

John 18:3-6 reports that when men came to arrest Jesus, he asked them for whom they sought. They answered, “*Jesus of Nazareth.*” Verse 6 says that when Jesus responded, “*I AM [he].*” they drew back and fell to the ground.” This shows that Jesus was using the divine title, the *I AM* of the Hebrew Scriptures; otherwise why would the men have drawn back and fallen to the ground?

Response: If this were a case where the power of a divine title bowled over the men that came to arrest him, we must wonder concerning the other occasions that Jesus supposedly used this title, why was the crowd not knocked over? Did these men understand that Jesus was using a divine title, yet others, including religious leaders, failed to do so? And, would they continue in their course of action after being knocked over by some unseen power evoked by Jesus’ use of this title? Wouldn’t it be more likely that they would have fled, leaving Jesus alone?

To understand why they drew back and fell to the ground, we must discern what they expected might happen when they encountered Jesus. At Matthew 16:13, 14 Jesus “*asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that the Son of man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’*” Notice that the disciples said nothing about their believing that he was God in the flesh; but it was rumored that he might be one of the prophets resurrected back to life! When soldiers came to arrest Elijah, he called down fire from heaven to kill them. (2 Kings 1:9-12) So those coming to arrest Jesus expected that, if he truly were a prophet, especially Elijah, he might call down fire from heaven to consume them. No wonder they recoiled in fear when he replied, “*I am [Jesus]*”! However, finding themselves not struck dead, they were emboldened in their course of action, arresting him and handing him over to his enemies.