

Meeting Jesus: His Life & Times
Worksheet for Week 8
The Divinity of Jesus in John's Gospel

The following is taken from Zuck, R. B., Bock, & D. L., *A biblical theology of the New Testament* (Pages 180-182). Chicago: Moody Press.

Explicit claims of deity. The clear and climactic assertion of Jesus' deity in the gospel of John is found in Thomas' exclamation in John 20:28, "My Lord and my God!" This is not the first time such an identification of Jesus occurs in the fourth gospel, however. It is introduced in the prologue and repeatedly emphasized throughout the gospel. John 1:1 makes three assertions about the Word (the *Logos*, identified as Jesus in 1:14). First, before the created order existed, the Word already existed. Second, the Word was in intimate personal relationship with God. Third, the Word was fully deity in essence (the NEB provides a helpful translation here: "What God was, the Word was"). Again at the end of the prologue a similar point is made about who Jesus is. "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (1:18). Thus at the very outset of his gospel, John set forth his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. This understanding is amplified and repeated throughout the remainder of the fourth gospel, reaching its climax in the confession of Thomas in 20:28. Contributing to John's affirmation of the deity of Jesus are the seven sign-miracles of John 2:1-11:44 (discussed in the preceding section), the nonpredicated "I am" statements of the gospel of John (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; and perhaps 18:5), and statements relating to the identity of Jesus and the Father.

The sign-miracles and the deity of Jesus. [There are] seven sign-miracles found in John 2:11-11:44. Each of these has its place in John's narrative as an expression of some facet of Jesus' person and work, but, in addition, all point to Jesus' heavenly origin, divine authority, and full deity. This is explicitly stated by Jesus Himself in John 10:37-38: "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the evidence of the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." The sign-miracles themselves provide testimony as to who Jesus is.

The "I am" statements and the deity of Jesus. The "I am" statements are unique to John's gospel. As first-person statements by Jesus they form a significant part of His self-revelation. These statements are important for two reasons. First, a number of them make significant predications about Jesus by using metaphors (e.g., "I am the bread of life," 6:35). Second, the phrase "I am" is used in the Old Testament as a description of God Himself (Ex. 3:14; cf. Isa. 46:4). A number of the "I am" statements in John's gospel (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; and perhaps 18:5) are absolute (i.e., without a predicate) and strongly suggest an allusion to Exodus 3:14.

There are seven "I am" statements which make predications about Jesus in the gospel of John. Jesus used this construction to make assertions about Himself as the Bread of life (6:35), the Light of the world (8:12), the Door (10:7; NIV "gate"), the Good Shepherd (10:11), the Resurrection and the Life (11:25), the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6), and the Vine (15:1). Each of these metaphors illustrates some aspect of Jesus' person and work. . . . Important as these are for understanding who Jesus is and what He came to do, they stop short of explicitly identifying Him with the name of Yahweh as found in the Old Testament. . . . The absolute (nonpredicated) "I am" statements go further, however. Four of these statements make explicit claims to Jesus' identification with God (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). The clearest and most remarkable of these is John 8:58, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" This was Jesus' reply to His opponents' exclamation, "You are not yet fifty years old . . . and you have seen Abraham!" (v. 57). Jesus' statement clearly alludes to Exodus 3:14, and the response of His opponents makes it clear that they understood Jesus' words as a claim to identification with deity. They prepared to stone Him for what they understood to be blasphemy (v. 59).

Statements relating to the identity of Jesus and the Father. Statements regarding the identity of Jesus and the Father in John 10:30 and 17:22 also point to Jesus' deity. Some interpreters have understood Jesus' words in these passages to affirm merely a oneness of will, action, or purpose. But within the framework of John's gospel the Word is declared to be essentially God (1:1), and the confession of Thomas in 20:28 provides the climax. As already seen in 8:58, Jesus alluded to His identification with God by appropriating the divine name (cf. Ex. 3:14) and the Jewish opponents responded by attempting to stone Him. A similar response to Jesus' statement "I and the Father are one" occurs in John 10:30. This suggests that Jesus' opponents understood the statement as a blasphemous (to them) assertion of deity on Jesus' part. It is important to note that although the statements in 10:30 and 17:22 regarding the relationship of Jesus to the Father do imply Jesus' deity, they stop short of complete identity. The word for "one" used by Jesus in John 10:30 is neuter rather than masculine in form, thereby preserving the distinction between Jesus and the Father established in the prologue to the fourth gospel (1:1b, "the Word was with God") and maintained throughout.

Bible Readings for Week 8¹

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

Day 1 John 13 The Last Supper	Day 2 John 14-17 Jesus' last discourse
Day 3 John 18-19 Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial	Day 4 John 20 Jesus' resurrection
Day 5 John 21 Jesus' resurrection appearances	Weekly Prayer Concerns

¹ This outline is from Raymond E. Brown's *Introduction to the New Testament*, Doubleday, 1997.