

## “Upon the Lampstand”

**“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon the Lampstand so those who come inside may see the light.”—Jesus of Nazareth, Gospel of Luke 8:16-17.**

**Question:** *Why do different editions of the New World Translation (NWT) contain different footnotes to its rendering of John 8:58?*

**Answer:** In the First, Second, and Third Editions of *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended* (published in 1998, 2000, and 2009, respectively) there are chapters which discuss Jesus’ use of “I am” or *ego eimi* (in Greek) in John 8:58 and in other New Testament (NT) texts. In the Second Edition there is a sub-section entitled, “NWT and the ‘perfect indefinite tense’ (PIT),” and on pages 259-262 I present and discuss what I have good reasons to believe are false claims published as far back as 1957 by Dr. Walter Martin and subsequently by others (see discussion below). Martin wrote that in the 1950 NWT New Testament (NWTNT) volume footnote to John 8:58 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society “*invents* a tense in the Greek and titles it ‘the perfect indefinite tense,’ a tense which does not exist in any known Greek grammar book.”<sup>1</sup>

As noted previously, other opponents of Jehovah’s Witnesses have recklessly followed Martin’s course, including John Ankerberg and John Weldon who similarly write, “there has never been a ‘perfect indefinite tense’ in Greek.”<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, even in a publication as recent as 1996 Dr. Robert Morey makes this assertion regarding the use of “perfect indefinite tense” in the 1950 NWT footnote: “But no such tense exists in the Greek language. They deliberately made it up to justify their mistranslation of ἐγὼ εἰμί [*ego eimi*].”<sup>3</sup>

Given such strong claims against the NWT’s 1950 footnote to John 8:58, and in view of the subsequent changes made to this footnote in later editions of the NWT, an extended consideration of this question may prove helpful in several ways, primarily by bringing closure to what should never have been made into such an issue in the first place. Before I further consider the NWT and KIT<sup>4</sup> footnotes to John 8:58, as well as several published evaluations of some or all of these same footnotes, I will first note that most if not all of the initial controversy surrounding these footnotes is due to the fact that Martin, Ankerberg, Weldon, Morey, and others have failed to understand and accept the evident meaning of the original 1950 NWTNT footnote’s words, “properly rendered in.” This makes clear the fact that the NWT footnote’s use of “perfect indefinite tense” has to do with the *English translation*; it does not mean the Greek of John 8:58 is “in” the “perfect indefinite tense”! But because of the misunderstanding and the evident resulting conceptual damage to the NWT/KIT footnotes to John 8:58, it is necessary to again state the obvious: The 1950 NWTNT and its publishers (the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society [here also simply, “Watchtower Society”]) have never put forth a “tense in the Greek language,” as Dr. Morey claimed (see above) as recently as 1996.

Even Robert M. Bowman, Jr. (who at one time worked with Martin at the Christian Research Institute in California) was eventually forced to admit, “it may be ... that the expression ‘rendered in’ in [the 1950 NWTNT] footnote should be understood to refer to the tense of the English rendering, although for many years JWs commonly defended it as a Greek tense.”<sup>5</sup> On the heels of admitting the truth (which is no great thing here since it is plain for all to see that the words “rendered in” have to do with the English

translation) Bowman tries to take back some of the force of his already weak admission by claiming that “for many years JW’s commonly defended it as a Greek tense,” and so in the end Bowman further blames Jehovah’s Witnesses for the misinformation spread by others (see notes 1 and 2).

Yet, the best available evidence calls into question Bowman’s claim that “for many years JW’s commonly defended” the “perfect indefinite tense” as “a Greek tense.” Indeed, Bowman does not quote any version of the NWT, KIT, or any other Watchtower publication to support his claim. Instead Bowman relies entirely on the personal testimony allegedly given to him by a former Jehovah’s Witness named Bill Cetnar. But in Cetnar’s *Questions for Jehovah’s Witnesses* (which has been available since 1983 and in which Cetnar reproduces or quotes numerous letters, documents, and other Watchtower-related materials) there is not one piece of evidence put forth which in any way suggests or supports the idea that “for many years JW’s commonly defended” the “perfect indefinite tense” as “a Greek tense.”

“Rendered in” makes it impossible to credibly argue that the 1950 NWT footnote meant “a Greek tense” by its use of “perfect indefinite.”<sup>6</sup> Unless other Witnesses like Cetnar simply did not understand the meaning of “rendered in” (as so many Evangelical and others have failed to understand it), then Bowman’s claim and Cetnar’s alleged claim are defeated by the evidence in the NWT itself (namely, by the use of “rendered in”), as well as by what the Watchtower Society has published elsewhere since 1950 concerning its use of “perfect indefinite tense” in the NWT footnote to John 8:58, as I will now further document.

In addition to the evidence from the 1950 NWT footnote itself (namely [again], the use of “rendered in”), in 1978 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society sent a letter to a Jehovah’s Witness named Firpo Carr, in response to Carr’s question about changes in the NWT footnote to John 8:58. In its letter, the Watchtower Society makes it clear just how the Society and those Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with it understood the 1950 NWT’s use of “perfect indefinite tense” in its footnote to John 8:58. Consider:

In the first edition of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* released in 1950, the footnote on John 8:58 explained why the *New World Translation* rendered the Greek phrase *ego eimi* as “I have been.” It was stated that this phrase was properly “rendered in the perfect indefinite tense.” It was never meant to say that there is a “perfect indefinite tense” in Greek. What was meant was that the Greek present indicative *ego eimi* is here rendered into English in the perfect tense, “I have been,” with an idea of indefiniteness. That is to say, no mention of the length of Jesus’ prehuman existence is here given. ... The translators of the *New World Translation* are fully aware that there is no Greek tense known as the perfect indefinite tense, but when we translate this phrase into English, it is properly rendered in the perfect tense.<sup>7</sup>

In view of the above, it is clear the NWT Committee did not consider the “perfect indefinite tense” to be a tense different from the English “perfect tense.” The NWT Committee did not have in mind a *Greek* tense by its use of “perfect indefinite,” and so there was never any ‘invention’ of a Greek tense by the Watchtower Society on this point. Those who have falsely claimed as much and those who continue to publish such things should explain how they have for decades been unable to understand the simple English expression, “rendered in,” rather than make false charges against the NWT translators (compare endnote 1). The meaning of the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 is clearly that “*ego eimi* is here rendered into English in the perfect tense, ‘I have been,’ with an idea of indefiniteness,” that is, “no mention of the length of Jesus’ prehuman existence is here [in John 8:58] given.”

