

The I AM

One of the scriptures that is often used as definitive proof that Christ is the “God of the Old Testament” is Christ’s statement in John 8:58 where He identifies Himself as “I AM”. Here is this scripture in its context:

John 8:48-59

⁴⁸ Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

⁴⁹ Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. ⁵⁰ And I do not seek My *own* glory; there is One who seeks and judges. ⁵¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."

⁵² Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' ⁵³ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. **Who do You make Yourself out to be?**"

⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. ⁵⁵ Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."

⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to Him, "**You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?**"

⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.**"

⁵⁹ Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Christ makes this statement in the context of being asked “Who do you make yourself out to be?” Specifically He is being challenged on how He could possibly have known Abraham given “You are not yet fifty years old”. In the above scriptures, Christ is speaking about Abraham and is not addressing Moses and the burning bush incident. However, His use of the phrase “I AM” is what causes many people to connect this passage of scripture with the account of the burning bush in Exodus 3.

The God being who spoke to Moses from the burning bush makes a very similar statement when He identifies Himself to Moses. In the Exodus 3 account, the God being who spoke to Moses identifies Himself using the phrase "I AM WHO I AM" and by instructing Moses to tell the Israelites "I AM has sent me to you". Here is the account in its context:

Ex 3:1-17

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the **Angel of the LORD** appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

⁴ So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

⁵ Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground." ⁶ Moreover He said, "**I am the God of your father — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.**" And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

⁷ And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹² So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, '**The God of your fathers has sent me to you,**' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?"

¹⁴ And God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**" And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, '**I AM has sent me to you.**'" ¹⁵ Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: '**The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,** has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.' ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, '**The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,** appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and *seen* what is done to you in Egypt; ¹⁷ and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

So, the question we have to ask is when Christ described Himself with the phrase "I AM" was He also communicating that He is the One who spoke to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3? To answer this question, we need to consider what else we are told about the God being that spoke to Moses from the burning bush in the Exodus 3 account. In this account the God being who spoke to Moses also repeatedly identifies Himself as "the God of your fathers" and also as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". If we look at who these titles are attributed to in the New Testament, we see that they are exclusively attributed to God the Father.

Acts 3:13-15

¹³ The **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers,** glorified **His Servant Jesus,** whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

Acts 3:25-26

²⁵ You are sons of the prophets, and of the **covenant which God made with our fathers,** saying to Abraham, '*And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*' ²⁶ To you first, **God, having raised up His Servant Jesus,** sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities."

Acts 5:30-31

³⁰ The **God of our fathers raised up Jesus** whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 22:12-14

¹² "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, ¹³ came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

¹⁴ Then he said, '**The God of our fathers** has chosen you that you should know His will, and see **the Just One**, and hear the voice of His mouth.

Notice in every scripture above the Father is clearly being referred to as the "God of our fathers" and He is being contrasted with Christ so there is no confusion as to who is being referred to. Also notice that both Acts 3:25-26 and Acts 5:30-31 mention that the God of our fathers "raised up" Jesus. This makes it very clear that God the Father is being referred to here as "the God of our fathers". Christ certainly didn't resurrect Himself nor did He by His own power do any of the works He performed during His physical life (John 5:30). It was clearly God the Father who "raised up" Christ in every way that statement can be interpreted. So, it is clear that God the Father is being referred to here with the title "God of our fathers".

The account of the burning bush incident as recorded in the book of Acts also indicates that it was God the Father who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush.

