

THE 'I AM' SAYINGS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: A HISTORICAL LOOK AT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

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Abstract

The synoptic Gospels have traditionally been the focus of the historical Jesus' studies. The Gospel of John has oftentimes been alienated due to its high theological nature, despite containing Jesus' 'I-AM' sayings which are expressive of his identity. This article critically examines the question: Is there any possibility that the identity of Jesus could be explored historically through the lens of the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John? The study utilized the historical critical method of diachronic and synchronic analysis as well as progressive hermeneutics of Biblical studies. The research examines various scholars that have critically considered the issues such as the 'John, Jesus and History' group and commentary authors. Most of the scholars who supported, limited their support of historicity in the Gospel of John to the traditions behind and elements in the settings of the 'I-AM' sayings. This article concludes that the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John are relevant in considering the identity of the historical Jesus, despite the difficulty of verifying them with historical facts. Recommendations are made that more work needs to be done by biblical scholars in looking historically into the Gospel of John and considering the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John in further historical study.

Introduction

Jesus of Nazareth is considered to be the greatest man that has ever lived. Even though he neither wrote a book nor authored an article, he still remains the most popular and influential man ever. There is an emphasis in Christianity that the identity of Jesus could be derived from the sayings attributed to Jesus in the bible – among these, there are those referred to as the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus. The 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus can be seen in the Gospels of the New Testament. Most descriptions of Jesus' identities have been derived from the Synoptic

Gospels. But the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John are presented by the author as purposeful words spoken by Jesus about his identity. The Johannine 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus have also received less acceptability due to their high theological nature. But in a more critical and logical sense, could these sayings claiming information about Jesus in the Gospel of John be considered from a historical point of view? This is the motivation behind this research, to attempt to look closely into the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John in relation to the identity of the historical Jesus, not to necessarily agree or object to already laid down positions of biblical scholars on the issue, and not trying to produce any fact or evidence historically about the identity of Jesus but to explore the relevant arguments that have been raised in this light. As such, a literature review of the Gospel of John; the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John; some of the problems of the 'I-AM' sayings identified by the 'John, Jesus and History' research group; and survey of some commentaries may be relevant in fostering the understanding and exploration of the research.

In addition, exegetical analysis of some passages in the Gospel of John containing the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus - John chapter 6 in particular - will be undertaken to see if there is any relevant insight that could be considered to give a direction as to proffer any possible recommendation for the historicity of the identity of Jesus through the lens of the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The research questions that will be pondered upon here are: Theologically speaking, do the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John give us a Jesus who came to establish himself as the only means of life's survival and nourishment?; Historically speaking, can the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John - which are mostly found in discourses within the Jewish feasts - in connection to the Jewish feasts in particular - be used to explore any historical plausibility of the Johannine gospel and also be used to show any connection between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith? The methodology of this

work is the historical critical method of diachronic and synchronic analysis as well as progressive hermeneutics. These entail a scientific method of Bible study based on the assumption that there will be rational explanations for the text of scripture as we have it. This study is based on the history of language (*diachronic linguistics*) and the study of a state of language at any given time (*synchronic linguistics*). The American Psychological Association's (APA) method is applied in the referencing. We shall first look at the 'I AM' sayings in the Gospel of John, with the review of related texts.

Review of some related texts

The 'I-AM' sayings in the Gospel of John

The 'I-AM' sayings in the Gospel of John focus on the personality and identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The phrase 'I AM' equates to the Greek *ego eimi*; a personal pronoun generally employed by the Greeks to lay more emphasis on the personality in the sentence. In some cases, the canonical Gospels have Jesus referring either to *ego* 'I' or *ego eimi* 'I AM', but in each case its emphasis on the person of Jesus is still intact. In the former case *ego*, the Gospel of Matthew has Jesus using it 29 times, the Gospel of Mark has Jesus using it 17 times, the Gospel of Luke has Jesus using it 23 times and the Gospel of John used it 134 times. In the latter case of *ego eimi*, the Gospel of Matthew used it 5 times (Matthew 14:27; 22:32; 24:5; 26:22, 25), the Gospel of Mark used it 3 times (Mark 6:50; 13:6; 14:62), the Gospel of Luke used it 4 times (Luke 1:19; 21:8; 22:70; 24:39) and the Gospel of John used it 30 times.