With the above introduction to some of the issues surrounding the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 now well in mind, I will further consider each NWT footnote to John 8:58 which has been published since 1950, and that I have seen, in order to give as clear of a presentation and an explanation for each as may be possible and practical here to give in answer to this question.

**1950 - NWTNT (Christian Greek Scriptures):**

I have been = ἐγὼ εἶμι (*e.go' ei.mi*) after the a'orist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect indefinite tense. It is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn'*, meaning 'The Being' or 'The I Am') at Exodus 3:14, LXX.

There are three points made in the above NWT footnote to John 8:58: 1) The basis for the NWT rendering "I have been" is said to relate directly to the adverbial expression which refers to a past time ("before Abraham was born"); 2) the English translation "I have been" is said to be "rendered in the perfect indefinite tense"; and 3) there is no connection between what Jesus says in John 8:58 and what Jah says according to the Septuagint (LXX) translation of Exodus 3:14. I have previously and elsewhere addressed the issues involved in the translation and meaning of Exodus 3:14, putting forth my good reasons for believing there is no credible connection between Jah's words to Moses and Jesus' words to the Jews in John 8:58.<sup>8</sup>

I have also elsewhere addressed and explained the importance of the first point noted by the 1950 NWT footnote concerning the significance of the adverbial expression, "before Abraham was born" (Greek: *prin Abraam genesthai*).<sup>9</sup> What is important to note here is how the NWT Committee viewed the adverbial expression in relation to the present form of the Greek verb *eimi* ("I am"). As I noted earlier, the February 15, 1957, issue of *The Watchtower* responded to a question concerning the difference between the NWT's "I have been" translation of John 8:58 and the more traditional rendering, "I am."<sup>10</sup> In addition to referencing other English and non-English translations which are similar to the NWT's translation of Jesus' words, *The Watchtower* article referred to the present verb *eimi* in John 8:58 as a "historical present." This occurs when a present verb is used to convey vivid narration of a past act or time.<sup>11</sup> *The Watchtower* article makes this connection primarily, if not exclusively, because the past expression "before Abraham was born" is used "after" *eimi*. Bowman and others have criticized *The Watchtower's* reference to the historical present in association with the NWT's translation of John 8:58, claiming in part that it "presented a completely new defense of the rendering."<sup>12</sup>

Bowman therefore considers the use of "the perfect indefinite tense" in the 1950 NWT footnote to have been an actual "defense" for the NWT rendering, with the "historical present" being "a completely new" defense! Yet, describing the English translation as "perfect indefinite" is not a "defense" of the translation, and labeling the Greek idiom as a "historical present" is not the Watchtower Society's complete defense of the NWT rendering, either. In the case of the former ("perfect indefinite tense"), again, it is merely a description of the English 'rendering.' Concerning the latter (the "historical present"), it is the wrong classification of the right Greek idiom,<sup>13</sup> the components of which are 1) the present verb *eimi* and 2) its occurrence "after the aorist infinitive clause." This is confirmed by the same footnote's use of "and hence properly rendered in" (underlining added) after referring to the fact that *eimi* follows the past-referring clause, "Before Abraham was born." Consider, however, Bowman's criticism of the 1957 *Watchtower* article in a larger context:

In 1957, a *Watchtower* "Questions from Readers" on John 8:58 made no attempt to defend the term *perfect indefinite*—in fact, the term is not even mentioned. Instead, the article argued that "the Greek verb *eimi* must be viewed as a historical present." However, historical presents have nothing to do with perfect tenses, nor with the

present tense following an “aorist infinitive clause.” Thus, a new defense was introduced that in effect rejected the old one but was itself no better.<sup>14</sup>

There are several problems with what Bowman writes. I will here enumerate, introduce, and then comment on each one:

- 1) **There is “no attempt to defend the term perfect indefinite”; indeed, “the term is not even mentioned.”** The question the 1957 *Watchtower* article is answering has nothing to do with the use of “perfect indefinite”! Here is the question the article was answering, “Why does the *New World Translation* use ‘I have been’ instead of ‘I am’?” This is a question about *the basis for the translation*, not about the words used to describe the *English* ‘rendering.’ So there is no reason for this *Watchtower* article to “attempt to defend the term *perfect indefinite*,” or for the article to ‘even mention the term,’ as Bowman suggests the *Watchtower* article should have done.
- 2) **“Historical presents have nothing to do with perfect tenses, nor with the present tense following an ‘aorist infinitive clause.’”** The historical present can be translated using the perfect or an English past tense. Since the 1957 article is arguing that *eimi* is a historical present in John 8:58 (because of its association with an adverbial expression which refers to a past time), the point of the 1957 *Watchtower* is “the historical present is rendered in the past.”<sup>15</sup> So in this case, in relation to the 1957 *Watchtower* article’s argument, the historical present *does* ‘have something to do with perfect tenses,’ namely, the “perfect indefinite tense” in which John 8:58 was “rendered”! For this same reason, the “defense” presented in the 1957 article also directly involves and even depends on the aorist infinitive clause (“before Abraham was born”), since it is this past-referring part of the text’s context which caused the author(s) of the 1957 *Watchtower* article to view *eimi* as having past implications, though present in its verbal form. But *eimi* in John 8:58 is not a historical present.
- 3) **“A new defense was introduced that in effect rejected the old one but was itself no better.”** To suggest that the reference to the historical present in the 1957 *Watchtower* is a “new defense,” Bowman would have to demonstrate that this same defense was not the basis for the “I have been” translation in the first place. Yet, Bowman believes “the 1957 defense is historically more likely to be the translators’ real basis”!<sup>16</sup> Then why refer to the 1957 defense as “new”? There certainly is no ‘rejection of an older view’ in the 1957 article, for there is nothing in the 1957 article which contradicts what is said in the 1950 NWT footnote. While we do not know for sure whether the translator of John 8:58 in the 1950 NWT understood *eimi* to be a historical present, clearly the basis for the translation (as explained in both the 1950 footnote and in the 1957 *Watchtower* article) is tied directly to the present verb *eimi* following an adverbial expression referring to a past time. It may be that in this case the 1950 NWT translator(s) sensed the Greek idiom and recognized the need for a translation which communicated Jesus’ prehuman existence without linking *eimi* to a particular idiomatic category, such as the historical present. It is also possible the 1950 NWT translator(s) understood the existential connotations of the text, but made a mistake in how he/they classified the Greek idiom. This is precisely what happened in the 1957 *Watchtower*, where the author understood the existential sense of the *eimi* but mistakenly viewed Jesus’ speech as a narrative in John 8:58, and so *eimi* was then also understood as a historical present. Indeed, one well-known Greek grammar published since Bowman’s 1991 *Jehovah’s Witnesses* book even suggests the 1957 *Watchtower* view of *eimi* as a historical present is “not impossible”!<sup>17</sup> With this latter view I disagree. Nevertheless, while the author(s) of the 1957 article misunderstood the nature of Jesus’ speech,<sup>18</sup> he/they correctly understood the existential implications of what Jesus said. The same may be true for the original translator(s) of John 8:58 in the 1950 NWT, in that their rendering was clearly based on the relationship between the past-referring adverbial clause and the present verb *eimi* which follows it.

