

2. John omitted this prayer episode, but he included something his counterparts didn't. That is the reaction of the arresting forces (Roman and Jewish) when Jesus identified Himself to them (18:3-9). John's account differs from the Synoptists who have Judas identifying Jesus with a kiss (Matthew 26:48-49; Mark 14:44-45; Luke 22:47-48). This seems to indicate a contradiction in the gospel records and various theories have been proposed to reconcile the differences. Whatever the explanation, it seems clear that John's intent in having Jesus identify Himself with the expression, "*I am*," was to highlight the theme – central to his writings – of divine power devoted to the service of love. He wanted his readers to recognize that Jesus' death was an act of sovereign, self-giving love in obedience to His Father, not the triumph of evil men over Him (cf. 10:17-18, 12:23-32, 14:30-31, 18:8-11, 18:33-19:11; cf. also 1 John 3:13-17, 4:7-11).

a. John recorded that Jesus was aware of the company approaching the garden and went out to meet them. Carrying torches in the darkness, it would have been easy to see them, but John indicated that Jesus sensed their presence before seeing them (18:4). When He drew near, Jesus asked who they sought and they answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." He responded, "*I am*" (18:5-6, 8), at which the men drew back and fell to the ground. A couple of observations are in order here.

First, Jesus' words are often interpreted as His explicit affirmation of His deity. "*I am*" was God's covenant name which He revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:13-15; *Yahweh* means "He is") and the claim is that Jesus was taking this name for Himself. There are several other "*I am*" declarations in John's gospel (ref. 6:20, 8:24, 28, 58, 13:19) and these are together used to show that Jesus did in fact believe and openly assert that He is God incarnate. This *may* have been Jesus' design, but it was common Greek language practice to omit an explicit predicate when it was clearly understood (and therefore unnecessary). In fact, omitting a predicate tended to *emphasize* it because it made the reader or hearer "fill in the blank." Thus, when people were questioning the man healed of his blindness, not believing that he was the individual who'd been blind from birth, he responded, "*I am*" – which is to say, I am *that very man* (John 9:9; cf. also Matthew 26:22, 25; Mark 13:6, 14:61-62; Luke 21:8, 22:70). So in this instance Jesus was likely saying only that He was the man they sought; He was Jesus the Nazarene.

Nevertheless, at His words the group of men drew back and fell to the ground. Many interpret this as them being bowled over by an unseen force, the implication being that the divine name going forth from Jesus' mouth acted like a mighty wind that blew them off their feet. But John's language in context connotes *submission* and *homage* rather than overpowering force. Their response resembled that of a subject appearing before his king or master (cf. Matthew 2:11, 4:9, 17:6, 18:26; Mark 5:22; Luke 5:12, 17:15-16; John 11:32).

Putting these two observations together, John's intent seems to have been to highlight the contrast between what appeared and what was actually taking place that night: *Human authority in the form of Rome and Israel set itself against Jesus as a counterfeit king, but He was yielding Himself to it as the King of kings.*

John gave no explanation for these men falling prostrate before Jesus, but their action had prophetic overtones, hearkening back to Isaiah's declaration that Yahweh's triumph in His Servant-Messiah would see every knee bowing before Him (Isaiah 45:11-25). Whatever they believed about the man standing before them, His self-identification compelled them to fall on their faces; the day of Yahweh's triumph was at hand and all would be confronted with it (Isaiah 40:5).

John may not have made this connection at the time, but he almost certainly did by the time he wrote his account. Jesus had insisted that He'd come to fulfill the Scriptures and He promised that the Spirit would lead His disciples into all truth – the truth that is bound up in Him. Surely decades of contemplation and instruction by the Spirit had led John to interpret the events surrounding his Lord's life and death through the lens of Israel's sacred writings. So his concern here wasn't to affirm Jesus' deity as such, but to highlight that He was subjecting Himself to the world's enmity out of self-giving love, just as the Scriptures prophesied. The earthly powers (epitomized in Roman civil authority and Jewish religious authority) were seizing Him, not because He couldn't resist them, but because He was yielding Himself to them. Anticipating resistance, they'd come against Him with weapons; indeed, Jesus' disciples were ready to fight to prevent His arrest. But no weapons were needed; He was submitting to His accusers willingly as the response of love – love for His Father and love for them (cf. Luke 22:49-51).

