

## The Nature of Yeshua in the Gospel of John

heaven and imparts to his hearers on earth what he has seen and heard in that transcendent realm (cf. John 3:11-13).<sup>149</sup>

A second remark in this dialogue, necessary to probe regarding the nature of the Messiah, appears in John 8:42, which is mainly intended to highlight how His opponents—who think they were serving God—were really not: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me” (RSV). Yeshua’s origins are stated in the source text as *egō gar ek tou Theou exēlthōn* (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον), “for-I from – God came forth” (Brown and Comfort). Rather than being a child of fornication (John 8:41), Yeshua’s origins are from God. Morris describes, “He came out from God,” also stating “the tense points to a moment of time, the incarnation.”<sup>150</sup> That Yeshua is not out only for His own self-serving interests—in stark contrast to any of the gods, goddesses, or other supernatural entities which would come down from the Heavens to the Earth—is clear from the dialogue transcribed with *kai ekō oude gar ap’ emautou elēlutha, all’ ekeinos me apesteilen* (καὶ ἤκω· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐλήλυθα, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνός με ἀπέστειλεν), “and I come for-not from myself I have come but that one sent-me” (Brown and Comfort).<sup>151</sup> Once again, our investigation into the nature of Yeshua, particularly as seen in the Gospel of John, is to widely involve what it means for Him to be sent to Earth from the Heavenly Father.

### John 8:48-59

#### “Yeshua’s Pre-Existence of Abraham”

“The Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’ Yeshua answered, ‘I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.’ The Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets *also*; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’ Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?’ Yeshua answered, ‘If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Yeshua said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Yeshua hid Himself and went out of the temple.”

Yeshua has just informed His opponents, “you are not of God” (John 8:47), which they doubtlessly took as not only an insult, but also as being rather impudent and arrogant from someone who had not been formally trained as a rabbi or religious leader (John 7:15). The Jewish leaders retort back with, “Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?” (John 8:48, NIV). Yeshua accused of being a Samaritan would immediately be taken as a slur, but more importantly regard how the Jewish leaders present thought that Yeshua was an aberration. The reason Yeshua was rejected, was because the religious leaders present did not want to recognize the truth He was teaching, and they could not comprehend the significance of His selfless mission of redemption:

“Yeshua replied, ‘Me? I have no demon. I am honoring my Father. But you dishonor me. I am not seeking praise for myself. There is One who is seeking it, and he is the judge. Yes,

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<sup>149</sup> Bruce, *John*, 198.

<sup>150</sup> Morris, *John*, 462.

<sup>151</sup> Brown and Comfort, 354.

indeed! I tell you that whoever obeys my teaching will never see death” (John 8:49-51, CJB/CJSB).

That the Jewish religious leaders hearing Yeshua continue to be offended by His message—and with it the claim that those who believe will never see death (cf. John 8:21, 24, 31-32, 34-36)—is detailed in their response: “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death” (John 8:52, NIV). *They were unable to process the dynamics of the life offered in Yeshua being one of reconciliation with the Creator, and full communion with Him throughout eternity.* The limitation, of these religious figures, is seen in how they are only thinking here of life and death in entirely corporeal terms—which means they are not going to be able to understand the true nature and origins of Yeshua. Yeshua is queried, “Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you claim to be?” (John 8:53, RSV).

In His response to whether or not He was greater than these religious leaders’ ancestor in Abraham, Yeshua makes it clear to His opponents that He is not some independent agent, only out for His own glory: “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who gives Me glory—the One of whom you say, ‘He is our God’” (John 8:54, TLV). Yeshua has stated to these opponents that His Heavenly Father is the God of Israel, who is the One who is seen to glorify Him. So, Yeshua has just deflected any potential accusation of self-deification, because His identity and origins are connected to what it means for the God of Israel to be His Father. Yet, while Yeshua knows the Father, His detractors here are stated to decisively not know the Father: “Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word” (John 8:55, NIV).