Since the original 1950 NWTNT translation, more recent footnotes and appendixes to the NWT and the KIT rightly classify the Greek present verb *eimi* in John 8:58 as a “Present of Past Action Still in Progress,” which is also called the “Extension from Past” present.<sup>19</sup> The Watchtower Society has not changed its understanding of the existential nature of *eimi*. The Society has always taught that in John 8:58 Jesus’ words mean he

existed before Abraham's birth and up to the events of John Chapter 8.<sup>20</sup> The Watchtower Society has, however, changed its understanding of the Greek idiom John used for Jesus' words, and it has also revised its footnotes to John 8:58 since the publication of the NWTNT in 1950, which changes I will now here further consider.

### **1961, 1971 - NWT:**

I have been=ἐγὼ ἐμί (e.go' ei.mi) after the aorist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect indicative tense. ...

In the footnotes to John 8:58 in these NWT editions, the 1950 "perfect indefinite tense" has been changed to "the perfect tense indicative." According to the previously referenced 1978 letter from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society to Firpo Carr, "the change was made in order to make it clearer that the footnote pertained to the English rendering rather than to the tense in the original Greek."<sup>21</sup> Bowman criticizes this explanation in part by claiming, "changing 'perfect indefinite tense' to 'perfect tense indicative' does absolutely nothing to clarify that 'rendered in' means rendered into English!"<sup>22</sup> I agree with Bowman on this point, but not with the false dichotomy which he next presents: "Unless we assume that the persons responsible for the revised footnote were utterly inept, it is inconceivable that what they were trying to do was clarify that an English tense was meant."<sup>23</sup> Here Bowman allows for only two possibilities (= his "unless we assume ...") when others do in fact exist. The two options Bowman permits here in relation to this point are: 1) 'Utter ineptness' and 2) the writer of the February 7, 1978 letter to Firpo Carr was lying or deliberately misrepresenting the facts (since according to Bowman the writer's claim is "inconceivable"). But there are other reasonable explanations.

It may be that the Watchtower Society received so much unwarranted criticism from people who were "utterly inept" about the meaning of "rendered in,"<sup>24</sup> that the Watchtower Society chose to make some change to the description "perfect indefinite tense" but without fully resolving the problem for those who had unfairly criticized the NWT footnote. It is quite possible that in so doing the Society felt it was necessary to use more common or recognizable terminology concerning its English translation. That the Society could have been even clearer than it was by using "perfect tense indicative," however, is not what has caused such deceptive and unfairly prolonged attacks against the NWT footnotes to John 8:58.

Conceding that the Society's adjustment to the 1950 NWT footnote did not help further the understanding that the expression "rendered in" refers to the English translation, it does not change the fact that whether we use "perfect indefinite tense" or "perfect tense indicative" there is only one way a person with a sense of fairness and objectivity could construe the meaning of "rendered in." Yet, when it comes to the inability or refusal of Trinitarian scholars to understand the meaning of "rendered in," as well as their failed application and understanding of the "perfect indefinite tense" as a Greek tense (!), Bowman handles his fellow Trinitarians' demonstrably false claims with kid gloves, all the while questioning or otherwise not properly captioning the scholarliness, the honesty, and even the expressed intent behind the wording of the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58.

In the 1980s and 1990s, several decades after Dr. Martin's *Kingdom of the Cults* had first misrepresented the 1950 NWT footnote's use of "perfect indefinite tense" without qualification,<sup>25</sup> one of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society named Nelson Herle, Jr., prepared an unpublished book examining the historical and biblical bases of the Trinity doctrine. In his book, Herle also discusses issues involved with the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58. Bowman subsequently attempted to make light of Herle's unpublished but distributed explanation for the change from "perfect indefinite tense" to "perfect tense indicative" in NWT footnotes to

John 8:58. Bowman first quotes the following explanation from Herle’s *The Trinity Doctrine* book:

Whether one calls the tense “perfect,” “perfect indefinite,” or “perfect tense indicative,” all mean basically the same thing, “an event of past time.” The terms “perfect” and “perfect tense indicative” are more common than “the perfect tense indefinite” and have been used in more recent editions of the NWT for the sake of using a more *common* term, not a more correct one.<sup>26</sup>

Bowman responded to Herle’s above claims with the following:

It overlooks the fact, known to all first-year students of Greek, that “indicative” is a term describing the *mood* of the verb, while “indefinite,” as used in the 1950 NWT footnote, is a term describing the *tense* of the verb. The indicative mood is simply that aspect of the verb that identifies it as a true statement (rather than a question, command, or wish). Thus, it is simply not true that “perfect tense indicative” is synonymous with “perfect indefinite tense.”

What Bowman fails to notice, however, is that Herle is not claiming these descriptions are completely “synonymous”! Rather, according to Herle they “all mean basically the same thing,” which could in this case mean simply that this was the NWT author(s)’ attempt to make more clear the fact that “rendered in” had to do with its English translation, not with the tense of the Greek verb *eimi*. Yet, Bowman makes this once again appear to involve the *Greek* of John 8:58, which is why (with my underlining) Bowman involves “all first-year students of Greek”! But the dispute existing before the first change to the NWT footnote took place had to do with whether “perfect indefinite tense” involved the English translation, which based on the footnote’s use of “rendered in” it clearly did involve in spite of the false claims made by others.

Further, nowhere in his book does Herle claim that “indicative” means the same thing as “indefinite,” and Herle did not overlook what is “known to all first-year students of Greek” with respect to the meanings of “indicative” or “indefinite.” Herle also knows that all of the terms used in the NWT footnotes to John 8:58 (with respect to the *English* rendering) mean “basically” the same thing *in reference to time*, specifically, as Herle wrote (and which John 8:58 does include) “an event of past time.” Bowman has misrepresented Herle. Bowman has also misrepresented (by not representing at all) potential and even likely reasons for the NWT footnote’s change from “perfect indefinite tense” in the first place.

