

JESUS' FOURFOLD "I AM"

March 13, 2016

John 8:28-59

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”

John 8:58

This text is the fourth in John 8 in which Jesus identified Himself with the title “I am.” This has profound significance, for it is the title by which Jehovah identified Himself in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:13, 14). Jesus’ use, combined with multiple other scriptures that speak of His relationship with God the Father, provides clear evidence of His deity. The religious elites understood this, and wanted to kill Him for blaspheming (compare 8:59 with 10:30-33).

In John 8:12 Jesus said, “**I am** the light of the world.” They accused Him of boasting. He responded that they did not know God the Father, otherwise they would know Him; that they could not come where He was going but would die in their sins: “if ye believe not that **I am**, ye shall die in your sins” (8:24).

To their angry retort, “Who art thou?” Jesus responded, “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that **I am**” (8:28). Jesus promised that adherence to His message would liberate them, but they responded that they were Abraham’s descendents, and not in bondage.

Responding, Jesus contrasted them with Abraham. “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham, but now ye seek to kill me” (8:39, 40). “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father will ye do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him” (8:44). They were rejecting Jesus, but “your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw wit, and was glad.”

Abraham rejoiced in eager anticipation of the day when Christ would be manifest. That day had come, and they writhed with angry malice. By faith, Abraham saw the day of Messiah’s coming. Enslaved by unbelief, they could not see that Jesus was their Messiah. When Abraham saw that day he was glad. They were enraged with hatred, rejecting the truth Jesus spoke. Murder was in their hearts.

They replied, “Thou art not fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” (v. 57). Jesus responded, “Before Abraham was, **I am**” (v. 58). He is the eternal, uncreated, ever-present One with whom Abraham communed, and in whom Abraham believed and rejoiced. But standing among physical descendents of Abraham, he was not recognized. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11).

How did Abraham see Christ’s day, and rejoice? Abraham had a son, Isaac. His name means “laughter,” and indicates Abraham’s joy. Abraham’s wife said, “God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me” (Gen. 21:6). Abraham saw in Isaac the (1) the fulfillment of a divine covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-16; 15:4-6, 13-18; 17:6-18; 18:10-14; 21:1-8). (2) Isaac was miraculously conceived when any hope of procreation was long lost for a couple their age.

(3) In the sacrifice of Isaac God provided a substitute (Gen. 22:8, 13), and Abraham's seed returned alive from the offering.

(over)

The meaning and significance of these events is expounded in these New Testament passages.

Hebrews 11:8-13

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but **having seen them afar off**, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Hebrews 11:17-19

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: **Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.**”

I Peter 1:10-12

“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the **Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.** Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

Galatians 3:6-8

“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the **scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.**”