The *ego eimi* 'I AM' in the canonical Gospels were uttered by different personalities or characters in the different narratives, for instance John the Baptist and Pilate, but it is mostly used by Jesus of Nazareth (Burge, 1992, p. 354). Just reading the Gospel of John, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the 'I-AM' sayings represent a significant feature of the fourth Gospel. Ball writes that: Like many of the major themes in the Gospel of John, the 'I-AM' sayings in the

Gospel of John are interwoven in the fabric of the Gospel, gathering further meaning each time they occur. Because the 'I-AM' sayings also focus attention on the person of Jesus, each time the words occur they further reveal something of Jesus' role or identity so that the narrator's point of view first disclosed in the prologue is reinforced (Ball, 1996, p. 149). The comparison of the *ego* and the *ego eimi* in both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John is to show the level of interest the author of the Gospel of John had in trying to identify the personalities in its presentation of the Gospel story. As such, the Gospel of John should be given more consideration in the historical investigation of the person of Jesus. Hence, a brief background of the *ego eimi* 'I-AM', will be examined.

Background to the phrase *ego eimi* 'I-AM'

The background sources of the *ego eimi* 'I-AM' that could have influenced the cultural setting in the Johannine community may play a significant role in showing that the 'I-AM' material of the Gospel of John may have existed during the lifetime of Jesus, and consequently may have been the exact words of the historical Jesus. There are different suggestions that have been considered by historical Jesus scholars regarding the source of the 'I-AM' material in the Gospel of John. Most of the religions of the ancient Near East have been seen to use the Greek formula, *ego eimi*. The magic formulas of Isis, The opening tract of the Hermetica (Poimandres) and Mandaean texts are non-Jewish sources that have been considered by scholars in this regard (Barrett 1978, pp. 291-293; Bultmann 1971, pp. 225-226). Wetter and Deissmann favoured a Hellenistic background (Veres 2008, pp. 112) while Bultmann (1971, pp. 226) and Schweitzer (2000, pp. 45-50) favoured Gnostic and Mandaen backgrounds. But there is no case of the *ego eimi* in the non-Jewish materials that can be traced to the Johannine 'absolute use' in which the *ego eimi* is virtually considered as a 'title'.

The Septuagint of the Old Testament is another source that shows abundant usage of the *ego eimi* but in most cases with a predicate (Gen 28:13; Exod 3:6-14, 15:26; Ps 35:3). The most important use is found in Exod 3:6-14 where God, having introduced himself as ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’, revealed his divine name as ‘I am who I am’ upon Moses’ request, which is translated in the LXX (Latin translation of the Bible- Septuagint) as *ego eimi ho on* ‘I am the one who is’. This became the personal covenant name for God in Israel’s faith and it became also a title. (Deut. 32:39). More recent biblical and historical Jesus scholars like Morris (1989, pp. 120-125) and particularly, Ball (1996) are of the opinion that the Old Testament represents the context or source of the Gospel of John’s usage of the *ego eimi* ‘I-AM’ that demonstrate that the ‘I-AM’ statements in the Gospel of John are very similar to the Greek translation of the Old Testament (particularly Isaiah) (p. 162). Veres (2008) explained that some conclusions that have been drawn from the background of the *ego eimi* ‘I-AM’ is that ‘the author of the Gospel of John simply assumed the affirmation of the ‘I-AM’ sayings and transposed them, giving them a Christian meaning and attributing them to Jesus’ (p. 113). Veres further explained that another conclusion is that the ‘I-AM’ sayings are the result of ‘a certain development within the Johannine community, one that is bound up with the Christological centering and structuring’.

I-AM Sayings in the Synoptic Gospels

There are couples of Synoptic texts which may betray a more specific meaning. For instance, in Mk 6: 45-60 where Jesus identified himself with *ego eimi* ‘it is I’ while ‘passing’ the disciples during the storm, which have been explained by biblical scholars to be a parallel with the theophany encountered by Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 33LXX) and Elijah (1 Kings 19) as the Lord ‘passed’ by and revealed his divine name. Also, in Mk 13: 6 where Jesus warned

about a future age when many people will come in his name saying *ego eimi*. In addition, there is Mk 14: 62 where the priest asked Jesus if he was the Christ during his trial, and Jesus answered *ego eimi* and also in Lk 24: 39 after the resurrection Jesus showed himself to his disciples and said ‘see my hands and my feet, it is I *ego eimi*’.