Whether NWT’s footnote change did, in fact, assist those who were misrepresenting the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 to better understand the “perfect indefinite tense” as referring to the English translation, is a separate question. Probably, it did not. But if “rendered in” was not enough to help keep those who should have known better from continuously publishing misrepresentations about NWT’s footnotes to John 8:58, then perhaps NWT should have left “perfect indefinite tense” in place and simply noted through *The Watchtower* that its critics were ‘overlooking the facts, known to all first-year students of English,’ namely, that “rendered in” has to do with the language into (hence, the “in” in “rendered in”) which the translation is being made; it does not refer to the *translated* language.

### **1969 - KIT (Kingdom Interlinear Translation):**

I have been=ἐγὼ ἐμί (e.go’ ei.mi) after the a’orist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect tense. ...

Here the KIT note refers only to “the perfect tense,” not to the “perfect indefinite tense” or even to the “perfect tense indicative.” This change does nothing to alter the meaning

of the *English rendering*, though it is not known why the 1969 KIT note is different in this one respect from the earlier NWT editions, and different from the 1971 NWT footnote to John 8:58 (see page 5 under “1961, 1971 – NWT”). Perhaps the NWT Committee or the Watchtower Society initially decided to change the “perfect indefinite tense” to the “perfect tense” in response to the unfounded criticism being brought against NWT’s earlier use of the former description for its English rendering. When the 1971 NWT was being prepared the Society obviously decided to use “perfect tense indicative” instead of “perfect tense” as part of its effort to make even more clear what was already very clearly indicated by “rendered in,” and which was not helped much at all (again, nor did it need to be but for the unwarranted criticism circulating at the time) by the changes made in the NWT and KIT footnotes to John 8:58.

**1984 - NWT Reference Bible (Appendix 6F, page 1582):**

The action expressed in Joh 8:58 started “before Abraham came into existence” and is still in progress. In such a situation ἐμί (*ei.mi*), which is the first-person singular present indicative, is properly translated by the perfect indicative. ...

**1985 - KIT:**

“I have been” (ἐγὼ ἐμί, *e.go' ei.mi*). The action expressed by this verb began in the past, is still in progress, and is properly translated by the perfect indicative. See App 2F [which appendix starts out with the exact same words quoted above under “1984 NWT,” except for the 1984 NWT abbreviates “Joh” while the 1985 KIT uses “John”].

In the 1984 NWT Reference Bible and in the 1985 KIT footnotes to John 8:58, reference is made to an appendix in each volume which is dedicated to explaining the basis for the NWT’s/KIT’s translation of John 8:58. These newer appendixes also discuss the existential meaning of *eimi* when used with an expression of past time, such as “before Abraham was born.” But in describing the Greek of John 8:58, the NWT and KIT appendixes to John 8:58 show clearly that the Watchtower Society no longer considers the present *eimi* in John 8:58 to be a Greek historical present. Rather, the Society accepts what was put forth as far back as 1858 by J.A. Bengel,<sup>27</sup> as far back as 1859 by A. Tholuck,<sup>28</sup> as far back as 1884 by H.A.W. Meyer,<sup>29</sup> as far back as 1897 by Greek grammarian G.B. Winer,<sup>30</sup> as recently as 1961 by F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R.W. Funk,<sup>31</sup> and as recently as 1963 by N. Turner,<sup>32</sup> and as recently as 1968 by J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, since the 1984 NWT and 1985 KIT were published, Greek grammarian K.L. McKay stepped forward in 1992, 1994, and again in 1996 to publish the same truth about the translation and the meaning of Jesus’ words in John 8:58 as the Watchtower Society has taught by means of its “I have been” translation. The 1984 NWT and 1985 KIT labeling of the Greek idiom in John 8:58 as the “present of past action still in progress” is the same as McKay’s “Extension from Past” present.<sup>34</sup> The grammar of John 8:58 fits this idiom. As I have argued above and elsewhere,<sup>35</sup> in addition to his claim to have preexisted Abraham’s birth, there is the additional possibility that in John 8:58 the predicates “Christ” or “Son of Man” should be supplied to Jesus’ use of *ego eimi*, which is consistent with John 8:24, 28 and it is consistent with Jesus’ and with others’ use of *ego eimi* with messianic implications in the NT.<sup>36</sup>

The *New World Translation* has from its first edition in 1950 to its latest editions in 1984 and in 1985 (KIT) given a translation for Jesus’ words in John 8:58 which accurately and sufficiently communicates his response to the Jews’ question, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” in John 8:57. Responding with the words, “Before Abraham came into existence I have been” directly answers the Jews’ question about his age, and it also answers how Jesus had “seen Abraham.” It was during his prehuman existence that Jesus witnessed Abraham ‘rejoice’ upon seeing the

Messiah’s “day.” According to Jesus, Abraham “saw [Jesus’ day] and was glad.”—John 8:56.<sup>37</sup>

Though several Greek and New Testament scholars before K.L. McKay accurately wrote about the meaning of John 8:58, McKay has helped to further undo part of the damage done by Trinitarian scholars such as A.T. Robertson, whose theology appears to have overridden his grammatical skills when it comes to texts such as John 8:58.<sup>38</sup> Were this not the case, then Robertson should have been able to clearly see what many others have recognized, namely, that in John 8:58 Jesus claimed to have “seen Abraham” because Jesus existed “before Abraham was born,” and he continued existing up to the present. The use of the present *eimi* with a past-referring expression identifies the “present of past still in progress” or the “Extension from Past” present idiom, it answers the Jews’ question in verse 57, about how Jesus could have “seen Abraham” based on Jesus’ words in verse 56, and *ego eimi* as used by Jesus in the NT clearly involves his identity as the Christ, Messiah, or Son of Man. Similarly, *ego eimi* in John 9:9 involves the identity of the blind man whom Jesus healed, and *ego eimi* in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) is used also by Jah to identify himself according to the contexts in which *ego eimi* is used.<sup>39</sup> Nowhere is “I AM” used as a name for the biblical God, nor does Jesus ever call or otherwise identify himself as, “I AM.”<sup>40</sup>

Thankfully, the NWT and other translations<sup>41</sup> of John 8:58 have chosen to let the text speak apart from the theological assumptions of Trinitarianism which came about after the New Testament was written, this in spite of the unjust criticism that has been heaped upon the Watchtower Society and the NWT translation committee by others as a result. As for the NWT footnotes to John 8:58, in addition to Ron Rhodes’ recently revised (2009) edition of his *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses* (discussed further in my Blog, “New World Translation Footnotes to John 8:58”<sup>42</sup>), Ankerberg and Weldon’s 2008 edition of their *Fast Facts on Jehovah’s Witnesses* continues to spread false information about Jehovah’s Witnesses and about NWT footnotes to John 8:58. So blatant are Ankerberg and Weldon in their published misrepresentations of Jehovah’s Witnesses on this point that as recently as 2008 they write (with underlining added), “the Watchtower Society still maintains from time to time that *eimi* is in the ‘perfect indefinite’ tense.”

