

**I AM THAT I AM**  
**EXODUS 3:14**

- I A response to Jehovah Witnesses proposal that:
- 1 Age not identity is in mind in John 8:58
  - 2 That Jesus was claiming to be the prophesied ruler of Micah 5:2 rather than deity
  - 3 That *ego eimi* in John 8:58 does not reflect or correspond to Exodus 3:14
- II An evaluation of whether John 8:58 is dealing with **merely** age as proposed by JW or the identity and nature of Jesus as evangelicals contend. In another words, does the passage deal with **who** Jesus is (evangelicals) or with nearly how **old** He is (JW). (Appendix 1 B)<sup>1</sup>
- 1 Vs. 48-57, make it clear that it was His nature and identity that was in question.
    - (1) 48 They called Him a Samaritan and demon possessed
    - (2) 49 Jesus rejected their characterization of who He was.
    - (3) 51 Jesus puts His word on par with the Father's (God is the only giver of life)
    - (4) 52 the Jews again attack His being
      - A "You have a demon",
      - B They argue that even Abraham, the great progenitor of the Jewish race, "died and the prophets also" and Jesus claims to be able to cause people not to "taste death"
        - a Note: comparison with Abraham is one of nature not age; Jesus claimed to possess power over death, but they did not believe he was even on the same level with Abraham and prophets of God; hence, He is demon possessed.
    - (5) 53 Note that the comparison is with greatness not age, "surely you are not *greater* than our father Abraham...whom do you *make yourself out to be*?" (Italics added). Again, this last phrase deals with who He is not how old He is.
    - (6) 56 the great Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day. This is speaking of the day of faith and salvation for all, Gen 12:3; Galatians 3:16. Abraham was aware of some things concerning the coming of the Messiah with salvation, and they misunderstood that knowledge.
    - (7) 57 This is the first time that age is mentioned. It is mentioned as an argument against His claim in v. 56. In another words, how could Abraham who has been dead for hundreds of years see Jesus or Jesus see him since Jesus was less than 50 years old?
      - A This is still an attack on his nature not merely age since regardless how old Jesus was, He would have to be more than a mere human to have seen or been seen by Abraham.
      - B If I said Moses saw me, either he didn't, and I am a liar or a lunatic—demon possessed in this case or if he did see me then I am not merely a man.
  - 2 Vs. 58
    - (1) "...Before Abraham was born"

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<sup>1</sup> *Reasoning from the Scripture* Watch tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. 1985, 1989, pp 417-418.

- A Was born is *genesthai*, aorist middle infinitive of *ginoma* = to become, to come into existence, be born, entrance into existence.
- (2) “I am”
- A *ego eimi*, first person singular, present active indicative, verb.
- a “It is a verb showing state of being, not action”<sup>2</sup>
- b A.T. Robertson says, “...I am (*ego eimi*). Undoubtedly here Jesus claims eternal existence with the absolute phrase used of God. The contrast between *genesthai* (entrance into existence of Abraham) and *eimi* (timeless being) is complete. See the same contrast between *en* in 1:1 and *egeneto* in 1:14.... See the same use of *eimi* in John 6:20; 9:9, 8:24, 28, 18:6.”<sup>3</sup>
- (A) Remember some of these are translated other than I am for smoother reading, but we are not the ones who deny the meaning of the actual grammar.
- (3) If age were the issue, another aorist infinitive would have been more than adequate (before Abraham came to be, I came to be). However, Jesus answered both the nature and the age issue with the first person singular present active indicative verb *ego (I) eimi (I am)*.
- (4) He is greater than Abraham in nature because Abraham **became** and Jesus is the **I am**, eternal in existence,
- A That Abraham became necessitates that there was a time when he did not exist.
- B In contrast, That Jesus is I am signifies that there never was a time when He did not exist (John 1:1; Phil. 2:6)
- C
- 3 Vs. 59
- (1) They stoned Him.
- A There were 10 offences that warranted stoning. They were all capital offences. This was for blasphemy, like in John 10:31-34
- a Appendix 2<sup>4</sup>
- 4 Answering their arguments
- (1) They say He was merely claiming to be older than Abraham.
- A Vs 48-56 never mention age, but rather focus specifically on Jesus’ nature, who He is in comparison with Abraham
- B V. 53, the Jews understood what Jesus was claiming and what they were accusing him of, so they responded, “surely you are not *greater* than our father Abraham”(italics added).
- C V. 57 mentions age, but it is still dealing with nature since to precede Abraham, Jesus would have to be a superior being.
- D If only age was the issue then:
- a The comparison with Abraham’s greatness would not be necessary
- b The change from the aorist infinitive in v. 58 to the present tense to be verb would be unnecessary. The aorist is the normal tense for Greek

<sup>2</sup> Essentials of New Testament Greek, Ray Summers, p 44

<sup>3</sup> Word Pictures in The New Testament, A.T. Robertson, vol. V p. 158..

<sup>4</sup> Zondervan Bible Dictionary Vol. 5 p. 524

writing, and they change tenses for a distinct purpose. In other words, two aorist infinitives would have expressed age better than changing to a present tense to be.

