

The Greatest Heist

'Before Abraham was, I AM' (John 8.58) is one of the most precious and remarkable sayings of Messiah. The intense Temple dispute culminates with it. It is most likely this took place in Hebrew, as Acts 22.2. To believers, here is an awesome, direct allusion to the Angel of the Lord, Who appears as Deity before Moses at Sinai, inaugurates the Exodus, and unveils the sense of God's Sacred Name, YHVH.¹ Critics deny this allusion. Catrin Williams, in her much-cited work, crystallises this consensus of unbelief: 'Exod. 3.14 is no longer regarded as relevant to the discussion'.² Instead, she recommends the phrase used in Isaiah, Deuteronomy, and Hosea, 'I [am] He', the title of her thesis,³ and therefore that John 8.58 should be translated as "Before Abraham was, I [am] He".

In both Exodus 3.14 and John 8.58, both in Hebrew and in Greek as in the literal translation of the AV, the complete clause 'I AM' is *itself* the whole assertion. This is most unusual in English and in both Biblical languages.⁴⁵ It goes far beyond simply being a 'self-contained statement'.⁶ The subject ('I') is one and the same with that which is asserted. Not once does this apply in the 54 other uses of 'I am' (אהיה) in the OT, 67% of which refer to Deity.⁷ Not once does this pertain in the 67 other uses of 'I am' (ἐγώ εἰμι) in the NT, 69% of which refer to Deity.⁷ Take John 9.9, for example, where the blind man uses the same expression: 'I am *he*'. The pronoun is supplied in the AV because the full sense in the Greek must be drawn from the adjacent sentence, v. 8: 'the one who sat and begged'. Or consider the false prophets in Mark 13.6, who claim, 'I am *he*'. The intended assertion is easily inferred from the preceding clause: 'who come in My Name'. On both preceding occasions in John 8, v. 24 and v. 28, when 'I am' appears as an isolated statement, an inferred sense may be readily identified from the same or adjacent verse. Thus, the AV adds the italicised pronoun '*he*' to both.

However, supplying the pronoun in John 8.58 inserts an assertion from the adjacent context, which *destroys* the Lord's sense. 'Before Abraham was, I am *He*' begs the obvious question: Exactly *Who* is this '*He*'? The One Whom Abraham saw, the One in Whom Abraham rejoiced (v. 56), or the One Who saw Abraham (v. 57)? If this is so, strictly considered, the argument is now false, since Abraham did not yet exist, by the Saviour's own affirmation. Abraham could neither see, be seen, or rejoice 'before Abraham was'. It is as facile and confusing to substitute 'I [am] He' for either 'I AM Who I AM' or 'I AM sent me' in the Hebrew of Exodus 3.14 as to change 'Before Abraham was, I AM' to 'Before Abraham was, I [am] He'.⁸ Grave disrespect has been shown to the Beloved, the Sacred Name defaced, Godhead vilely impugned.

No, this is why the 'I AM' in John 8.58 may only refer to the other unique statement of assertion of pure Being in Holy Scripture, where the term is particularly employed as the key to the [Sacred Name](#).

The scribes gathered stones to kill; hostile critics still seem intent on burying this living and seminal testimony to the Messiah's full Deity.

¹ strateias.org/sinai

² Williams, C. *I am He. The Interpretation of 'Anî Hû' in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, 3. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament: Series 2: 113. ISBN 3161470982.

³ Williams, op cit., 276–7.

⁴ Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, Ed. E. Kautzsch, Trans. A. E. Cowley. 28th Ed. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1910.

Sn.142.a,c for אהיה אשר אהיה, the express and emphatic identification of subject and predicate in the first Divine quotation. The subject and verb possess one essence. If the verb is taken simply as a Sacred Name, as it may in the second quotation, heightening the emphasis of repetition, then, as a noun clause. Sn.141.g,i. also casts some light on the highly unusual character of making a simple predicate of a substantive which is *both* identical to its subject and *in* a verb usually expressing mere equivalence, identity, or existence. Gesenius' insightful, rigorous, but turgid and critical handling of Hebrew hinders clearer abstraction.

⁵ Wallace, Daniel. *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 530–1. Zondervan, Michigan.1996. Wallace suggests completing the clause from the LXX translation of Exodus 3.14. ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν.

⁶ Williams, op cit., 255.

⁷ [ahieh.xlsx](#)

⁸ Williams, op cit., 281. As the author concedes: 'I [am] He' in Hebrew (אני הוא), unlike 'I AM' (אהיה), is not a sacred Name, and any indication of blasphemy must be drawn from the context. The Saviour's claim elicited an immediate, explosive reaction. An oblique, anodyne and inaccurate declaration might only be expected to attract ridicule.

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Charles Soper 26/2/2026