Not once, not in 1950, not in 1961, not in 1969, not in 1971, not in 1984 or in 1985, and certainly not in 2008 or here now near the end of 2009, has the Watchtower Society in any of its publications or elsewhere claimed the Greek verb *eimi* was “in the ‘perfect indefinite tense’”! The continued publication of misrepresentations of NWT footnotes to John 8:58 must stop, and the fact that Trinitarians are so unable to police themselves over such obvious mistakes concerning important texts and grammatical issues does not speak well for the likes of Ankerberg, Weldon, Rhodes, Bowman, Morey and others who have had plenty of time to start telling the truth about the NWT and about its footnotes to John 8:58, and also to tell the truth about those who have published falsehoods concerning the same for decades.

Greg Stafford

“Upon the Lampstand,” December 17, 2009.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Walter R. Martin, *Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1957), page 36. The emphasis on “invents” is original to Martin. The misrepresentation of the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 actually started four years earlier in 1953, according to Martin’s *Jehovah of the Watchtower* book (see note 25). Later, in his book, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1977 [1965]), page 78, Martin alleges “the term

‘perfect indefinite tense’ is an invention of the author of the [NWT] note.” Twenty (20) years after the publication of Martin’s *The Kingdom of the Cults* in 1965, in Martin’s 1985 newly Revised edition, Martin’s original claim that “the term perfect indefinite tense is an invention” of the NWT translators was significantly changed. In fact, the change made in the 1985 edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults* still remains in editions of Martin’s work published almost forty (40) years after the book was first published, according to the Revised, Updated, and Expanded Edition of Martin’s book edited by Ravi Zacharias (Grand Rapids: Bethany, 2003). Consider the following comparison of the following three editions of Martin’s *Kingdom of the Cults* (with underlining added):

**1977 (1965) *Kingdom of the Cults*, pages 77-78:**

It is difficult to know what the author of the note [on page 312 of the 1950 NWT] means since he *does not* use standard grammatical terminology, nor is his argument documented from standard grammars. The aorist infinitive as such does *not* form a clause. It is the adverb *Prin* which is significant here, so that the construction should be called [a] *Prin* clause. The term “perfect indefinite” is an invention of the author of the note, so it is impossible to know what is meant.

**1985 *Kingdom of the Cults*, page 88:**

It is difficult to know what the author of the note [on page 312 of the 1950 NWT] means since he *does not* use standard grammatical terminology, nor is his argument documented from standard grammars. The aorist infinitive as such *does not* form a clause. It is the adverb *Prin* which is significant here, so that the construction should be called a *Prin* clause. The term “perfect indefinite” is not a standard grammatical term and its use here has been invented by the authors of the note, so it is impossible to know what is meant.

**2003 *Kingdom of the Cults*, page 111:**

It is difficult to know what the translator means, since he *does not* use standard grammatical terminology, nor is his argument documented from standard grammars. The aorist infinitive as such *does not* form a clause. It is the adverb *prin* that is significant here, so that the construction should be called a *prin* clause. The term “perfect indefinite” is not a standard grammatical term, and its use here has been invented by the authors of the note, so it is impossible to know what is meant.

Note that in the later editions of Martin’s work it is not said that the NWT translators ‘invented’ “the term ‘perfect indefinite tense,’” but that the NWT footnote authors “invented” the perfect indefinite “use here” in John 8:58! It is unclear how those responsible for the 1985 and later 2003 editions of Martin’s work (quoted above) could have made the above change from ‘inventing’ “the term” to ‘inventing’ “the use” of “perfect indefinite tense” and at the same time have failed in their research (all the way up to at least 2003) to note the explanation for the “use” of “perfect indefinite” given by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in its 1978 letter to Firpo Carr. In fact, this 1978 letter (which I discuss further in the main body of this article [see pages 2, 4-5]) is referenced and considered in part by Robert M. Bowman, Jr., in his 1989 book *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), pages 93-94, 100. So it was not “impossible to know what” was meant in 2003, that is, had those responsible for editing Martin’s work bothered to fully research the matter according to the written explanation given by the Society over thirty (30) years ago, and subsequently critiqued by Bowman nearly twenty (20) years ago!

<sup>2</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Fast Facts on Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Eugene, Oregon: Ankerberg Theological Seminary, 1988), page 26. Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), page 116, makes almost the exact same claim as Ankerberg and Weldon, using almost the exact same words, though Rhodes cites Bowman’s discussion as support for his claim. But Bowman actually contradicts Rhodes on this matter involving the alleged ‘invention’ of a Greek tense by the NWT Committee! As noted also on page 1, fourth paragraph of my answer to the question for this article, Bowman wrote, “it may be ... that the expression ‘rendered in’ in [the 1950 NWTNT] footnote should be understood to refer to the tense of the English rendering” (Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, pages 94). Setting aside Bowman’s weak admission “it may be” (weak in view of the obvious meaning of “rendered in” in the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58), the clear meaning of “rendered in” appears to have finally (fifty-nine years after it was published in the 1950 NWT) moved Rhodes to revise the following comments from his 1993 edition (page 116) of his *Reasoning* book:

It is highly revealing that at one time, the Jehovah’s Witnesses attempted to classify the Greek word *eimi* in John 8:58 as a perfect indefinite tense rather than a present tense. ... However, this claim proved to be very embarrassing when Greek scholars pointed out to the Jehovah’s Witnesses that there is no such thing as a perfect indefinite tense in Greek grammar.

Rhodes has his facts wrong and he has reversed the true consequences in his above quoted 1993 comments: The embarrassment is (or it should be) for those Trinitarian scholars and others who could not understand the simple English expression “rendered in”! Further, in spite of my having addressed many of Rhodes’ arguments and issues related to John 8:58 in the NWT in my First (1998) and Second (2000) Editions of *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, in his recently revised 2009 edition of his *Reasoning* book Rhodes does not respond expressly to anything I wrote in either edition. The result is Rhodes’ work continues to misrepresent numerous issues and facts relating to Jehovah’s Witnesses and to the NWT, all the while keeping his readers unaware of my published responses to his works and to many of the works Rhodes cites and relies on in his 1993 and 2009 presentations against Jehovah’s Witnesses. Ankerberg and Weldon have also failed to note the facts in their 2008 revised edition of their *Fast Facts on Jehovah’s Witnesses*, for on page 51 of their new edition they write:

Feeling the pressure from scholars, the Watchtower Society has tried to explain its reason for translating the Greek *ego eimi* (“I am”) as “I have been” in John 8:58. They claimed it was because the verb *eimi* was in what they called the “perfect indefinite” tense. Then scholars pointed out to them that there has never been a perfect indefinite tense in Greek

...