Yeshua’s statements are now more assertive, as He has been asked whether or not He was greater than the Jews’ ancestor Abraham, who had been deceased by this time for more than a millennium-and-a-half (John 8:53). Yeshua forthrightly tells them, “Avraham, your father, was glad that he would see my day; then he saw it and was overjoyed” (John 8:56, CJB/CJSB). The Jewish religious leaders being addressed, who did not regard Yeshua, regarded themselves as being sons or children of Abraham. Yet, Yeshua makes a statement involving not only Abraham, but Abraham while he was once living a life on Planet Earth. The assertion, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was thrilled” (TLV), is rightly taken to be how Abraham had the faith to look into the future and see the arrival of the Messiah. Those hearing this were totally taken aback, as it is recorded, “Then the Judeans said to Him, ‘You’re not even fifty years old and you’ve seen Abraham?’” (John 8:57, TLV). How could Yeshua have known what was in the mind or thoughts of Abraham? From any standard, mortal perception, Yeshua was not yet even a fifty year old man. This was an impossibility.

Yeshua’s declaration, to the Jewish religious leaders (John 8:58), is one which provoked a violent response on their behalf (John 8:59)—**precisely because it makes a claim of Divinity.** John 8:58 is translated by almost all major English Bible version as something like, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am**” (RSV/NRSV/ESV).<sup>152</sup> The source text of John 8:58 reads with, *amēn amēn legō humin, prin Abraam genesthai egō eimí* (ἀμήν ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί). Yeshua’s exclamation, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM” (PME), is widely taken as a statement not only of pre-existence on the part of the Messiah—but indeed a statement of Yeshua declaring that He was the One who spoke “I am” to Moses at Mount Sinai.

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<sup>152</sup> A different orientation is witnessed in the renderings: “Truly truly I tell you, I am from before Abraham was born” (*Lattimore*); “I tell you the truth; I AM before Abraham was born” (*The Voice*).

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The Greek Septuagint version of Exodus 3:14 took the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֶהְיֶה), “I AM WHO I AM,” and translated it as *egō eimi ho ōn* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), language which is widely recognized among examiners (quoted further) to be in principal play in John 8:58. However, there are other statements appearing in the Tanach or Old Testament, involving the LORD or YHWH speaking forth “I am,” which can certainly also be recognized as having an important role in the Messiah’s words of John 8:58. Here is a collection of key passages:

“He said also, ‘I am the God of your father [Heb. MT *anokhi Elohei avikha*, אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ; Grk. LXX *egō eimi ho Theos tou patros*, ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς], the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:6).

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM [Heb. MT *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, אֶהְיֶה אֶשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה; Grk. LXX *egō eimi ho ōn*, ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν]; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you”’ (Exodus 3:14).

“Who has performed and accomplished *it*, calling forth the generations from the beginning? ‘I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He [Heb. MT *ani YHWH rishon v’et-acharonim ani-hu*, אֲנִי יְהוָה רִשׁוֹן וְאֶת־אַחֲרֵינִים אֲנִי־הוּא; Grk. LXX *egō Theos prōtos kai eis ta eperchomena egō eimi*, ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγὼ εἰμι]” (Isaiah 41:4).

“Even from eternity I am He [*gam-m’yom ani hu*, אֲנִי הוּא גַם־מִיּוֹם אֲנִי הוּא], and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?” (Isaiah 43:13).

“Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God [Heb. MT *al-olam atah El*, אַל־עוֹלָם אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים; Grk. LXX *heōs tou aiōnos su ei*, ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος σὺ εἶ]” (Psalm 90:2).

While there are numerous usages of “I am” or *egō eimi* (ἐγὼ εἰμι) witnessed in the Gospels, John 8:58 bears a unique distinction, given the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders present in John 8:59: “At this, they picked up stones to throw at him; but Yeshua was hidden and left the Temple grounds” (CJB/CJSB). The reaction of these leaders is hardly surprising, as they only regarded Yeshua as a mere mortal speaking “I am,” and thus for it to be blasphemy against the God of Israel. Stoning a blasphemer of the God of Israel is a capital penalty witnessed in the Torah and Mishnah:

“Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him. You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death...Then Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and they brought the one who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him with stones. Thus the sons of Israel did, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Leviticus 24:14-16, 23).

“These are the felons who are put to death by stoning...he who blasphemes...he who performs an act of worship for an idol” (m.*Sanhedrin* 7:4).<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 596, 597.

