

[Did Jesus See Abraham?](#)

Watch out for the little leaven. Someone said,

Jesus must have been delusional according to the Pharisees. He actually thought he had seen Abraham a long time back. Who knew? He did.

Does Jesus actually say he saw Abraham? Jesus didn't see Abraham. Jesus actually said, Abraham rejoiced to “**see my day.**” (John 8:56). What did Abraham see? Jesus? No. By FAITH Abraham saw the Messiah's coming in advance of its actual arrival. The following is taken from [The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound](#).

In John 8:58 Jesus claimed superiority over Abraham. His supreme position, however, depends on the Father who glorifies His Son (John 8:54). He stated that Abraham rejoiced to “see my day” (John 8:56) – that is, Abraham by faith saw Messiah's coming in advance of its actual arrival. The day of Messiah “preexisted,” so to speak, in Abraham's mind. It is noteworthy that Rabbinic traditions state Abraham saw a vision of the entire history of his descendants (Midrash Rabbah, XLIV, on Gen. 15:18) IV Ezra 3:14 (additional commentary) says that God granted Abraham a vision of the end times. The Jews misunderstood what Jesus had said, believing that he had made a claim to be actually a contemporary of Abraham (John 8:57). Jesus reaffirmed his absolute preeminence in God's plan with the astonishing claim, “Before Abraham was, I am [he]” (John 8:58).

To grasp the meaning of the phrase “I am” in this text, it is essential to compare it with John's frequent use of the same phrase, which is in several places connected with the Messiahship of Jesus:

John 18:5 (KJV)

⁵ They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, **I am he.** [identified himself as the one they were looking for] And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.

John 6:20 (KJV)

²⁰ But he [walking on the water] saith unto them, **It is I [literally "I am"]; be not afraid.**

John 9:9 (KJV)

⁹ Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he [the man healed of blindness] said, I am he.

John 4:25,26 (KJV)

²⁵ The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. ²⁶ Jesus saith unto her, **I that speak unto thee am he.** [meaning he is the Messiah]

John 8:24 (KJV)

²⁴ I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

John 8:28 (KJV)

²⁸ Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

John 13:19 (KJV)

¹⁹ Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

John 9:35-37 (KJV)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God [many versions say "Son of Man"]? ³⁶ He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? ³⁷ And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

Cp. John 10:24; 25 (KJV)

²⁴ Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. ²⁵ Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

John 8:58 (KJV)

⁵⁸ Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am [he].

At this point John's expressly stated purpose for writing the whole of his Gospel must be kept in mind. His aim was that we should "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). The fact that in the Old Testament God speaks of Himself as "I am [He]" does not lead us, as often thought, to the conclusion that on Jesus' lips "I am [he]" means "I am God" in the Trinitarian sense. Jesus' "I am he" declarations in John can be satisfactorily explained as a claim to be the Messiah. As such Jesus presents himself as the unique agent of the One God and empowered by the latter to act on His behalf.

Even if one were to connect Jesus' *ego eime* ("I am") statements with the words of God in the Old Testament, there would still be no justification for identifying Jesus with God in the Trinitarian sense. Jesus, as Messiah, may bear a divine title without being God. Once the Hebraic principle of "agency" is taken into account, it will be readily understood that Jesus perfectly represents his Father. As agent he acts for and speaks for his principal, so that the acts of God are manifested in Jesus. None of this, however, makes Jesus literally God. He remains the human Messiah promised by the Scriptures. Trinitarian theology often displays its anti-Messianic (antichrist) bias, and "overreads" the evidence of John, failing to reckon with his simple monotheistic statements defining the Father as "the one true God" distinct from His Son (John 17:3, 5:44). This procedure sets John against Matthew, Mark, and Luke/Acts. It also blurs the New Testament's central point, which is to proclaim the identity of Jesus and the Messiah.

The evidence before us (cited above) shows that the famous phrase *ego eimi* means “I am the promised one,” “the one in question.” The blind man identifies himself by saying “I am the person you are looking for,” “I am the one.” In contexts where the Son of Man or the Messiah are being discussed Jesus claims to be “the one,” i.e., Son of Man, Messiah. In each case it is proper (as translators recognize) to add the word “he” to the “I am.” There is every reason to be consistent and to supply “he” in John 8:58 also. Thus John 4:26, “I am” = “I am [he, the Messiah].” In John 8:58 likewise Jesus declares, “Before Abraham was, I am [he, the appointed Messiah].”