Yet, what “scholars” like Dr. Walter Martin “pointed out” on this issue was false. The “pressure” brought upon the Watchtower Society was motivated by the inability or unwillingness of Dr. Martin and others who followed him to recognize or to accept the meaning of the English expression “rendered in,” which makes it clear that the 1950 NWT footnote has nothing to do with “a perfect indefinite tense in Greek.” In spite of this, Ankerberg and Weldon continue their misrepresentation nearly six (6) decades after the original publication of the NWT footnote to John 8:58! So there appears to be an evident unwillingness on the part of those loyal to Martin to expressly admit he misrepresented the NWT and that Martin was incompetent or very reckless in not fairly captioning the meaning of “rendered in.” All the way up to at least 1981, Dr. Walter Martin insisted in his correspondence with Jehovah’s Witnesses that the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 “clearly stated that the perfect indefinite tense was in the Greek language” (Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 151, note 18). Note how, in spite of the evidence, Bowman handles Martin’s false charge and incompetent claim against Jehovah’s Witnesses and against the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58:

It must be said that the [1950 NWT footnote] was not explicit on this point, and could most easily be interpreted as Herle [one of Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Society] has argued. [Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 151, note 18 (underlining added)].

“Not explicit on this point”? What “point,” that “rendered in” had anything to do with “the Greek language”? That is not true! The footnote could not have been more reasonably “explicit” about how it was using “perfect indefinite tense,” namely, for the language into which the text is “rendered in.” In spite of this explicit footnote, Martin writes as if the NWT authors were “clearly” ‘rendering’ John 8:58 into Greek! Bowman is right there to show compassion and understanding for Martin’s “falsely called knowledge” (1 Timothy 6:20), which Martin himself put forth in print until at least 1981, thirty-one (31) years after the 1950 NWTNT was released. Further, it is not merely that the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 “could most easily be interpreted” so “perfect indefinite tense” has to do with the English ‘rendering,’ that is the only interpretation a fair-minded, English-speaking person could reach based on the footnote’s “explicit” use of “rendered in the perfect indefinite tense” (underlining added). Unfortunately, this type of blatant misrepresentation of Jehovah’s Witnesses by Dr. Walter Martin is not unique to John 8:58 and to NWT footnotes. See, for example, my Appendix B, “In Defense of F.W. Franz,” on pages 561-563 of the Second Edition of *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended* (2000), in which I show how Martin and others have misquoted and misrepresented Franz’ testimony concerning his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, in large part by not accurately or by not completely presenting Franz’ testimony in response to a question about whether he would translate a passage from *English into Hebrew*,

which Martin and others somehow took to be the same thing as translating *Hebrew into English!* Further, Martin misrepresented the translational complexities of the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:4, which was the subject English text of the question put to Franz during the 1954 Douglas Walsh trial in Scotland. My Appendix B and the sections from the court transcripts cited therein can be read online at the Elihu Books web site, under the Topical Index page under “F” for “F.W. Franz,” “N” for “New World Translation,” under “R” for “Ron Rhodes,” and under “W” for “Walter Martin.”

<sup>3</sup> Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Word Publishing, 1996), page 364.

<sup>4</sup> There are two editions of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* which the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has published to date, namely, its 1969 and 1985 editions.

<sup>5</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, pages 94.

<sup>6</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 151, note 18.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Firpo W. Carr from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, dated February 7, 1978 (underlining added).

<sup>8</sup> See my *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, First Edition (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 1998), Chapter 6, pages 149-154; see my Second Edition (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), Chapter 5, pages 292-296; and see my Third Edition (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2009), Chapter 1, pages 111-123. The pages from the Third Edition's discussion of Exodus 3:14 can be read online: [http://www.elihubooks.com/data/topical\\_index/000/000/087/JWD3\\_Chap\\_1\\_SITE\\_081509.pdf](http://www.elihubooks.com/data/topical_index/000/000/087/JWD3_Chap_1_SITE_081509.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> See most recently my *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, Chapter 3, pages 277-294. Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 110, argues that “a clause beginning with *prin* [or *pro*, Greek prepositions meaning ‘before’] cannot specify ‘duration’ up to the present, since it refers to a period *prior* to the past event specified in the clause.” The first problem with this argument is Bowman assumes “duration” must be specified by the adverbial clause. But no one with whom I am familiar claims *the adverbial clause* ‘specifies duration up to the present.’ As I have shown on pages 283-284 of my Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Bowman misquotes every single one of the Greek grammars he cites in connection with his claim, “most grammars specifically state that accompanying the present tense verb is some adverbial expression indicating the extent of the duration of the time indicated by the verb” (Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 105 [underlining added]). Each one of Bowman's referenced grammars makes it clear that a past expression *and* a present verb together denote duration from the past point of reference (“before Abraham was born”) to the present (“I am”). Yet, not one of the grammars cited by Bowman on this point says anything about “the extent of the duration of the time” being indicated by the adverbial, past-referring expression. Shifting the focus (as Bowman does) from a past expression modifying a present verb to “a clause beginning with *prin*” ignores the role of the present verb in relation to the adverbial clause. By doing this, Bowman can disconnect “‘duration’ up to the present” from the past expression. But the adverbial “*prin* clause” is not considered in isolation from the present verb! It is, in fact, the present verb which denotes duration (though not always *the extent* of the duration) from the time indicated by the past-referring adverbial clause. Thus, “I am from before Abraham,” or “I have been in existence since before Abraham was born.” This use of “from” or “since” to help convey the described existence in translation is entirely warranted, for when this idiom occurs the present verb (in the case of John 8:58, the verb *eimi* [“I am”]) is “used with an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications” (K.L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek* [SBG 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1994], page 41). That is why in John 8:58 the meaning and translation of this Greek idiom is best expressed as McKay has done, namely, by using “from” or “since” to connect the duration from the past point of reference to the present moment (with underlining added), “I have been in existence since before Abraham was born” (see K.L. McKay, “Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek,” *NovT* 34 [1992], page 212; *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek*, page 42; “I am’ in John’s Gospel,” *ExpT* 107.10 [1996], page 302). McKay’s use of “since” in his translation does not indicate or even imply a beginning to the duration of Jesus’ existence. This is one of the mistaken conclusions spread by Nelson Herle, Jr., in his unpublished book on the Trinity. See, for example,

Herle’s 1993 edition of *The Trinity Doctrine Examined in the Light of History and the Bible*, page 56, where Herle suggests that because “other examples of the ‘present of past action still in progress’ ... had a beginning ... John 8:58 is no exception.” The Greek verb and past-referring expression used by Jesus in John 8:58 do not indicate that his existence had a *beginning*, but only that Jesus did exist from a time “before” Abraham’s birth up to the present. There is an *extension* (but not an “extent”) of duration or existence indicated in John 8:58. McKay uses “since” to help reveal the extension of Jesus’ existence indicated by the Greek idiom used.