It is hardly a surprise to see how various evangelical Christian commentators on John 8:58 have made associations between the “I am” declared by Yeshua, and the LORD or YHWH declaring “I am” in the Tanach. More frequently than not, this is associated with the Exodus 3:14 theophany of Moses encountering God at the burning bush, but it can also be associated with other Tanach declarations, such as that of Isaiah 41:1. The following are a number of notable entries, which do bear some significance for how John 8:58-59 is to be properly interpreted:

F.F. Bruce: “He echoes the language of the God of Israel, who remains the same from everlasting to everlasting: ‘I, the LORD, the first, and with the last, I am He’ (Isa. 41:4). How can a man who is ‘not yet fifty years old’ speak like that? Only if he speaks as the Word that had been with God in the beginning and was now incarnate on earth. Abraham looked forward to the time of his incarnation, but he himself existed before his incarnation, before Abraham was born (*γενεσθαι* [γενέσθαι]), before the worlds were made. The Word of the eternal God cannot be other than eternal. So much, in this context, is conveyed by *egō eimi* [ἐγὼ εἰμί]. And if we suppose that the conversation was carried on in Aramaic or even in Hebrew, then Jesus could have uttered the very words *‘ānī hū* [אני הוּא], as though he were applying them to himself.”<sup>154</sup>

Leon Morris: “A mode of being which has a definite beginning is contrasted with one which is eternal. ‘I am’ must have the fullest significance it can bear...It is not easy to render into Greek the Hebrew underlying passages like Exod. 3:14. The LXX translators did so with the use of the form we have here. It is an emphatic form of speech and one that would not normally be employed in ordinary speech. Thus to use it was recognizably to adopt the divine style. In passages like vv. 24, 38 this is plain, but in the present passage it is unmistakable. When Jesus is asserting His existence in the time of Abraham there is no other way of understanding it. It should also be observed that He says ‘I am’, not ‘I was’. It is eternity of being and not simply being which has lasted through several centuries that the expression indicates.”<sup>155</sup>

D.A. Carson: “If he had wanted to claim only that he existed before Abraham, it would have been simpler to say, ‘Before Abraham was, I was.’ Instead, bringing forward the use of *egō eimi* [ἐγὼ εἰμί] found in vv. 24, 28, Jesus says, ‘Before Abraham was born, I am.’ Whatever doubts may attach themselves to whether or not *egō eimi* should be taken absolutely in vv. 24, 28, here there can be none. Moreover, the strong linguistic connections with Isaiah 40-50 are supported by obviously conceptual links: cf. ‘I, the LORD—with the first of them and with the last—I am he’ (Is. 41:4); ‘Yes, and from ancient days I am he’ (Is. 43:13). Cf. Ps. 90:2. That the Jews take up stones to kill him presupposes that they understand these words as some kind of blasphemous claim to deity.”<sup>156</sup>

Colin G. Kruse: “Jesus’ opponents ridiculed the idea that he could have seen Abraham (their statement not his), but in response Jesus gave them something far more astounding to think about. He claimed to have existed prior to Abraham’s birth (just as God existed prior to the creation of the world: Ps. 90:2). This comes as no surprise to readers of the Fourth Gospel, because in the Prologue they are informed that the Word who became flesh in the person of Jesus was with God in the beginning. But there is more involved in Jesus’ statement ‘before Abraham was born, I am’. The words ‘I am’ (*egō eimi* [ἐγὼ εἰμί]) are used in a number of different ways on the lips of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel...Here they are clearly used in an absolute sense representing the divine name. Thus when Jesus said to ‘the Jews’, ‘before Abraham was born, I am’, he was identifying himself with God. Perhaps Jesus was also implying that Abraham, great

<sup>154</sup> Bruce, *John*, 206.

<sup>155</sup> Morris, *John*, pp 473-474.

<sup>156</sup> Carson, *John*, 358.

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though he was, had lived and died, but that he, Jesus, because he is one with God, remains forever as the 'I am'."<sup>157</sup>

Bruce Milne: "A conscious reflection of the Old Testament self-designation of God is evident. We are again at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14, and with the prophetic vision of Isaiah 41:4, 'I, the LORD—with the first of them and with the last—I AM HE' (my emphasis), or Isaiah 43:10, 'Yes, and from the ancient days, I AM HE' (my translation)."<sup>158</sup>

Gary M. Burge: "The climax of the entire chapter arrives at 8:58...[Jesus makes] an absolute claim to preexistence anchored in the absolute 'I am' (Gk. *ego eimi* [ἐγὼ εἰμί]) language we have already seen in this Gospel (cf. 4:26). 'I am' possesses no predicate (as in 'I am the bread of life,' 6:35) and so stands alone, no doubt echoing the Greek translation of God's divine name given in Exodus 3:14. To exist before the birth of Abraham—and yet to stand here today—is the boldest claim Jesus has yet made. It recalls the affirmation of the prologue that the Word existed even at the beginning of time. His existence has been continuous since his life is completely drawn from God's eternal life."<sup>159</sup>