From these limited occurrences in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 6: 45-60, 13:6, 14:62; Lk 24: 39), there are different questions that have been raised, whether Jesus was making an innocent expression of self-disclosure with the *ego eimi* simply to identify himself? Or, whether he was making a more profound declaration – revealing himself in relation to the divine name, as the fourth evangelist seemed to imply? These questions seem to have relevance to a greater degree in the Gospel of John than in the Synoptic authors.

Distinct use of the ‘I AM’ Sayings in the Gospel of John

There are similarities in the usage of the ‘I AM’ in the Gospel of John as in the Synoptics, however, the usage of the *ego eimi* ‘I AM’ in the Gospel of John is more frequent than the Synoptics and seems to have a unique importance in the Johannine theology. Although there are no large number of monographs that have focused specifically on the ‘I-AM’ sayings in the Gospel of John - to evaluate their unique importance and the role they play in the exploration of Jesus’ identity, Catrin Williams’ book ‘*I am He*’ (2000, pp. 250-270) is a noteworthy, and recent, example. She made a detailed investigation of Jewish and early Christian literatures. In answering the question ‘who are you’ or ‘what are you’, the Gospel of John used *ego eimi* with regards to characters other than Jesus, for instance John the Baptist’s response that ‘I am not the Christ’ (Jn 1:20). These are considered by Burge (1992, pp. 354-356) as ‘common identification’ and have no theological meaning. But contrarily, ‘the usage by John the Baptist is significant as the use of the negative is the exact opposite to Jesus’ declaration and reveals the significance of who Jesus is by proclaiming who John the Baptist

is not' (Vondey, 2017, p. 6). Furthermore, in narrating how Jesus described himself metaphorically, the Gospel of John records seven passages where the *ego eimi* is used with an 'explicit predicate'; these are 'I am the bread of life' (Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 51), 'I am the light of the world' (Jn 8:12; 9:5), 'I am the door of the Sheep' (Jn 10:7, 9), 'I am the good shepherd' (Jn 10:11, 14), 'I am the resurrection and life' (Jn 11:25), 'I am the way, the truth and life' (Jn 14:6), 'I am the true vine' (Jn 5:1, 5). This manner of 'explicit predicate' usage of 'I AM', always portrayed in a discourse contrasting the teachings in Jesus' days, has significant theological meaning as it emphasizes the superiority of Jesus over the ideas of his counterparts, whoever that may be. In addition, there are those considered 'uncertain predicate' as they leave the readers uncertain whether they should supply a predicate based on their own understanding of the context or to assume that they are 'common identification'. Some of these *ego eimi* with an 'uncertain predicate', may look quite easy for the readers to decide either to consider them as 'common identification' or supply a predicate, for instance, Jn 6:20 where Jesus comforted the frightened disciples by saying '*ego eimi*, do not be afraid', which could mean 'it is I' as a 'common identification'. But some of these 'I AM' with 'uncertain predicate' are also seen to produce double meaning. For instance, Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:26 indicates acknowledgement to be the Messiah. According to Williams (2000), "Jn 4:26 is Jesus' first pronouncement of *ego eimi* in John's Gospel which represents the only occurrence of the expression communicated to an individual as Jesus revealed his identity to the Samaritan woman (4:26)" (p. 257), other cases were communicated to the disciples (6:20; 13:19) or opponents (8:24, 28, 58; 18:5, 8).

In favour of the first meaning of Jn 4: 26 as Jesus' acknowledgement to Messiahship, Williams (2000, pp. 258) was influenced by Okure's (1988, pp. 126) suggestion that the *ego eimi* here functions as a watershed in the discourse since it looks backward to verse 10 – '...you would have asked him and he

would have given you living water’ and forward to verse 29b – ‘Could this be the Christ?’ and verse 42 – ‘Then they said to the woman, ‘now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard him and we know that this indeed is the Christ, the Saviour of the world’. Hence, the most obvious and widely held interpretation of v. 26 is that Jesus is affirming the truth of the Samaritan woman’s declaration and is identifying himself with the Messiah (Williams, 2000, pp. 259). But when using the LXX explanation of Isa 45:19; 52:6, Burge (1999, pp. p. 355) has suggested that it means more than an acknowledge of Jesus as the Messiah. It emphasizes that Jesus is the sort of Messiah who is one with God. This, Williams (2000, pp. 260) also went further to show that, this is not the only possible interpretation of the declaration. Williams relates that ‘O’ Day goes further and defines *ego eimi* of v. 26, as the ‘most direct statement of the dialogue’, which is an absolute occurrence totally independent of Messiah, one which enables Jesus ‘to identify himself as God’s revealed, the sent one of God’ (Williams, 2000, pp. 260). There is also a similar case in John 18:5 where Jesus said *ego eimi* to the soldiers seeking for Jesus of Nazareth during his arrest, could mean ‘I am the one you seek’ as supplying a predicate to it; but putting it in the context, the Gospel of John reported in verse 6 that immediately Jesus said *ego eimi*, the soldiers drew back and fell on the floor. This, Kostenberger (2013, p. 166) has suggested to have a divine influence as the mere saying of *ego eimi* by Jesus, produced a powerful revelation that caused the soldiers to be overwhelmed and prostrated before God.

