

John 8:58

"Before Abraham came into existence, I have been existing"

Why KO3 Chose This Rendering Over Traditional Translations
A Greek Grammatical, Contextual, and Manuscript-Based Analysis

1. The Greek Text

The earliest manuscript witness to John 8:58 is Papyrus 66 (P66), dated to approximately 200 CE. The Greek reads:

πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί

prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi

The KO3 Codex renders this as:

"Before Abraham came into existence, I have been existing."

This document explains why this rendering is the most grammatically accurate translation of the Greek, and why the traditional rendering of "I AM" (capitalized, implying a divine title) is a theological import rather than a grammatical conclusion.

2. Greek Grammatical Breakdown

γενέσθαι (genesthai) — pronounced: geh-NESS-thai

- This is the aorist infinitive of γίνομαι (ginomai), meaning "to come into being," "to be born," or "to begin to exist."

- The aorist tense marks a one-time, point-in-time event. Abraham had a specific moment when he came into existence.
- This word is not εἶναι (einai, "to be" in general). The writer chose genesthai deliberately to emphasize Abraham's beginning point.

ἐγὼ εἰμί (egō eimi) — pronounced: eh-GOH ay-MEE

- Literally: "I am." But the Greek present tense does not always equal English simple present.
- When a Greek present tense verb is paired with a past-time marker (like πρίν + aorist), it creates what grammarians call a PPA: Present of Past Action still in Progress.
- A PPA means an action that started in the past and continues into the present. The English equivalent is "I have been" or "I have been existing."

The Tense Contrast

The sentence sets up a deliberate contrast between two verbs. The aorist (*genesthai*) marks a point in time: Abraham began. The present tense (*eimi*) marks ongoing duration: Jesus has been existing continuously. This contrast is the entire point of the sentence. It is a statement about duration of existence, not a claim to a divine title.

3. Proof That This Is a PPA — Other New Testament Examples

The exact same grammatical pattern (present tense verb + past time reference) appears elsewhere in the New Testament. In every other instance, translators render it as "have been," not "I am."

Luke 15:29 (Codex Sinaiticus, ~340 CE)

τοσαῦτα ἔτη δουλεύω σοι

tosauta etē douleuō soi

- Present tense verb δουλεύω (douleuō) + past time marker τοσαῦτα ἔτη ("so many years")
- Every major translation renders this: "So many years I HAVE BEEN SERVING you."
- Nobody translates this as "So many years I serve you." That would be bad English and miss the point.

John 14:9 (P66, ~200 CE)

τοσοῦτον χρόνον μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι

tosouton chronon meth' hymōn eimi

- Same verb: εἰμι (eimi) + past time marker *τοσοῦτον χρόνον* ("so long a time")
- Every major translation renders this: "I HAVE BEEN with you so long."
- This is the **exact same verb** (εἰμί) in the **exact same grammatical pattern** as John 8:58. If translators render it "have been" here, consistency demands the same at 8:58.

4. The Septuagint Argument Debunked

Trinitarians claim that when Jesus said ἐγὼ εἰμί in John 8:58, he was quoting God's self-identification in Exodus 3:14 from the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament that Jesus and the disciples used). This claim falls apart under examination.

What Exodus 3:14 Actually Says in the Septuagint

ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν

egō eimi ho ōn

- This is NOT just ἐγὼ εἰμί. It includes the article and participle: ὁ ὢν (ho ōn), meaning "the One Who Is" or "the Being."
- The full phrase in Exodus 3:14 LXX means: "I am THE ONE WHO IS" or "I am THE BEING." This is a specific divine self-designation with a title attached.
- John 8:58 does **NOT** include ὁ ὢν. It is just ἐγὼ εἰμί, with no title, no article, no participle.
- If the writer of John wanted to connect Jesus' words to Exodus 3:14, he had the exact phrase available and chose not to use it.

The Writer Knew the Septuagint

The Gospel of John quotes from and alludes to the Septuagint repeatedly. The writer was fully capable of using the Exodus 3:14 phrasing if that was the intended connection. He did not. This is not an accident or oversight. It is a deliberate choice. The absence of ὁ ὢν is the absence of the divine title.