Andreas J. Köstenberger: "The statement 'Before Abraham came into being, I am' (cf. Ps. 90:2...) contrasts an allusion to Abraham's birth with a reference to Jesus' eternal existence, focused on his incarnation...Jesus' language here echoes God's self-identification to Moses in Exod. 3:14. Thus, Jesus does not merely claim preexistence—otherwise he could have said, 'before Abraham was born, I was'—but deity...The present instance of ἐγὼ εἰμί (*egō eimi*, I am) startlingly culminates earlier occurrences of this expression in this chapter."<sup>160</sup>

J. Ramsey Michaels: "Jesus uses the present: not 'Before Abraham came to be, I was,' but 'Before Abraham came to be, I am'....As has often been noticed, this saying of Jesus echoes a number of pronouncements by the God of Israel in the Old Testament (particularly Isaiah), reminding Israel of who he is, what he has done, and what he will do. Such pronouncements are introduced by 'I [am] He' in the Hebrew Bible אֲנִי הוּא ('*Anî Hû*'), and by 'I am' in the Greek Old Testament [*egō eimi*]. Their purpose, most often, is to affirm continuity between God's revelations and actions in the past and what he is doing, or will do, in the present and near future....[references Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10-11; 43:25; 45:18, 19, 22; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6]....Jesus' answer is unequivocal, and to his hearers deeply offensive. Instead of citing Exodus 3:6 as a word of Scripture, he boldly makes God's pronouncement to Moses his own...This is as close as the Gospel's opening words, 'and the Word was God,' come to being made explicit on Jesus' own lips."<sup>161</sup>

What have various Christian voices, who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua being a created entity, done with the Messiah's words in John 8:58? Translations of John 8:58—*prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi*—which are produced from those who unambiguously deny Yeshua as God, include the renderings "Before Abraham came into existence, I am the one!" (The Kingdom of God Version)<sup>162</sup> and "Let me assure you on the highest authority, before Abraham ever existed, I am the Messiah" (*The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation*).<sup>163</sup> From this perspective, Yeshua's employment of "I am" before the Jewish religious leaders questioning Him, is only akin to "I am He," meaning "I am the Messiah."

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<sup>157</sup> Kruse, *John*, 218.

<sup>158</sup> Milne, 136.

<sup>159</sup> Burge, *John*, 263.

<sup>160</sup> Köstenberger, 273.

<sup>161</sup> Michaels, pp 533-534, 535.

<sup>162</sup> *The Kingdom of God Version: The New Testament*, 185.

<sup>163</sup> *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation*, 266.

One of the things which a critical thinker immediately has to process, in response to Yeshua saying “I am,” **is the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders present in wanting to stone Yeshua to death.** Is this something which would have been legitimately expected to someone who would only say “I am the Messiah” or “I am the Anointed One”? There is no recognition, or even consideration, by such Christian proponents of a low Christology of Yeshua being a created entity, of there being any possible linguistic connection to statements involving “I am” in the Tanach or Old Testament. ***This is, to be sure, unacceptable and irresponsible.*** There were doubtlessly numerous figures who had arisen within the world of Second Temple Judaism, who fashioned themselves as “the Messiah,” who would not have been stoned for claiming to be the Messiah—especially given how many Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to simply be a political or military figure who would lead a revolt against the Romans, restoring self-rule and autonomy to Israel.

Yeshua the Messiah declared “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58, NIV), and then the religious leaders present picked up stones to kill Him (John 8:59). This is not the response one would expect if Yeshua were simply claiming to be the Messiah or Anointed One. He could have instead simply been dismissed as a madman or crazed lunatic. Claiming to be the Messiah would not have merited a capital penalty, but instead only a censure, fining, flogging, imprisonment, or expulsion from the Jewish community. Yeshua exclaiming “I am” in John 8:58 draws on a deeply significant number of Tanach passages, the foremost of which is Exodus 3:14, **and is a definite claim to be integrated into the Divine Identity.** Working from an apologetics standpoint among Christian people questioning the Divinity of Yeshua, Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski issue the following, excellent conclusions in their book *Putting Jesus in His Place*:

“Most biblical scholars agree...:Jesus’ statement in John 8:58 expresses not only existence prior to Abraham but also existence of a different order than that of Abraham. That is, they understand Jesus to be affirming that his existence antecedent to that of Abraham was the eternal preexistence of deity. John 8:58 contrasts Abraham, who ‘came into being’ (*genesthai* [γενέσθαι], translated ‘was’ in the NRSV), with Jesus, who simply *is* (which Jesus states in the first person, ‘I am,’ *egō eimi* [ἐγὼ εἰμί]). The statement recalls a classic affirmation of the eternal being of God in the Old Testament: ‘Before the mountains came into being [*genēthēnai* [γενηθῆναι], the passive form of *genesthai*] and the earth and the world were formed, even from age to age, you are [*su ei* [σὺ εἶ], the second-person equivalent of *egō eimi*]’ (Ps. 90:2 [89:2 in LXX]). The Greek sentence here reflects the same grammatical structure as John 8:58 and use the same verbs to make the same contrast between that which is created and temporal and the one who is uncreated and eternal.

“The reaction of Jesus’ critics to his statement—attempting to stone him (John 8:59)—confirms that they thought he was making a divine claim. Had Jesus only stated that he had been alive longer than Abraham, they might have regarded such a claim as crazy (as they apparently did with regard to his earlier comments, vv. 48-57), but not as an offense meriting stoning. Of the offenses for which Jews practiced stoning, the only one that seems to fit the context here is blasphemy. Claiming to be older than Abraham might have been judged crazy, but it would not have been judged as blasphemy. Speaking as if one were Abraham’s eternal God, on the other hand, would be quickly deemed blasphemy by Jesus’ critics, who of course did not recognize his divine claims as valid.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Bowman and Komoszewski, pp 96-97.

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Given the importance of the nature of Yeshua for today's Messianic movement, what has been the approach witnessed to John 8:58 in various sectors of both Messianic Judaism and the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement?

The 1998 Complete Jewish Bible (and also 2016 Complete Jewish Study Bible) renders John 8:58 with, "Yes, indeed! Before Avraham came into being, I AM!" In his 1995 *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David H. Stern issues conclusions reflective of a high Christology:

"This and 10:13 are Yeshua's clearest self-proclamations of his divinity...It was very clear to the Judeans exactly what Yeshua's claim was, because they immediately took up stones to put him to death (v. 59) for blasphemy. Claiming to be God and, specifically, pronouncing God's name (as Yeshua had just done) were punishable by death (Leviticus 24:15-16 and Mishna Sanhedrin 7:5, 'The blasphemer is not guilty until he pronounces the Name.')."165

The 2016 *Complete Jewish Study Bible* notes for John 8:57-59 repeats much of this, adding the thought that Yeshua was actually "the angel/messenger of the LORD" witnessed in a number of key Tanach passages (previously addressed):

"Here and in John 5:17-18 and 10:30 are Yeshua's clearest self-proclamations of divinity, pointing back to his presence in the burning bush: 'The angel of ADONAI appeared to him in a fire blasing from the middle of a bush' (Exod. 3:2a). It was clear to the Judeans exactly what Yeshua claimed, because they immediately took up stones to put him to death for blasphemy (Lev. 24:15-16). Throughout the *Tanakh*, the pre-incarnate Messiah may well have appeared as 'the angel of ADONAI.'"166

In his 2012 book *The Real Kosher Jesus: Revealing the Mysteries of the Hidden Messiah*, Michael L. Brown makes appropriate connections between Yeshua speaking "I am," Tanach passages such as Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10, and that He is indeed the LORD or YHWH:

"...Jesus, who was born a little more than two thousand years ago,...[said] to his contemporaries, 'I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!' (John 8:58). And note that he didn't say, 'Before Abraham was born, I was' (which would have been striking enough, since Abraham was born two thousand years before Jesus!). He said, 'Before Abraham was, I am' — associating himself with Yahweh himself, known to Israel as 'I am' {referencing Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10}."167

Among some of the major English versions which are employed in either Messianic Judaism and/or the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, it is appreciably witnessed that *prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi* is rendered faithfully to the source text:

- "I most positively say to you, before Abraham was *born* I AM" (Power New Testament).
- "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am" (ISR Scriptures-2009).
- "I assure you that before Abraham came into being, I am" (The Messianic Writings).
- "Amen, amen I tell you, before Abraham was, I am!" (TLV).168

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<sup>165</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 183.