Lastly, the Gospel of John used the *ego eimi* spoken by Jesus in four instances where it seems incomplete. For instance, in John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19, where Jesus said “For you will die in your sins, unless you believe that *ego eimi* ‘I AM’”; “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that *ego eimi* ‘I AM’”; “Truly, Truly I say to you, before Abraham was *ego eimi* ‘I AM’” and “I tell you this now - so that when it does take place, you may believe that

ego eimi ‘I AM’” respectively. These are considered by Burge (1992, p. 355) to be an ‘absolute case’ where the *ego eimi* is assumed to be a ‘title’. And as such, there is a suggestion that the *ego eimi* has its root in the Septuagint translation in Deuteronomy 32:39 and Isaiah 41:4; 43:10,25; 45:18-19; 46:4; 51:12; 52:6; as the Isaiah references occur in the context of divine lawsuits with Israel and all other nations, as God claims sovereignty over history. This divine self-identification of God functions as an equivalent of his divine name. Witherington (1995, p. 156) argued that there are certainly no clear connections between some of the seven ‘I am’ sayings with predicate and the seven discourses. For instance, it seems difficult to find the connection between the water of life discourse with the healing of the royal official’s son in John 4 but regardless, Witherington (1995, p. 156) explained that the seven ‘I am’ sayings with predicate deserved to be explored on their own, - ‘for they are predicating something *about* Jesus, not simply making an identity statement’ - as he puts it. Witherington also proposes that there seem to be more discourses in the Johannine Gospel beyond the seven generally accepted discourses. According to Witherington, ‘the Greek phrase *ego eimi* was a perfectly ordinary one, with a basic meaning of ‘it is I’, a simple way of identifying oneself to someone else or to a group who may be in doubt about the identity of the person they are seeing or to whom they are speaking’ for instance Jn 6:20. Furthermore, Witherington supported that the absolute case of the *ego eimi* in Jn 8:58 where Jesus said ‘Before Abraham was, I am’, clearly connotes a pre-existent claim of Jesus before Abraham and using Isa 43:10 as a background to the text may connote that Jesus is making a divine claim to be ‘I am’ as Yahweh. Witherington divided the seven ‘I am’ sayings with predicates into two natures: most are associated with a particular miracle, in which the sayings either follow the miracle or precedes it. And some are in the nature of summarizing statements, for instance, I am the resurrection and life (Jn 11:35) and I am the way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). Using Wisdom, Sol. 7:25-26; 8:8; 6:18,

Witherington traces the 'I am' sayings of Jesus with predicates to Wisdom, which is God's divine Word, as having the same attributes to the identity of Jesus. In view of the organization of the *ego eimi* in the Gospel of John that is more frequent and seems to portray more unique significance than the Synoptic, Lincoln explains that the Gospel of John could be easily seen to narrate the life of Jesus so closely related to the God of Israel, that Christology and theology are intimately interwoven. Due to this, modern scholars propose that the author of the Gospel of John took for granted the fact that he was interpreting the life of a fully human figure, and so emphasized Jesus' divine, rather than human qualities (Lincoln, 2005, p. 59).

In line with this, Gordon (2022) argues that the resulting portrait of Jesus takes 'the form of a naive Docetism' in which, 'the gospel of John changes the Galilean teacher into the God who goes about on the earth' (pp. 11, 12). As a result, there exists a consensus among most modern historical Jesus scholars that the Gospel of John's presentation of Jesus' proclamation of himself as the Son of God and his use of the 'I-AM' phrase to introduce himself and his roles is inconceivably historical in its description. Of course, Jesus did not leave any direct writings of his own to ascertain whether the 'I-AM' sayings were actually his words and if they reflect a true identity of how he understands himself. Also some scholars, Boer (2001) and Jonge (2001) argued that Jesus' words in the Gospel of John are not representative of his own thoughts, but a later struggle in the Johannine community; either due to the Johannine community reacting to persecution endured from non-Christian Jews (Boer 2001, p. 156) or from non-Johannine Christian Jews (Jonge, 2001, pp. 122-123). Be that as it may, Jesus' words serve as a key component to promote confidence that there is the existence of his character for those considering the Gospel as a whole. Among the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, especially that of the fourth evangelist, the 'I-

AM' sayings seem to be the closest statements that could be linked to the self-understanding of Jesus even if this is phrased in the language of the evangelist.