5. ἐγὼ εἰμί Used Casually in John

The same phrase appears multiple times in John's Gospel with zero divine implications. Every time, it simply means "I am he" or "it is me" or "I'm the one."

John 9:9 (P66, ~200 CE / Codex Vaticanus, ~325 CE)

- A blind man who was healed is asked if he is the same person. He answers: ἐγὼ εἶμι.
- Meaning: "I am he" / "It's me." Nobody claims this man is declaring himself to be God.

John 18:5 (P66, ~200 CE)

- Soldiers come to arrest Jesus. They ask for "Jesus of Nazareth." He says: ἐγὼ εἶμι.
- Meaning: "I'm the one" / "That's me." A simple identification in response to a question.

John 4:26 (P66/P75, ~200 CE)

- The Samaritan woman says the Messiah is coming. Jesus says: ἐγὼ εἶμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι ("I am he, the one speaking to you").
- Meaning: "I am the Messiah." Not "I am God." He is identifying himself as the promised agent of God.

The phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι is ordinary Greek. It is used for self-identification throughout the Gospel. Capitalizing it as "I AM" in 8:58 and importing Exodus theology is a translator decision, not a textual one.

6. The Context of John 8

The conversation in John 8 is about authority and age. The Pharisees are not asking Jesus to declare his ontological nature. They are questioning his timeline.

John 8:57 (P66, ~200 CE)

The Pharisees say: "*You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?*"

- This is a question about AGE and TIME. They think Jesus is too young to have any connection to Abraham.
- Jesus responds in John 8:58 by answering their challenge: he existed BEFORE Abraham. He predates him.
- A duration statement ("I have been existing since before Abraham") directly answers their question about time.
- A divine identity claim ("I AM = Yahweh") does **not answer their question**. It changes the subject entirely. That would be a non-sequitur in the conversation.

7. Supporting Verses from the KO3 Codex

The following verses, drawn from the earliest available manuscripts, demonstrate that the Gospel of John consistently presents Jesus as subordinate to, sent by, and distinct from the Father. They confirm that John 8:58 is a statement about prior existence, not co-equal deity.

John 17:3 (P66, ~200 CE)

"This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent."

- The Father is identified as the ONLY true God. Jesus is the one SENT. You cannot be the only true God and also be sent by the only true God.

John 5:19 (P66/P75, ~200 CE)

"The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing."

- If Jesus were co-equal God, he could do everything by himself. He explicitly says he cannot.

John 14:28 (P66, ~200 CE)

"The Father is greater than I."

- Greater means greater. Co-equal God cannot have someone greater than him. Jesus says the Father is greater. That is not equality.

1 Corinthians 8:6 (P46, ~200 CE)

"There is one God, the Father... and one Lord, Jesus Christ."

- Paul separates the categories. One God = the Father. One Lord = Jesus. Jesus is not called God here. The Father alone holds that title.

Philippians 2:9 (P46, ~200 CE)

"Therefore God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name."

- God GAVE Jesus his exalted status. You cannot give yourself something you already possess. If Jesus were co-equal God from eternity, there would be nothing to give or exalt.

8. Conclusion

The KO3 Codex translates John 8:58 as "Before Abraham came into existence, I have been existing" because:

1. The Greek grammar (present tense + aorist temporal clause with πρίν) forms a textbook PPA, which means "I have been existing," not "I AM" as a divine title.
2. The identical grammatical pattern in Luke 15:29 and John 14:9 is translated "have been" by every major translation. Consistency demands the same at John 8:58.
3. The Septuagint text of Exodus 3:14 uses ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, a fundamentally different construction with a divine title (ὁ ὢν). John 8:58 omits this title entirely. The writer had access to it and chose not to use it.
4. The context of John 8 is a debate about Jesus' age and authority, not his ontological nature. A statement about prior existence answers the question. A divine identity claim does not.
5. ἐγώ εἰμι is used casually for self-identification throughout John (9:9, 18:5, 4:26) with no divine implications whatsoever.
6. The rest of John's Gospel consistently presents Jesus as subordinate to, sent by, and lesser than the Father (John 17:3, 5:19, 14:28).

The rendering "I AM" with theological capitalization is not demanded by the Greek. It is a **theological interpretation imported into the text**. The KO3 Codex follows the grammar, the context, the manuscript evidence, and the consistent witness of the earliest texts