(A) Before Abraham was born, I was born, or the NWT translation, ...came into existence I have been.

(a) *Genesthai*, was born, (literally to become) aorist tense, middle voice, infinitive of *ginomai* to become or begin, which signifies a beginning. This is used of Jesus referring to when He became a man in John 1:14 *egeneto* became, third person singular aorist middle indicative of *ginomai*.

i. *Ginomai* is the Greek term used in John 1:14, and John 8:58 only in different tenses.

(b) The verb is used of Jesus' humanity but not of His deity because as God He is I am not I became (John 1:1; Phil. 2:6-7).

(2) They say Jesus was claiming to be the ruler of Micah 5:2

A Since this verse is never mentioned in the context.

B Since Jesus does not claim to be ruler anywhere in the passage

C Since claiming to be ruler was not a capital offense (an offense worthy of stoning)

a This interpretation has no merit.

b This is reading into the text rather than gleaning from the text.

c Interestingly, this seems strangely similar to arguing for identity rather than age.

(3) They list a few translations that are similar to theirs in order to prove their translation is correct.

A This is a useless argument since:

a All JW and Christians agree that there are different kinds of translations, Dynamic, Formal, Paraphrase, etc., which result in different translations.

b All JW and Christians agree that there are good and bad translations.

c If their translation were deemed correct because a few translations read the same, then it would stand to reason that our translation must be more correct since we can actually list more translations that translate it *I am*.

(A) This includes the N.W.T. practice except in places where it testifies to the deity of Christ.

(4) They quote A.T. Robertson's "A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research"<sup>5</sup> in order to prove their translation.

(Appendix 1 A)

A Their quote from Robertson is, "The verb *eimi*... Sometimes it does express existence as a predicate like any other verb, as in *ego eimi* (John 8:58)." (Appendix 1 B)

B Their quote is from Chapter X, II, (g). The chapter is entitled "The Sentence", it is 55 pages long, and (g) deals with sentences where the

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<sup>5</sup> A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research" p. 394.

“Verb [is] not the Only Predicate.”<sup>6</sup> Robertson deals with this subject after he has dealt with elliptical sentences (not require subject or predicate), predicate only sentences (no subject), subject only (no predicate and/or only implied in the subject). In this section, he deals with the possibilities of a verb being or not being the predicate.

- C Their quote does not reflect the intent of Robertson.
  - a They ignore the context. (See (4) B above)
  - b Note the context:
    - (A) Concerning the predicate Robertson says, “The verb indeed is the usual way of expressing it but not the only way.” Now he gives examples of that truth.
      - (a) “The verb *eimi*...may be merely a ‘form-word’ like a preposition and not be the predicate.” The meaning of this statement simply states that sometimes the verb is not the predicate—as the title of this section states.
      - (b) “Sometimes it does express existence as a predicate like any other verb, as in *ego eimi* (John 8:58)...”
        - i. This is the part they quote
        - ii. The clear meaning is that, in fact, *eimi* is sometimes a predicate signifying existence and John 8:58 is an example of that truth.
    - (B) “But more commonly the real predicate is another word and *eimi* merely serves as a connective or copula.”
      - (a) Copula is basically equivalent to our linking verb.
      - (b) The apostle **is** a man.
  - c Note several things from the fuller context
    - (A) Robertson does not address whether *eimi* in John 8:58 signifies deity or not. That is not the question being addressed in the section quoted or the chapter.
    - (B) The statement does testify to the fact
      - (a) That *eimi* in John 8:58 is a predicate.
      - (b) That *eimi* commonly is a copula, preposition etc. Hence, the way that Jesus used it of Himself is uncommon.
      - (c) That *eimi* does signify existence in John 8:58 not merely age.
      - (d) The contrast being made by Robertson is not between existence in time and eternity, but between a form-word and a predicate. Hence, since Robertson declares *ego eimi* is a predicate, it actually, tells us something about the subject, which is Jesus. To infer that Robertson limits *eimi* to existence in time is to read into what he is saying since that is not the subject under discussion.
        - i. However, in John 8:58 the contrast is between degrees of greatness, kinds of nature, and existence. Abraham **came to be**, Jesus is **I am**.

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<sup>6</sup> The predicate asserts something about the subject.

