

I AM

I AM

Stories from the
Gospel of John

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PREFACE

The stories of Jesus are some of the most famous stories in the Bible. Each gospel writer crafted their narratives from their perspective, drawing attention to different aspects of Jesus' identity and mission. The apostle John wrote his own account of Jesus' life and ministry. In these pages, you will find retellings of a series of stories that John recorded—stories all connected by Jesus' declaration, "I AM." In these stories, Jesus speaks about his identity as the Messiah for whom God's people had been waiting.

The Old Testament is full of images and promises that pointed God's people ahead in time, to the arrival of Jesus. They spoke of who Jesus would be, and what he would do. When Jesus did come, he connected his identity and his actions with those Old Testament images and promises.

These retellings of John's stories imagine what he might have thought and felt as he followed Jesus. They imagine what it would have been like for him to sit under Jesus' teaching, to witness Jesus' miracles—and they invite you to imagine, as well. Who might you be, in these stories? And more importantly, how will you respond to Jesus?

How to use this book

This book is designed for children and those who want to share Jesus' stories with them. Children can navigate the stories independently, or alongside someone older. The stories can be read through and enjoyed as a whole,

PREFACE

or they can be used devotionally, worked through one at a time. After each story, you will find short sections titled “Growing Deeper”. These sections provide some further explanation of the ideas in Jesus’ stories and make connections to readers today. Finally, each story closes with a short prayer.

My prayer for each of you is that in these stories, you will be drawn to Jesus—the bread of life; the light of the world; the great I AM; the gate; the shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, truth, and life; the vine. May you know the life that comes through him.



JOHN MEETS JESUS

God's people were waiting. God had spoken to the Israelites through his prophets, and he had brought them into the promised land. But now, hundreds of years had passed since God had spoken to them through a prophet. Where was God's word—his promises, his instruction, his presence? Why was God far off? Would he be silent forever?

Hundreds of years had passed since the Israelites had ruled their own land in peace and safety. Wave after wave of foreign nations had invaded them, sometimes

carrying them off to faraway lands, and now the empire of Rome ruled over their land. The Romans put their own governors in place to rule the people. The Israelites knew that the Roman ruler was not the good king that God had promised. They were still allowed to worship God, but they needed to obey Rome's laws and pay Rome's taxes.



A man named John was waiting, too. A Jewish man from Galilee, he knew the promises that God had given his people hundreds of years ago. Through the prophets, God had promised to restore them, to bring them back to himself and his ways, after they had broken his

covenant with them. He had promised to defeat his and their enemies. In these promises, God gave his people pictures and signs that pointed to one who was to come. This one, the Messiah, would fulfill the promises God had made to them. But when, John wondered, would these promises come to pass?

One day, news of a prophet near Jerusalem reached John. John thought, *Did this new prophet have a word from God after so many years?* The rumors were that the prophet lived in the wilderness outside of Jerusalem, preaching and baptizing people in the Jordan River. They said that he survived on a diet of locusts and honey. Curious, John left his home in Galilee. He traveled south, towards Jerusalem, following the Jordan.





John traveled for almost a week on foot, his sandaled feet crunching against the rocky path. As he walked, he thought about his people, who had been waiting for so long. Without a word from God, the present looked dark and without hope.

Some of John's people had tried to take things into their own hands, resisting the Romans who ruled over them. These were the Zealots, a group eager to rebel against the Romans and take their land back by force.

Some of them were determined to hold onto their identity as God's people. They tried to do this by setting up rules and regulations to keep God's people pure and separate from the Romans and others around them who were not Jewish. These men, the Pharisees, were the religious leaders of God's people.

JOHN MEETS JESUS

Some of them, John thought, had forgotten what they were waiting for.

When John found the prophet, he was not alone. Crowds of people had followed the prophet into the wilderness—people who were curious, perhaps, like John. He was called the Baptizer, because he was washing people in the Jordan as a sign of their repentance and desire to get ready for the Messiah.



John looked at the river—muddy and still, it did not look like the best place to wash oneself. But John remembered the story of the army captain, Naaman, who at first scoffed at cleansing in such an unpromising river. When Naaman finally did, he was cured of his leprosy.

Today, the prophet stood next to the river, his voice raised as he spoke to the crowd gathered around him. He was calling for repentance, for people to turn away from their sins.

His camel-hair coat tied around the waist with a leather belt contrasted strongly with the softer woven clothing of those in the crowd. Between his clothing and his diet, the prophet was clearly no ordinary person—*but*, John thought, *neither were the prophets from long ago*.

At a lull in the prophet's preaching, a group of men pushed through to confront him. A whisper went through the crowd: these men were from Jerusalem, sent by the Pharisees.

“Who are you?” the men asked.

In response, the prophet repeated the words of another prophet, a man called Isaiah. “I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,” he said. “Clear the way for the Lord’s coming!”

The prophet was preparing the way for someone—someone important.

John decided to stay, his curiosity still not satisfied. He wanted to hear more about the one the prophet was preparing for. He met others who followed the prophet, eager for repentance and for the Messiah that he promised would come.