<sup>166</sup> *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, 1535.

<sup>167</sup> Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus: Revealing the Mysteries of the Hidden Messiah*, 136.

<sup>168</sup> John 8:58 is a definite verse where Messianics need to be rather cautious with how they use the Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels by First Fruits of Zion/Vine of David. Here, Delitzsch's Hebrew New Testament has rendered the Greek *prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi* (πρὶν Ἐβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί), "Before Avraham came into being, I AM!" (CJB/CJSB), as *b'terem heyot Avraham ani hayiti* (בְּטֵרֵם הָיִיתָ אָנֹכִי הָיִיתִי), "before the existence of Avraham, I was" (DHE).

The Qal perfect first person singular verb *hayiti* (הָיִיתִי) is certainly witnessed in the Hebrew Tanach. In Joshua 3:7 we see, "Now the LORD said to Joshua, 'This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just

Reinhartz, in the relatively liberal *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, is notably forced to conclude for John 8:58, “I am, an allusion to God’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3.14), also perhaps a claim to preexistence (1.1-3).”<sup>169</sup>

John 8:58-59 is an important passage that has led many over the centuries to correctly conclude that Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is indeed the LORD God, YHWH (יהוה), made manifest in the flesh. This is not only because of connections that can be made between Him saying “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM” (PME) and Exodus 3:14 or Isaiah 41:1, but also the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders in wanting to stone Him for blasphemy (John 8:59). While Yeshua’s statement of John 8:58, depicting His pre-existence of Abraham and invoking the burning bush theophany, is by no means exhaustive in explaining His nature and origins, **that John 8:58 is clear and decisive cannot be ignored or avoided by any honest reader.** Those who claim that John 8:58 is only a declaration of Yeshua’s Messiahship, have improperly examined the “I am” statement made, and irresponsibly evaluated the response of His opponents in wanting to see Yeshua stoned to death.

## John 9:35-38

### “Yeshua is Worshipped as the Son of Man”

“Yeshua heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ Yeshua said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him.”

In the previous encounter recorded in John 9:1-34, one sees Yeshua heal a blind man on the Sabbath, and as a result, questions about not only what happened, but about the identity of who performed this action, are seriously raised.<sup>170</sup> Various Jewish religious leaders question the man who was healed of his blindness, and he is subsequently ejected from the assembly. Yeshua then encounters him, asking whether or not he believes in Him, with an affirmative response from the one who was healed. Some form of honor is issued from the man, to the Messiah.

Upon seeing the man who was born blind, healed of his affliction, there was some debate as to the nature of this Yeshua who had taken it away. Notwithstanding internal Pharisaical debates over whether or not the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* had been violated or not (John 9:16), the immediate perception of the one who had been healed, was that Yeshua had to have been a prophet (John 9:17). And indeed, with some having said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” (John 9:16), just saying “He is a prophet” (John 9:17) would merit some strong opposition. When it is evaluated whether or not the former blind man “was to be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22), for recognizing Yeshua to perhaps even be the Messiah, the religious leaders insist, “we know that this man is a sinner” (John 9:24). Because of having

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as I have been with Moses [*ki k'asher hayiti im-Moshe*, כִּי כְאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי עִם־מֹשֶׁה], I will be with you.” The DHE rendering of John 8:58 can certainly be used to affirm Yeshua’s pre-existence of Abraham, but not necessarily Yeshua’s identification with the LORD or YHWH.

While the Hebrew *ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה) or “I AM” is seen in Exodus 3:14, and this was what we believe Yeshua orally spoke in the many places where the Greek *egō eimi* appears in the Gospels, the 1991 UBSHNT has rendered John 8:58 with *ani hu* (אֲנִי הוּא). This simple present tense Hebrew expression for “I am” appears in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4 in reference to God, His supremacy, and His Deity. Why Delitzsch did not originally choose *ani hu*, which would have been far better than *hayiti* for his Hebrew New Testament translation, is probably unknowable, but is very problematic.

<sup>169</sup> Reinhartz, in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 177.

<sup>170</sup> Issues about whether or not Yeshua the Messiah actually violated the Sabbath are addressed in the entry for John 9:1-16 in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper*.