- ii. Rather than just express prior existence which an aorist infinitive would have done, this, the predicate, asserts something about Jesus that the aorist would not. The aorist infinitive would have presented Jesus as a **mere** man with a beginning like Abraham, but changing to the first person present active **I am** asserts His eternity and inter-canonical connection with Jehovah in the Old Testament.
  - D The JW interpretation that Robertson denied the eternity of John 8:58 is unfounded; in addition, it contradicts what Robertson says in his commentary on John 8:58 when he addresses the subject of *ego eimi* specifically saying, "...I am (*ego eimi*). Undoubtedly here Jesus claims eternal existence with the absolute phrase used of God. The contrast between *genesthai* (entrance into existence of Abraham) and *eimi* (timeless being) is complete. See the same contrast between *en* in 1:1 and *egeneto* in 1:14.... See the same use of *eimi* in John 6:20; 9:9, 8:24, 28, 18:6."<sup>7</sup>
    - a Slight oversight by the JW. Maybe they should be a little more careful whom they choose to quote.
  - E John 8:58
    - a Jesus is the subject, Nominative case
    - b Said, say and I am are the verbs
      - (A) Am (*eimi*) is also a predicate (asserts something about the subject)
    - c Them is the direct object dative case
    - d Abraham is the indirect object
  - F An example of the verb not the predicate from John 1:1
    - a "...the Word was God.
      - (A) Word is the subject
      - (B) God is the predicate (asserts something about the subject)
      - (C) Was, is the verb, not in the predicate. Just a verb, showing existence, continuous existence, imperfect tense of *eimi*.
      - (D) If the predicate, God, was not there, then the verb, was, would be a predicate of Word; hence, word would always have existed, which is an attribute of God.
      - (E) Since God, the predicate is there, the verb does not have to act as verb and predicate.
        - (a) This is what Robertson is talking about, that normally the verb is a connector, etc., but can be the predicate, but it does not have to be.
- III The grammar of Exodus 3:14
- 1 They argue that because the LXX <sup>8</sup> "...reads *ego eimi ho ohn*, 'I am the being.' This is quite different from the simple use of the words *ego eimi* (I am) at John 8:58."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Word Pictures in The New Testament, A.T. Robertson, vol. V p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> This means the Septuagint

<sup>9</sup> W74 9/1 526-7 How are God and Christ "one"? NOT ETERNAL LIKE HIS FATHER

- (1) Their argument is predicated upon the idea that *ho ohn* is actually different from *eimi* and thus John 8:58 has no correlation to it.
- 2 Response:
- (1) Hebrew: the verb is exactly the same in all three instances in v. 14 *eheyeh* which means, I am, I exist or I am being. (Appendix 4)<sup>10</sup>
- (2) LXX:
- A The first Hebrew, *eheyeh* is translated *Ego* (I) *eimi* (I am) lit. I, I am. This *is* precisely the same as John 8:58 meaning I am or I exist or I am being—the same is true of the Hebrew.
- B The second Hebrew *eheyeh* is translated *Ho* (the) *ohn* (I am). This is a present active participle, masculine, nominative, singular of *eimi* (I am); hence it is the same as John’s except it is in the participle form—being, existing.
- a The word translated who in English and the in the LXX is the Hebrew relative pronoun *ashar*.
- b In another words, *ohn* is exactly the same word as *eimi*. The only difference is that it is in the participle form. This allows for the expression of it being nominative and masculine. Thus, it tells you more not less.  
(A) Greek words change spelling in order to show different tenses, voices etc.
- c Thus, their argument that it is not the same is in accurate. Jesus just used the term *eimi* once rather than two times in a row. However, the singular formula is found in the last part of vs. 14, “I am (*ho ohn*, = *the eimi*) has sent me to you.” (Same participle form as previous one in this verse)
- d In summary  
(A) Old Testament, Jehovah said, tell them the (*ho*) I am (*eimi*) has sent you.  
(B) New Testament, Jesus said, I am (*eimi*), He was claiming to be the I am eternally existent one.  
(a) Jesus and the Jews knew this is what He was claiming.
- (3) God is assuring Moses of his presence, that He is the true God, and the God of their fathers v. 15
- IV Old Testament example of LXX translating the Tetragrammaton *ego eimi* or using the verb in direct connection with Jehovah.
- 1 \*\*Isaiah 45:18 “...*Ego eimi* and there is none else”  
(1) Hebrew “I Jehovah”  
A Here *ego eimi* is the LXX translation of Jehovah.  
(2) NWT “...I am Jehovah...”
- 2 Isaiah 45:8 “*ego eimi* the LORD have created it”
- 3 Isaiah 45:19 “...*ego eimi ego eimi* LORD speak righteousness...”
- V Old Testament usages and familiarity with the phrase *ego eimi* in the LXX.
- 1 Deut. 32:39 “See now that *ego eimi*...”
- 2 Isaiah 41:4 “...I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. *Ego eimi*”

<sup>10</sup> The Complete Biblical Library in loc.

- 3 Isaiah 43:10 "...And understand that *ego eimi*...."
- 4 Isaiah 43:25 "I, even I, am..." (*ego eimi ego eimi*) Hebrew *anokhi anokhi hu* I, I, he (personal pronoun first person singular) vs. 15-16 Jehovah is talking.
- 5 Isaiah 46:4 "Even in your old age *ego eimi*...and even to your graying years, *ego eimi*..." 45:24-25 & 46:9-10 make it clear that Jehovah is speaking.
- 6 Isaiah 48:12 "...*ego eimi* the first, *ego eimi* also the last.  
(1) See Rev. 1:17 where Jesus makes the same claim, "...*ego eimi* the first and the last" vs. 13 & 18 make it clear that this is Jesus speaking.
- 7 Isaiah 51:12 "*ego eimi ego eimi* who comforts you...."
- 8 Isa 52:6 "...*ego eimi* the one who is speaking...."