It is important to notice that Jesus did not use the phrase revealing God’s name to Moses. At the burning bush the One God had declared His name as “I am who I am” or “I am the self-existent one” (Ex. 3:14). The phrase in the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint) reads *ego eimi ho hown*, which is quite different from the “I am he” used by Jesus. If Jesus had indeed claimed to be God, it is quite extraordinary that in a subsequent encounter with hostile unbelieving Jews he claims NOT to be God, but the unique agent of God bearing the title “Son of God” (John 10:34-36)

It is fair to ask how someone can “be” before he actually is. Is the traditional doctrine of the incarnation of a second divine being the only possible way of dealing with the Johannine preexistence statements? The pattern of foreordination language found in John’s Gospel does not require a literal preexistence of the Son. Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Messiah’s day was a reality to Abraham through the eyes of faith. So also the Messiah “existed” as the supreme subject of God’s plan long before the birth of Abraham. “Before Abraham came to be, I am [the one]” is a profound statement about God’s original plan for the world centered in Jesus, whom John can also describe as “crucified before the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). We have no difficulty grasping how this is to be understood. Jesus was the one appointed – and appointed to die – long before Abraham, as the supreme agent of God’s plan. If Jesus was “crucified before Abraham,” he himself may be said to have “existed” in the eternal counsels of God. In that sense he was indeed appointed as Savior of the world before the birth of Abraham.

In support of this interpretation we cite again the comments of Gilbert. Of John 8:58 he says:

Jesus has been emphasizing his Messianic claim. He does not say that before Abraham was born the *logos* [plan, motive, intent, word] existed; he says “I am.” It is Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the man whom the Father consecrated to the Messianic work who speaks. Just before this he had spoken of “my day,” which Abraham saw (John 8:56), by which we must understand the historical appearance of Jesus as Messiah. Abraham had seen this, virtually seen it in God’s promise of a seed (Gen. 12:3, 15:4,5) and had greeted it from afar (Heb. 11:13). And now it is this one who consciously realizes the distant vision of Abraham who says, “Before Abraham was born, I am.” Jesus therefore, seems to affirm that his historic Messianic personality existed before Abraham was born. If that had been the case, then its existence before Abraham must be thought of as an ideal.

THE AMBIGUITY OF JOHN 8:58

Commentators on the book of John frequently note a certain ambiguity in the sayings of Jesus, especially in connection with the failure of the hostile Jewish audience to grasp what Jesus meant. Orthodoxy is often keen to side with the opinions of the Jews against Jesus. The Jews, it is argued, thought that Jesus was claiming to be God. Therefore he is. But Jesus' hostile audience is not a safe guide to the intentions of Messiah. We have already seen that Jesus had to correct the Jewish misunderstanding that he was claiming to be God. His claim was that he was the Son of God, which is the rank of a human being, not God. In John 8:58 there is an interesting grammatical ambiguity that makes a different translation possible. The standard rendering: "Before Abraham came to be, I am" is not the only way to render the Greek.

It is an elementary fact of language that a Greek aorist infinitive takes its meaning from the context. It may refer to events future or past. Thus Matthew writes, "Before the cock will have crowed" (Matt. 26:34; *prin*, "before," + aorist infinitive). But earlier in the same Gospel we have, "Sir, come down before my child dies" (John 4:49; *prin* + aorist infinitive); "I have told you before it comes to pass" (John 14:29; *prin* + aorist infinitive). The question arises, What is the proper rendering of John 8:58? Did Jesus say: "Before Abraham **comes** to be [i.e., returns to life in the resurrection], I am", or "Before Abraham **came** to be [i.e., was born], I am [he]"?

It may be that Christian orthodoxy misreads this verse as a proof of a preexistent Messiah. Only a few verses earlier Jesus had spoken of resurrection as conferring endless life on those who follow him (John 8:51). The Jews objected that this made Jesus superior to Abraham who was then dead. Jesus justifies his claim by pointing out that Abraham had in fact looked forward to the Messiah's day. The Jews misunderstood Jesus to mean that he and Abraham were contemporaries ("Have you seen Abraham?"; John 8:53, 56, 57). It is possible that Jesus counters with the stupendous claim that he will precede Abraham in the resurrection. Before Abraham gains immortality in the resurrection, Jesus will already be alive and immortal. This would fully justify the claim to be superior to Abraham. "Coming to be" (the aorist infinitive of *ginomai*) is in fact used of resurrection in the Septuagint of Job 14:14: "I will wait until I come to be again."

If the text is read as standard translations render it Jesus will have claimed to be the Messiah appointed from eternity. Or he may be stating his superiority to Abraham in another sense. Abraham anticipated the Messiah's triumph. Jesus will indeed be enjoying endless life as the resurrected Savior long before Abraham reappears in the future resurrection.