

# John 8:58

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

## Analysis

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Jesus' declaration 'Before Abraham was, I am' (πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί) stands as His most explicit claim to deity in the synoptic-like material. The contrast is grammatically striking: Abraham 'was' (γενέσθαι/genesthai, aorist infinitive of 'to become') indicates Abraham came into existence at a point in time, whereas Jesus says 'I am' (ἐγὼ εἰμί/egō eimi, present tense). Jesus doesn't say 'I was before Abraham was' but 'I am,' using the present tense to indicate eternal, timeless existence. This echoes God's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush: 'I AM THAT I AM' (Exodus 3:14, LXX: ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν). By using God's covenant name—the unutterable Tetragrammaton YHWH—Jesus claims absolute deity. The Greek ἐγὼ εἰμί appears throughout John's Gospel as Jesus' self-identification (6:35, 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1), deliberately evoking divine identity. The temporal statement 'before Abraham' asserts pre-existence—Jesus existed before Abraham was born (c. 2000 BC), indeed before creation itself (John 1:1-3). This transcends mere pre-existence; the present tense 'I am' asserts eternal, unchanging existence outside of time. Jesus claims to be the eternally self-existent God, the same yesterday, today, and forever. The immediate response confirms the Jewish audience understood His claim: they took up stones to execute Him for blasphemy (John 8:59). Under Mosaic law, blasphemy—a mere human claiming to be God—warranted death by stoning (Leviticus 24:16). Their reaction proves they understood Jesus' words as an unambiguous claim to deity, not merely prophetic authority or messianic status.

## Historical Context

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This climactic statement occurred in the temple treasury during the Feast of Tabernacles (John 8:20, 59). Jesus had been debating Jewish leaders about His identity, authority, and relationship to Abraham. The Jews claimed Abrahamic descent as proof of divine favor: 'Abraham is our father' (John 8:39). Jesus responded that true children of Abraham would do Abraham's works, but they sought to kill Him. The conversation intensified as Jesus claimed that Abraham 'rejoiced to see my day' (John 8:56)—likely referring to the Moriah sacrifice (Genesis 22) where Abraham saw a prophetic glimpse of Christ's substitutionary atonement. The Jews retorted incredulously: 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' (John 8:57). They understood Jesus to claim personal acquaintance with the patriarch who lived 2,000 years earlier—absurd unless He claimed supernatural existence. Jesus' response exceeded even this claim: not merely that He saw Abraham, but that He existed before Abraham and continues to exist in timeless present. The divine name 'I AM' was so sacred in Judaism that it was never pronounced, being replaced with Adonai (Lord) in reading Scripture. For Jesus to appropriate this name was either the ultimate blasphemy or the ultimate revelation. Early church councils defending Christ's deity against Arianism relied heavily on this verse. Arius taught that Christ was created ('there was when he was not'), directly contradicting Jesus' 'before Abraham was, I am.' The Nicene Creed's language 'eternally begotten of the Father' draws on this passage's assertion of Christ's eternal existence.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

## Study Questions

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1. What is the significance of Jesus using the present tense 'I am' rather than past tense 'I was' when speaking of existence before Abraham?

2. How does Jesus' appropriation of God's covenant name 'I AM' from Exodus 3:14 establish His divine identity?
3. Why did the Jewish leaders immediately attempt to stone Jesus after this statement, and what does their reaction reveal about how they understood His claim?
4. How does Christ's pre-existence and eternal nature ('before Abraham was, I am') affect your understanding of His authority and worthiness of worship?

## Interlinear Text

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εἶπεν	αὐτοῖς	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	ἀμὲν	ἀμὲν	λέγω	ὕμῖν	πρὶν
said	unto them	G3588	Jesus	Verily	Verily	I say	unto you	Before
G2036	G846		G2424	G281	G281	G3004	G5213	G4250
Ἀβραὰμ	γενέσθαι	ἐγὼ	εἰμί					
Abraham	was	I	am					
G11	G1096	G1473	G1510					

## Additional Cross-References

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**Exodus 3:14** (Parallel theme): And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

**Colossians 1:17** (Parallel theme): And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

**John 17:5** (Parallel theme): And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

**Isaiah 44:6** (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

**Revelation 1:8** (Parallel theme): I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

**Hebrews 13:8** (References Jesus): Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

**John 17:24** (Parallel theme): Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

**Revelation 2:8** (Parallel theme): And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

**Isaiah 48:12** (Parallel theme): Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.

**Micah 5:2** (Parallel theme): But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.