Some of the problems of the 'I-AM' and reasons for focusing on John 6

a. Johannine predicative 'I-AM' omissions in the Synoptic Gospels

Anderson (2007) is a leading figure in the John, Jesus and History group. He explains that since the seven 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus with predicate such as (I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the resurrection and life, I am the true vine, I am the door and I am the Way, truth and life) are considered the most theologically significant statements uttered by Jesus about himself anywhere among the four canonical Gospels, the contrary question often asked is, 'how could they not have been included in the Synoptic if they were historical to Jesus'? (pp. 24-25) Conversely, Anderson (2007) observed that the language and diction of Jesus in the Gospel of John has been concluded to be 'nearly identical to that of John the Baptist (Jn 3:31-36) and the fourth evangelist (pp. 24-25). In that sense, the Johannine Jesus' discourses probably reflected the evangelist's paraphrasing of Jesus' teachings rather than a historical rendering of such teachings. Moreover, the I-AM sayings in the Gospel of John are far more self-referential than the Kingdom sayings of the Synoptic and the Markan messianic secret, and one can understand how the Gospel of John's presentation of Jesus would call for explanations other than historical ones'.

Although Anderson (2007) agreed that the Gospel of John's presentation of Jesus' words were obviously in the language of the evangelist or its author, he objected to the claim that the Gospel of John's paraphrase has no root in the ministry of the historical Jesus (p. 26-27). Anderson also argued that the I-AM sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John that made use of the predicate nominative are similar to the metaphorical character to the parables of the Synoptic Gospels. For example, the light-of-the-world motif and the bread and sustenance motif are

not clearly styled in the same parabolic form as the Synoptic teachings of Jesus. While it could be argued that Synoptic developments were constructed upon themes present in the Gospel of John, it is more likely to see the Johannine discourses as Christo-centric developments of Jesus teachings. It is clear that the Johannine I-AM metaphors are all missing in the Synoptics.

b. The Johannine Jesus speaks and acts like the evangelist

It has been identified that an interesting problem posed by Anderson (2007) is ‘one of the greatest puzzlement of the Gospel of John, which is that; the Johannine Jesus speaks in the voice of the evangelist’ (pp. 27-28). Since the language of the Johannine Jesus is so different from the Synoptic Jesus, it becomes extremely difficult to imagine the *ipsissima verba* of the historical Jesus coming to us through the Johannine text. Anderson (2007) further explains that since the Johannine witness comes to us explicitly from the perspective of the post resurrection consciousness, it must be read through a missional and theological lens (pp. 28-29). For instance, several times the point is made that the disciples did not ‘understand’ the action or words of Jesus at that time, but later, after the resurrection, they were able to understand clearly his teachings (Jn. 2:22; 12:16). Likewise Jesus himself emphasizes that their comprehension will be fuller in the future, as mediated by the Holy Spirit, and this prediction is borne out in the perceptions of the Johannine narrations (Jn. 7:37-39; 13:7, 19-20).

From this perspective of the post resurrection consciousness, there was the conclusion that the Gospel of John’s presentation of Jesus’ words is largely influenced by a later discovery. In addition, there was the conclusion that the Gospel of John presents the past in the light of future valuations, due to its own admission of the post resurrection perspective. In that sense, it presupposed that ‘what really happened back then’ mode of historicity is less important to the author of the Gospel of John than the connecting of ‘what happened’ to ‘what it really meant, and means now,’ mode of narration. As such the question, ‘to what

extent has the Gospel of John's presentation of Jesus teachings reflect the teaching of the historical Jesus as opposed to the evangelist's teaching within the evolving history of his situation? (Anderson, 2007, pp. 28-29). Anderson (2007) argued in favour of the Gospel of John by saying that the assumption that the interpretive relevance of the Gospel of John completely eclipsed originated history is not true. Anderson explained that true historicity is never limited to the irrelevant, and to assert such, misjudged the character of historiography itself (pp. 29-32).