Acts 7:30-36

³⁰ "And when forty years had passed, an **Angel of the Lord** appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. ³¹ When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, ³² saying, '***I am the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.***' And Moses trembled and dared not look. ³³ '*Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."*

³⁵ "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, '*Who made you a ruler and a judge?*' is the one **God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who**

appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Notice that verse 30 tells us that it was the “Angel of the Lord” that appeared as the flame in the burning bush. The “Angel of the Lord” is a title for the One who became Jesus Christ. (The word “Angel” here does NOT imply that He is a created angelic being. He is clearly an Eternal God being. The Hebrew word for Angel in the original account in Exodus 3:2 is “malak” and it simply means “messenger”. This title indicates He is acting as the Messenger of God the Father.) However, Acts again tells us that the God being who spoke to Moses identified Himself as “the God of your fathers” and as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” and we have previously seen that the book of Acts exclusively uses these titles for God the Father. Verse 35 shows us that the God being who sent Moses to deliver Israel is a separate individual from the Angel of the Lord. Clearly Acts is telling us that both God the Father and the One who became Jesus Christ were involved in the burning bush incident, but it was God the Father that spoke to Moses.

In addition, Christ’s own statements about the burning bush incident also verify that it was God the Father that spoke to Moses at the burning bush. Notice Christ’s account of this in Mark 12.

Mark 12:26-27

²⁶ But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *burning bush passage*, how **God spoke to him**, saying, *‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’* ²⁷ **He is not the God of the dead**, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

While referring to the burning bush incident, Christ states “God spoke to him”. He does not say “I spoke to him”. In addition, He speaks of the God being that spoke to Moses by using third person language when He states, “He is not the God of the dead”. Notice that nowhere in this account does Christ claim that He is the One who spoke to Moses at the burning bush.

Many people dismiss Christ’s use of third person terminology in this verse by saying that Christ was actually referring to Himself but just chose to refer to Himself using third person terminology. However, if we look at Christ’s use of the title “God” in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) we see that Christ never refers to Himself using the title “God”. Multiple times He refers to Himself as the “Son of God” (John 3:18; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4) but He never refers to Himself with the title “God”. Every time He uses the title “God” in the Gospels He is referring to God the Father. Here are just a few examples of Christ using the title “God”:

Matt 19:17

¹⁷ So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? **No one is good but One, that is, God.** But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,** that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ **For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world,** but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 7:16-17

¹⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but **His who sent Me.** ¹⁷ If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, **whether it is from God** or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*.

John 8:42

⁴² Jesus said to them, "**If God were your Father,** you would love Me, **for I proceeded forth and came from God;** nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

John 17:3

³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, **the only true God,** and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

In these scriptures, (and in every other scripture where He used the title "God" in the Gospels), Christ clearly differentiates between Himself and God the Father by never referring to Himself using the title "God". Given His consistent use of the title "God" as a term to refer to God the Father, we can clearly see that this is the same meaning He was expressing in Mark 12:26-27 when He stated that it was God that spoke to Moses from the burning bush. For the sake of clarity, pointing out that Christ never referred to Himself with the title "God" in the Gospels is not intended in any way to deny that Christ is a God being and worthy of worship. He is definitely an eternal God being and worthy of worship. The point is simply to clarify that Christ used the title "God" in the Gospels exclusively as a title for God the Father to clearly differentiate His role from the role of God the Father.

Given all of the scriptural evidence presented, we can clearly see that Christ was not stating that He was the One that spoke to Moses at the burning bush when he stated "I AM" in John 8:58. So, what exactly was He communicating when He stated "I AM"? To understand Christ's meaning we need to look at the Greek words used in this verse. The phrase "I AM" in this verse is a combination of two different Greek words. The word "I" is translated from the Greek word "ego" (Strong's # 1473) and the word "AM" is translated from the Greek word "eimi" (Strong's # 1510). The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates defines "eimi" "As a verb of existence, to be, to have existence". Referring specifically to the word combination "ego eimi" in John 8:58, Zodhiates states, "'I am,' meaning I have always been".

The question Christ was responding to when He stated "I AM" was how He could possibly have known Abraham given he was less than 50 years old. His answer to this question was to tell those asking this question "I have always been". He was telling them He had eternally existed. By making this claim they knew He was claiming to be a God being and this is why they reacted by attempting to stone Him. Although Christ was clearly stating He was an eternal God Being, He was not claiming that He was the One that spoke to Moses from the burning bush as He, Himself, stated in Mark 12:26-27 that it was God the Father who spoke to Moses from the burning bush.