<sup>10</sup> “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, 15 February, 1957, pages 126-127.

<sup>11</sup> A historical present “is often used of a past act as though it were going on” (William Douglas Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], page 71). This present is usually for vivid narration, as with Chamberlain’s examples of the present verbs ἔρχονται (“they are coming”) and θεωροῦσιν (“they are seeing”) for narrated past acts which mean “they came” and “they saw,” respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 91.

<sup>13</sup> Compare Bowman’s listing of the “defenses” used by the Watchtower Society in the NWT translation of John 8:58 on page 92 of *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*. Bowman prefaces his listing of the three defenses by writing that in each case “the defense” is related to the preceding adverbial clause. But, in fact, the first defense used by the Witnesses is the fact that the present verb *eimi* follows a past-referring adverbial clause. The “perfect indefinite tense” is not the “first defense” or even any “defense” of the NWT ‘rendering’; rather, it is the description given to the resulting English translation.

<sup>14</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 91.

<sup>15</sup> “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, 15 February, 1957, page 127 (underlining added).

<sup>16</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 93.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pages 530-531. Yet, long before the publication of Wallace’s 1996 *Grammar* the Watchtower Society changed its classification of *eimi* in Joh 8:58 from a historical present to a “Present of Past Action Still in Progress” or “Extension from Past” present (see pages 7-8), since in John 8:58 the present verb *eimi* is associated with an expression of past time (“before Abraham was born”) to denote existence extending from the past to the present rather than for vivid narration. This change took place as far back as the 1984 NWT Reference Bible, which is why Wallace’s citation of the historical present in relation to the Witnesses’ view of Joh 8:58 twelve years later in 1996 is so surprising.

<sup>18</sup> However, this view of *eimi* as a historical present was not held to dogmatically in the article, “How Are God and Christ ‘One?’” *The Watchtower*, 1 September, 1974, page 527, which states: “The verb *eimi*, at John 8:58, is evidently in the historical present, as Jesus was speaking about himself in relation to Abraham’s past” (underlining added). This use of “evidently” is much different from the 1957 article’s claim that because *eimi* followed an adverbial expression it “must be viewed as an historical present.”

<sup>19</sup> See McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek*, pages 41-42.

<sup>20</sup> Even as far back as 1899 C.T. Russell showed an understanding of Jesus’ words in John 8:58 that is remarkably reflective of the Greek idiom there used, but without direct reference to the Greek text itself. After quoting John 8:58 in the more traditional rendering, “Before Abraham was I am,” Russell wrote that these words “signify that there had been no cessation of his existence at any time in the interim,” that is, Jesus’ “interim” existence before Abraham’s birth up to the time of John 8:58 (*The At-One-Ment Between God and Man, Millennial Dawn* [Allegheny, PA: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1899], page 99 [underlining added]). The “Index to Scripture Citations” beginning on page 499 of volume 5 does not include John 8:58 from its citation on page 99, nor does it include some of the other texts also cited on page 99 of volume 5 of *Millennial Dawn*. The same is true for the 1906 and 1911 editions: John 8:58 is cited on page 90 in each

edition, but not in the index (nor are several other referenced texts). In the 1923 and 1924 editions of volume 5, John 8:58 is again cited on page 90 but there is no “Index to Scripture Citations” included at all with these editions. Further on the Watchtower’s early understanding of John 8:58, consider what Mrs. Russell wrote in *Zion’s Watch Tower* back in 1883. After also quoting John 8:58 in the more traditional rendering, Mrs. Russell wrote: “There can be no mistake about that expression. ... “I AM” expresses his continuous existence” (“Before Abraham Was, I AM,” *Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* [February, 1883], reprint page 445). This article, with the same title, was revised but reprinted in large part in the August, 1888, issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower*, on the reprint volume’s pages 1059-1060, but without naming Mrs. Russell as the author.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Firpo W. Carr from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, dated February 7, 1978, page 1.

<sup>22</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 94.

<sup>23</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 94.

<sup>24</sup> See *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1977 [1965]), page 78. Martin was recklessly followed in misrepresenting the 1950 NWT footnote to John 8:58 by John Ankerberg and John Weldon (see their *The Fast Facts on Jehovah’s Witnesses*, page 26), by Ron Rhodes (see his *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses* [1993], page 116), and by Dr. Robert Morey (see *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*, page 364). See note 2, and my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 259-262.

<sup>25</sup> Though in his 1957 *Jehovah’s Witnesses* (see endnote 1) Martin claimed the NWT footnote to John 8:58 “*invents* a tense in the Greek and titles it ‘the perfect indefinite tense,’” four years earlier in 1953, in Martin and Norman Klann’s *Jehovah of the Watchtower* (New York, NY: Biblical Truth Publishing Society, 1953), page 54, Martin and Klann write (with underlining added), “The term ‘perfect indefinite’ seems to be an invention of the author of the note.” As documented already in this article, by 1957 Martin stated his false accusation without any qualification, so that even in later editions of his *Jehovah of the Watchtower* Martin’s “seems to be an invention” becomes the more familiar but still false claim, “The term *perfect indefinite* is an invention of the author of the note” (Walter Martin and Norman Klann, *Jehovah of the Watchtower* [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1974 (1981 printing)], page 53).

<sup>26</sup> Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 94.

<sup>27</sup> John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1858), page 370.

<sup>28</sup> Augustus Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1859), page 243.

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of John*, trans. William Urwick (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), page 293.

<sup>30</sup> George Benedict Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, trans. J. Henry Thayer (Andover: Warren Draper, 1897), page 267.

<sup>31</sup> F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), page 168, sec. 322 [cited erroneously in this grammar as John 5:58].

<sup>32</sup> Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), page 62, sec. 1(c).

<sup>33</sup> J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), page 236.

