daniel . . . greater than apostles like Peter and Paul . . . greater than Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley . . . greater than philosophers and religious leaders like Confucius, Socrates, Buddha, and Mohammed . . . greater than any of our famous politicians, movie stars, economists, academics, athletes, musicians, and celebrity pastor/teachers. At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow.

Let’s commune with him faithfully in the Lord’s Supper, honor him with our obedience, and unashamedly declare his name. Whatever else happens when Christians gather, may it always be obvious that we have “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Personal Challenge: When was the last time you read through one of the four Gospels? By reading one chapter per day, you can read Matthew, Luke, or John in less than a month, or you can read Mark in a little over two weeks. ■

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe an experience when hearing the truth was painful for you.

Ask two people to read aloud **John 8:31-58** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. What does it mean to be a true disciple of Jesus, and how does knowing the truth set us free?
3. Why do you think Jesus' claims about his connection to Abraham were so polarizing?
4. Why does Jesus say that the Jews do not know the Father despite claiming him as their God?
5. What does it mean to be a slave to sin, and how does this concept apply to our lives?
 - Why is slavery to sin so insidious and challenging?
6. What do you learn about Jesus from his statements to the Pharisees?
 - What do you learn about the Pharisees from their statements to Jesus?
7. Why is it important to recognize Jesus as the Son who sets us free, and how does embracing his teachings lead to true freedom?
8. What is the significance of Jesus using the divine name "I AM" when speaking about his existence before Abraham?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. Quietly assess some of the sinful behaviors you struggle to overcome. Early each morning for the next several days, ask God to help you overcome these sinful impulses.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 10:1-18**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■