Having noted that the Gospel of John's presentation of Jesus' teachings were rendered in the evangelists style of proclaiming the Gospel, the following remarks were made by Anderson (2001, pp. 29-32): That there are dozens of aphorisms in the Gospel of John that sound very much like the sorts of things the historical Jesus would have said was considered. That the historical Jesus spoke in characteristically terse, pithy aphorisms, therefore did not deliver any longer discourses was also considered. Here, a meaningful criterion for inclusion is inappropriately applied. For example, Anderson asked, how would Jesus hold the multitude's attention for more than a few minutes at a time? Anderson (2007) reiterated that if Jesus held the attention of the multitude for hours like in the case of the feeding narrative and in other sections as all four canonical Gospels suggested, then Jesus must have delivered longer discourses as well as short aphorisms (pp. 30-32). Thus, Anderson concluded that aphoristic sayings were probably included in these long discourses, but it is difficult to imagine that they were the only content or form delivered. Lastly, the assertion that the Johannine paraphrase of Jesus' teachings cannot represent the content or character of the teachings of the historical Jesus was considered. Anderson (2007) argued that "this assertion is not true because as earlier impressions are not necessarily more authentic than distanced reflections, so likewise historical presentations are not more authentic when they are not interpreted or paraphrased" (pp. 31-32).

An Exegetical Investigation of the 'I-Am' Sayings of Jesus in John 6

Placement of the text

The 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in John 6 can be seen within the sections of verses 20 to 59. Verse 20 falls in a different context - which is 'Jesus walking on the sea' and it seems not to contribute much to the identity of Jesus due to its 'uncertain predicate' and since it was not a discourse and the recipients were Jesus' disciples. Nevertheless, Brown (1971) thought otherwise and explained that the Gospel of John treated the 'Jesus walking on the sea' scene as a divine epiphany as its focus is on the expression '*ego eimi*' (p. 254). Brown also suggested that the scene might be from the primitive form of the tradition, since the expression occurs in both the Synoptic and Johannine form of the story. The Gospel of John takes the expression as that form of the divine name which the Father has given to Jesus and by which he identifies himself. It might also mean that the miracle gave expression on the majesty of Jesus unlike the transfiguration. Also in a similar emphasis as of Brown, Kostenberger (2013) classified Jn. 6:20 among the category of 'absolute I-AM saying' and he explains that although the 'I-AM' can simply mean 'it is me', suggested that it is highly probable that Jn. 6:20 is an absolute I-AM saying due to the preceding verse which tells us that, Jesus made the statement while he walked on the sea (p. 247). With a focus on the research enterprise, a close reading on the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in Jn. 6:22-59 will be done in line with a further look at its place within the Gospel of John in terms of both the theological issues it raises and the historical settings behind the Johannine Gospel narrative of the discourse. This investigation on the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus, in connection with some historical material in the discourse, will be done in order to see if the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus, which are considered highly theological statements, may be viewed as having a basis in connecting the Christ of faith with the Jesus of history.

Therefore in the analysis below, exegetical, theological and historical aspects of Jn 6:22-59 will be examined.

Exegesis of key verses in Jn. 6:22-59 and overall re-articulation of the research questions

In order to carry out a proper exegetical discussion of Jn. 6:22-59, it is of paramount importance to determine the place it occupies in the overall structure of the Gospel of John. There are some ideas that have been raised regarding Jn. 6:22-59 that may seem to be significant in the analysis and explanation of the text. Firstly, a more generally accepted format of the division of the Gospel of John is that of considering 1:1-18 as a Prologue, 1:19 – 12:50 as the Book of Signs, 13:1 – 20:31 as the Book of Glory/exaltation and 21:1-25 as a later addition to the text. But since the ‘I-AM’ sayings of Jesus are mostly found in discourses during the Jewish feasts, it would be better to subscribe to Bondi’s (1997) format of division according to various Jewish feasts in the Gospel of John, which 5:1-47 deals with the Sabbath, 6:1-7:1 concerns with the Passover, 7:1-10:21 takes place around the feast of Tabernacles, 10:22-42 deals with Dedication or Hanukkah and 11:1-20:31 all occurs around the time of the final Passover for Jesus (p. 478). The format of the division of the Gospel of John according to various Jewish feasts was also observed by Motyer (1997) that ‘the Jewish festivals are closely woven into the structure of the Gospel of John’ (p. 36). Secondly, critical observations on the makeup of the Gospel of John by various scholars, have affirmed the possibility that the Gospel of John has been supplemented after the completion of the main composition.