<sup>34</sup> See K.L. McKay, “Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek,” *NovT* 34 (1992), page 212; *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek* (SBG 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1994), page 41; “I am’ in John’s Gospel,” *ExpT* 107.10 (1996), page 302. See also note 9 in this article.

<sup>35</sup> Most recently in my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, Chapter 3, pages 277-294. The appendixes explaining John 8:58 in the 1984 NWT and in the 1985 KIT each give the following as texts with examples of this Greek idiom, that is, other than John 8:58: Luke 2:48; 13:7; 15:29; John 5:6; 14:9; 15:27; Acts 15:21; 2 Corinthians 12:19; and 1 John 3:8.

<sup>36</sup> See my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, Chapter 3, pages 240-250, for a discussion of the predicates which are clearly implied with the use of *ego eimi* in John 8:24, 28, and pages 294-296 for a discussion of the possibility that even in John 8:58 a similar predicate may be implied with Jesus’ use of *ego eimi*, that is, in addition to *eimi*’s use as a present verb which, together with an expression of or referring to a past time, conveys existence from the past to the present. See my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, pages 231-260, for my discussion of the use of *ego eimi* by Jesus and by others with evident messianic implications.

<sup>37</sup> Viewed from this perspective, *eimi* is a present verb modified by a past expression, showing that Jesus’ existence continues from a time before the birth of Abraham to the contextual present. The past reference is necessarily vague, since those to whom Jesus is speaking cannot relate to a time beyond “the beginning.” That is why the time before Abraham’s birth is used as the past reference instead of “the beginning” (Genesis 1:1), because Abraham is the focus of the question pending an answer, namely, how did Jesus ‘see’ Abraham ‘rejoice’ when Abraham “saw” Jesus’ “day”? Significantly, the Curetonian Syriac preserves the present and the past elements found in the Greek, *’ena ’ith hawith* (“I is was”)! One late Greek cursive (157) actually reads, ἐγὼ ἦμην (“I was”). See also note 9.

<sup>38</sup> Robertson was at times overly motivated by loyalty to Trinitarianism in his treatment of certain grammatical issues, which can be seen in his handling of the use of *eimi* in John 8:58. Consider Robertson’s lamenting of “those who” believed various things during his time, including “those who accept the New Testament writings as adequate interpretations of Christ and Christianity, but who say that Trinitarianism is a misinterpretation of the New Testament” (A.T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1977], page 61). Yet, Trinitarianism is a misinterpretation of the New Testament. It has nothing to do with the meaning of “G-god” or with the identity of the “one God,” the identify of Jesus, or with the holy spirit as they are all three presented to us in the Bible (1 Corinthians 8:6; see *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, page 130, note 1, for a brief discussion with references on the personalization of the holy spirit, that is, as God’s spirit). Further, if people were saying the same thing in Robertson’s day then he should simply have considered their reasons rather than position matters then and for future generations so that Robertson’s grammatical insights would at times take second place to his Trinitarian theology. Robertson misinterprets John 8:58 and every single text in the NT which uses the Greek article and the word for “G-god” in his “Chapter V,” as he does throughout all of his writings. But this is not because A.T. Robertson is not a grammatical scholar! It is because he sets aside what are demonstrably the best grammatical interpretations of various texts, including John 8:58, in favor of his theology. This can be shown by comparing what Robertson assumes with the best available reasons, as I have endeavored to do here and elsewhere in furtherance of the discussion of the meaning of John 8:58 and of NWT footnotes to the same text. For a detailed discussion with examples showing how Trinitarians assume Trinitarianism in their understanding of all NT texts which use the words for “G-god” for Jesus or for the Father, see Chapter 2 in my Third Edition of *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*.

<sup>39</sup> See *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, note 34, pages 235-237. See also my entire discussion of the use of *ego eimi* in other Johannine texts and in the other three NT Gospels, on pages 231-260. An interesting non-biblical Greek parallel to the use of *ego eimi* by Jesus in NT texts which reveal his identity through a predicate supplied by the context, is found in the *Apocalypse* (17.2) section of the *Life of Adam and Eve* (see Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, 2d ed. [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press: 1999], page 52). Consider this text from the *Life of Adam and Eve* (originally written in Hebrew and then translated into Greek around 400 CE) followed by Jesus’ response to the high priest according to Mark 14:61-62:

Καὶ λέγει μοι· Σὺ εἶ ἡ Εὐά;  
Καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ· Ἐγὼ εἰμι

And he said to me, "Are you Eve?"  
And I said to him, "I am."

Καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς  
... ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· Ἐγὼ εἰμι

And he said to him, "Are you the  
Christ?" Jesus said, "I am."

In both of the above examples the predicate is clearly supplied from the context in response to the questions asked. In the *Life of Adam and Eve, Apocalypse* 17.2 "Eve" is the understood predicate and in Mark 14:61-62 and other NT texts "the Christ" is the understood predicate used with "I am." Compare, for example, Mark 13:6 and Luke 21:8 with Matthew 24:5, where in Matthew's account the predicate "the Christ" is explicitly stated, while in the other two accounts it is not stated but it is implied from the context.

<sup>40</sup> The idea that Jesus is using *ego eimi* as a name in John 8:58 is both odd and wrong, for "if Jesus' ἐγὼ εἰμι in 8:58 is to be understood as a name, the statement should read 'Before Abraham was, I am "I am"' (Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], page 85). To further illustrate, we would not say in translation of John 8:58, "Before Abraham came into existence Jesus," or "Before Abraham came into existence God," because missing from them both is the very "I am" which some Trinitarians claim is a divine name! The only way Jesus could be using a title or name in John 8:58 is if it is in the form of an implied predicate, such as "Christ" or "God," or if some other name or title is understood clearly from the context. Yet, as I have elsewhere shown (see *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Third Edition, pages 294-296), "Christ" is the only predicate from the context that might fit with Jesus' use of *ego eimi* in John 8:58. Thus, as Barnabas Lindars rightly points out that *ego eimi* in John 8:58 "cannot be regarded as a title" ("The Son of Man in Johannine Christology," in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament, In Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, eds. B. Lindars and S. Smalley [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973], page 54, note 25).

<sup>41</sup> Here is a sample listing of just some English translations of John 8:58 which are similar to the NWT rendering:

**"From before Abraham was, I have been"**

George R. Noyes, *The New Testament* (Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1871).

**"Before Abraham was born I was already what I am"** and (in the 1904 edition) **"I was"**  
*The Twentieth Century New Testament* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1904).

**"I have existed before Abraham was born"**

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<sup>42</sup> Available through "Watching the Ministry" (<http://elihubooks.blogspot.com>).