

John 8:58 — NIV

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

## Greek Text:

- Greek: πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί
- Pronunciation: prin Abraam genésthai egó eimí

## Word Breakdown:

Greek Word	English	Notes
πρὶν (prin)	before	preposition of time
Ἀβραάμ (Abraam)	Abraham	transliteration
γενέσθαι (genésthai)	to become / to be born	aorist infinitive
ἐγὼ (egó)	I	pronoun
εἰμί (eimí)	am	present tense, indicative mood, active voice

## A) SHALIACH Argument (Messenger Representation)

- In Jewish law, a shaliach (שָׁלִיחַ / sha-LEE-akh) is a representative.
- When the shaliach speaks, he is treated as if the one who sent him is speaking.
- Jesus can say "I am" not claiming to be God Himself but acting fully authorized by God.

Meaning:

➤ Jesus represents God so perfectly, he can speak as if from God's perspective.

Scholar examples:

- James Dunn ("Christology in the Making") — early Christians saw Jesus acting on God's behalf.
- Samuel Barrett (Unitarian scholar) — Jesus' language shows a mission from God, not identity with God.

## B) "I Have Been" Translation Theory

- Greek present tense (εἰμί / eimí) can sometimes be understood as an action still ongoing from the past (historical present).
- Connection to γενέσθαι ("born") makes this important.

Meaning:

➤ Jesus could be saying "Before Abraham was born, I have existed" (continuous existence, but not eternal).

Scholar examples:

- Jason David BeDuhn ("Truth in Translation") — grammar supports softer reading like "I have been."
- Anthony Buzzard — Jesus is preeminent in God's plan, not literally pre-existent.

## C) "I Am" as an Identification of Mission, Not Existence

- Prophets used strong "I am" statements too (e.g., Isaiah 43:10 — "I am he").
- "I am" language = identity and mission, not ontological deity claims.

Examples from Jesus:

- "I am the bread of life."
- "I am the light of the world."
- "I am the good shepherd."

Meaning:

➤ Jesus is stating his role, not his being.

## D) Context of John 8

- Entire John 8 is an argument about authority and spiritual lineage.
- Jews claim Abraham as father.
- Jesus says if that were true, they would accept him.

Meaning:

➤ Jesus is emphasizing his greater authority in God's plan, not his timeless existence.

# Summary of Unitarian (Fact) Perspectives on John 8:58

View	Meaning
Shaliach	Jesus speaks fully authorized by God
Preeminence	Jesus existed in God's plan before Abraham
Identity Role	"I am" means identity and mission, not deity
Greek Grammar	"I have been" is a valid translation option

## Final Thought:

The non-Trinitarian understanding of John 8:58 is deeply rooted in the Jewish understanding of agency, representation, mission, and contextual reading of Greek grammar. Jesus is not claiming to be Yahweh, but rather affirming his God-given mission and authority, which predates even Abraham in God's divine plan