Lindars (1990) explained that the idea that the Gospel of John had been supplemented after the completion of the main composition were done either by a later editor – presumably after the death of the evangelist, or that the evangelist

had already supplemented the Gospel – so as to incorporate further sermon materials which would make the presentation of the Gospel of John stronger (pp. 138-139). Some of the passages involved in the debates as noted by Lindars (1990) are the prologue (1:1-18), Bread of life discourse (6:22-59), the woman caught in the act of adultery (7:53-8:11), chapters 15, 16, 17 and 21 (p. 139). Ashton (2007) added the Shepherd and the door narrative (10:1-18) and 20:30-31 and also affirmed modifications in relation to chapters 6 and 21 (pp. 42-53). This shows that the idea that the Gospel of John has been supplemented after the completion of the main composition is almost universally recognized. Thirdly, Ashton (2007, pp. 42-53) explained that the problem of John 6 has traditionally been seen as that of ‘order’. Ashton argued that chapter 6 has no connection with chapter 5, since the former - places Jesus going ‘to the other side’ of the lake and the latter - places him in Jerusalem. In addition, Ashton suggested that chapter 6 follows on from chapter 4 very well because Jesus had been staying in Jerusalem (Judaea) and that the proposal of the arrangement of the gospel of John as chapter 4, 6, 5 and 7 has been put forward as early as the fourteenth century by Ludolph of Saxony (pp. 42-53). Contrary to Ashton’s proposal on the arrangement of John 6, Lindars (1990) argued that reasons can be found to suggest that chapter 6 was deliberately placed after chapter 5; seeing that the bread of life discourse is based on the manna story in Exodus 16, it makes a superb example of the claim of Jesus in 5:46 that Moses ‘wrote of me’. Also there is the idea that the closing paragraph of chapter 5 which presents Jesus ‘as one greater than Moses’ - which becomes one of the themes surrounding the ‘manna’ and ‘the bread of life’ comparison in Chapter 6, affirmed that *meta tauta* ‘after these things’ is a common chronological transition device which favours the author of the Gospel of John’s assumptions namely major chronological as well as geographical gaps (example 7:2; 10:22; 11:55) (p. 139). As interpolation is a more natural editorial procedure than accidental displacement, it seems Lindars’ idea is more plausible.

The form of Jn 6:22-59 is obviously a discourse and also contains some distinct thoughts as narrative. Barrett (1978) submitted that it may be accepted that chapter 6 manifests stylistic unity but it cannot be divided up on literary grounds (p. 280). Borgen (1965), Guilding (1960) and Gartner (1959) support strongly and argue that the chapter as a whole could be regarded as an extended exegesis - by accepted methods - of Ps 78:24. Lindars (1990) suggested that the Gospel of John's style of Greek was simple and straightforward because of the repetitiveness and because it does not use long philosophical words. Verbs were preferred to abstract nouns - for instance, the gospel of John constantly summoned the hearers to *pisteuein eis* 'believed into' Jesus, which means to entrust themselves to Jesus; but the word for 'faith' *pistis* never occurred (p. 139).

In addition to the structure and movement of Jn 6:22-59, Lincoln (2005) explained that there are various ways of presenting this synagogue sermon but the dialogue is called *yelammedu* by later rabbis (p. 223). The process of this *yelammedu* is to connect together part of the 'Law' *seder* and 'prophet' *haftarah* and apply them in an exposition and it will be related to their present situation in the community. Also in verse 45, there is a combination of Isa 54:13 and 55:2b-3a as verses 35, 37, 40, 44, 45, 47 affirmed. But the material in verses 25-59 can be seen as supplying a similar sort of commentary as in the preceding sayings of Jesus in verse 27 and in itself it contains allusions to Exod. 16:18-21 and Isa 55:2-3 both *seder* and *haftarah* respectively. So this passage is structured around an exposition of the sayings of Jesus in verse 27. As this serves the development of Jesus' saying, the perspective is set out in 5:39,46,47 namely showing that scripture, when rightly understood, witnessed to Christ and that the Torah of Moses also speaks of Christ.

