



JOHN 8:58-59

This passage depicts one of the instances in which Jesus Christ explicitly claims to be Deity. Properly understanding and explaining this passage is vital in refuting the claim of Jehovah's Witnesses that Jesus was created by Jehovah God.

1 Abraham saw Jesus' day.

2 *ego eimi*.

3 The crowd attacked Him for claiming to be God.

58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM. 59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

EXPLANATION

- Context is vital for understanding this passage. In verse 56, Christ stated that "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day," clearly implying that Christ was alive at the same time as Abraham, many thousands of years earlier. The crowd, understanding this implication, asked in verse 57, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" Understanding that the crowd was questioning Jesus' claim to have lived thousands of years earlier is necessary for understanding verse 58.
- This verse is so destructive to the Jehovah's Witnesses' claim that Christ was created that the Watchtower Society has changed the passage in their Bible. Verse 58 in the *New World Translation* reads, "Most truly I say to YOU, Before Abraham came into existence, *I have been*" (emphasis added). The Witnesses will thus agree that Jesus was alive during Abraham's day; however, by changing the wording, they can deny that He was alive because He is God.

It is important to note that the phrase "I AM" in the original Greek is *ego eimi*. The Witnesses may attempt to argue, using the footnote to verse 58 in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* (or Appendix 6F in the *NWT with References*) that because "before Abraham was" is an aorist infinitive clause (meaning that the "before" implies an indefinite action, i.e., does not specify that Christ has always existed), *ego eimi* should be translated "I have been." This argument can be refuted by noting that *eimi* appears in this verse in what is called a predicate absolute (a sentence structure in which the copulative verb is used without an object or complement); this means that *eimi* must be translated in the present tense ("I AM") rather than simply referring to the present statement of a past action ("I have been").

The *NWT* has changed several of the verses that Christians use in relation to John 20:58. For example, the Watchtower Society changed Exodus 3:14 so that the God refers to Himself as "I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE." The Society argues that this rendering is appropriate because God is referring to what He will become to His people, rather than simply referring to His Eternal Being. Knowing that Christians relate this passage to John 8:58, the Society even admits in their footnote to Exodus 3:14 in the *NWT with References* that the phrase appears in the Greek Septuagint as *ego eimi ho on*, which translated accurately is "I AM THAT I AM," but then attempts to persuade Witnesses to ignore the linkage by saying only that the two passages are unrelated.

- Finally, the Christian should also point out to the Witnesses the significance of the crowd's reaction. While the crowd was highly skeptical of Christ's claim to have been in existence during the time of Abraham, they did not threaten violence. However, the crowd attempted to stone Christ after He referred to Himself using the phrase I AM from Exodus 3:14. This reaction was the biblically prescribed punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16), thus reinforcing the understanding that Christ is claiming to be Deity.

Readers who want more information on proving from the book of John that Jesus Christ is God should read *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* by staff member Robert Bowman, available from Watchman Fellowship for a donation of \$13.

KEY TO USING THIS PAGE

The biblical passage is highlighted in pink to indicate that this is a passage to which alternative religions ignore the context of the passage. The notes to the left of the passage can be written in the margins of a Bible to help explain the passage (however, do not write the numbers). The numbers correspond with the detailed explanations at the bottom of the page. These explanations help readers to fully understand the meaning of each marginal note.