Jesus understood what no one else did: The suffering, degradation and death coming upon Him would exhibit His regal status and authority. The opposing powers were soon to mock and scorn Him from beneath His cross, but what they were witnessing proved the truth of the title over His head: "*The King of the Jews.*" What seemed to all observers to prove that Jesus wasn't the promised Son of David actually demonstrated that He *was* – He is the One ("I am He") in whom all the Scriptures are fulfilled and all of Yahweh's promises are "yes and amen." He is the One in whom Israel's God was becoming King over all the earth.

- b. The authorities sent to seize Jesus expected a fight and were prepared to arrest those defending Him. But there would be no opposition and so Jesus instructed them to take Him and let His disciples go their way untouched (18:7-9). He'd kept them thus far (17:12) and would not have them share His fate – not because He refused to let them die, but because their time hadn't come. They *would* follow Him in death, but not until they'd born the fruit for which He'd chosen them (15:1-27; cf. Mark 10:32-39). The disciples saw that Jesus wasn't resisting; indeed, He'd told them repeatedly – and recently – that His suffering and death were necessary (cf. Mark 9:30-31; Luke 18:31-33; Matthew 26:1-2). But Peter wasn't having it. *He* wasn't about to walk away and allow this to happen (cf. Matthew 16:21-23). Ironically, the same defiant unbelief that brought men against Jesus with swords and clubs moved Peter to raise his own sword. And not merely to threaten, but to kill; all four accounts suggest that Peter swung his sword with the intent to behead the high priest's servant, but managed only to sever his ear (18:10; cf. Matthew 26:50-51; Mark 14:46-47; Luke 22:49-50).

When he did so Jesus rebuked him and reminded him of what he should have known – and would have known if he'd kept watch as instructed: The Father had given Him this cup and He was going to drink it (18:11). The Scriptures would be fulfilled and the Messiah would go as it had been determined and written of Him. Men might choose to disbelieve this fulfillment, but Jesus wasn't going to give them any reason for their disbelief. He was fully yielded to His Father's design and everything about that night and the following day would demonstrate that. Thus He commanded Peter to desist and sheath his sword, after which He reached out and touched the servant's ear and restored it (Luke 22:51).

- c. The next thing John recorded was Jesus being taken bound to Annas' house (vv. 12-13). The only explanation he gave was that Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year who'd unwittingly prophesied Jesus' death for the nation (18:14; cf. 11:45-52). Perhaps Annas coordinated the arrest and asked that Jesus be brought to him. He and Caiaphas both served as high priest in that period (cf. 18:19, 24; Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6), so Annas may have been the starting point for all formal inquiries. The Synoptists have nothing to add because they skipped this episode. On the other hand, they included two details of Jesus' arrest which John omitted. The first is His confrontation of the men sent to arrest Him and the second is the disciples fleeing as He'd predicted (cf. Matthew 26:55-56; Mark 14:48-52; Luke 22:52-53). Though these events weren't directly related, they shared the common feature of prophetic fulfillment:

- Jesus confronted His accusers with the way they came against Him, armed and under the cover of darkness as if they needed to catch Him unawares in order to arrest Him. They acted like He was a common thief on the run from the authorities, when they knew He'd taught openly in the streets of Jerusalem and day after day in the temple. The temple was protected by police presence and they could have arrested Him at any time, yet they came against Him with a massive show of force in the dead of night. Jesus rebuked them for this, but with a particular aim in mind: *He was confronting them with the fact that their actions were scripted into God's plan* (Matthew 26:55-56; Mark 14:48-49). They viewed Him as a criminal revolutionary and approached Him that way, but they were actually serving His glorification as Israel's King (Isaiah 53:1-12). Even their timing accorded with God's design that Messiah would fulfill the Passover and bring the new Exodus (Isaiah 51:9-11; cf. 61:1-2 with Luke 4:14-21).
- So it was with the apostles fleeing as they watched their Lord seized and bound. They, too, were motivated by personal perceptions and interests, but what they did for their own reasons was in perfect accord with God's purposes as revealed in the Scriptures. He'd ordained all that was unfolding before them and even the part they were playing (ref. again Matthew 26:30-31, 52-54). They couldn't comprehend this at the time, but soon they would. And then what had appeared horrifically tragic would be unveiled as infinitely glorious – the triumph of the Lord and His Christ.