In view of the ideas regarding Jn 6:22-59, it seems necessary that Jn 6:22-59 can better be understood when an elaborate attention is given to the

Passover feast, in considering what aspect of it can shed more light in understanding the 'manna' and 'bread of life' comparisons and other aspects of it can also produce a tiny thread of connection between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. This is because the passage - Jn 6:22-59 - has a connection with the feeding miracle of the five thousand (6:1-16) which took place in the context of the feast of the Passover (6:4), recalling the images of Moses, Israel and the 'manna' in the wilderness. Furthermore, some scholars such as Gartner (1959, p. 25) and Guilding (1960) have attempted to make some connections between Jesus' discourse and the Passover due to verses 4 and 59; to show that during Passover, when the central focus is on the history of the Israelites during exodus, the eating of manna was given special attention. In addition, the Gospel of John's quotation in verses 45 and 46 - 'It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught by God. Every man therefore that has heard and that has learned of the father, comes to me. Not that any man has seen the father, except he who is from God, he has seen the father' has been suggested by Barrett (1978) to come from what appears to be a Passover *haftarah* (p. 298).

Furthermore, in view of the above form of Jn 6:22-59 that - although it manifests stylistic unity but cannot be divided on literary grounds as suggested by Barrett, it seems difficult to accurately divide the passage into different sections based on a context of thought, as various key issues raised in the passage such as Passover feast, sign, 'work', 'manna and bread of life', 'Jews', eternal life, and Eucharist all runs through the entire passage. For instance, a difficulty has been observed by various scholars in trying to ascertain a division in context between verses 47 to 51. Borgen (1965) emphasized that verses 47 and 48 are the 'natural conclusion of this pattern of exegetical debate' - and if it is so, it will follow that verse 49 is the beginning of a new paragraph which adds the supplement of *kai apethanon* 'and are dead', which runs to the end of the discourse (pp. 86-87). Bultmann on the other hand, thinks that the new section

starts with the reference of *sarx* 'flesh' of Jesus in verse 51c and regards verses 51 to 58 as a Eucharistic supplement added to the discourse by the ecclesiastical redactor. In addition, Barrett (1978) believed that neither Borgen nor Bultmann's views was satisfactory (p. 298). Here and elsewhere, Barrett explained that the Gospel of John built its discourse by ending one section with a provocative remark which arouses misunderstanding or opposition on the part of the audience. Hence Barrett concluded that verses 49 to 51 are a summarizing conclusion of what precedes - with the word *sarx* 'flesh' introduced into the restatement so as to lead to the strife of verse 52, with which the new treatment of the theme of the 'bread of life' began (p. 298).

Conclusion

With regards to the identity of the historical Jesus, firstly, there are suggestions that the Gospel of John contains to some degree, a good aspect of historicity in it (Kostenberger, 1998; 2004; 2013). Secondly, there are suggestions that the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John reflect to some degree, historical resemblance as to words spoken within first-century Palestine (Brown, 1971; 2011). Although it is very difficult to show that the 'I-AM sayings of Jesus' in the Gospel of John could be included among the words of Jesus that, the suggestions by different commentaries emphasizing the words of Jesus in the light of plausible historical materials favours the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John being given historical consideration. Thirdly, the traditions behind the Gospel of John have also been emphasized to some degree, showing where historical plausibility could be located in comparison to the traditions of the Synoptic Gospels. This favours the fact that since the Synoptic Gospels have been concluded by scholars to be historical materials, the Gospel of John could also be similarly considered in that light of historicity. Fourthly, the elements within the discourses of the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus' passages in the Gospel of

John have been suggested to have to some degree, a high historical plausibility. Also, since it is difficult to separate the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus from the more historical elements of these 'I-AM' passages in the Gospel of John, this could also reflect the possibility that the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John should not be ruled out of having potential historical considerations.

The research questions have been justified here thus: Theologically speaking, the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John has given us a Jesus who came to establish himself as the only means of life's survival and nourishment. Historically speaking, the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John - which are mostly found in discourses within the Jewish feasts - in connection to the Jewish feasts in particular are quite helpful in exploring any historical plausibility of the Johannine gospel and also are useful to show the connection between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

The study above reveals that more work needs to be done by biblical scholars in looking historically into the Gospel of John and considering the 'I-AM' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John in further historical study. The 'I-AM' sayings cannot be overlooked in the study of Jesus of Nazareth. The above discussions therefore, show that history is not just being objective, neutral or factual, but to continually attempt to understanding more fully, 'the complex interrelations between history and story, truth and faith, text and interpretation, past and present' (Just, 2007, p. 78).

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