

**John 8:58:  
The BeDuhn—Bowman Debate**

**Jason BeDuhn**

v.

**Robert M. Bowman, Jr.**

**(Part One: 4 August—19 October 2004)**

**As of March 11, 2005**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Beginning with the fifth post, the words “John 8:58,” which appear in most of the titles, are dropped from the titles as shown here. Depending on one’s word processor, it is possible that the page numbers given here will appear to be one page off from your own copy. Post numbers refer to the archives on the web site, found here:

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/evangelicals\\_and\\_jws/messages](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/evangelicals_and_jws/messages)

Because Jason BeDuhn’s seventh post (#15524) was entitled “Jason #6,” the previous post (#15522) is assigned the number 6A and the seventh post 6B. This accounts for the discrepancies noted in later posts as to the enumeration of Jason’s posts #8 and #9.

If you find any discrepancies between the texts as reproduced here (other than formatting) and as in the archives, please notify me so that I may correct the text here. Due to its length, I have had to divide the work into two documents.

—Rob Bowman

Page	Author/No.	Date	Post	Title
5	Jason #1	8/4	15318	John 8:58
11	Rob #1	8/4	15326	John 8:58 – general considerations
18	Jason #2	8/5	15327	John 8:58 – general considerations
27	Rob #2	8/5	15328	John 8:58 – general considerations (cont.)
29	Rob #3	8/5	15329	Rob #3: Word order
34	Jason #3	8/6	15331	Jason#3: general considerations (cont.)
36	Rob #4	8/6	15333	Rob #4: general considerations (cont.)
37	Jason #4	8/9	15367	Jason #4
47	Jason #5	8/10	15378	Jason #5: burdens of proof
49	Rob #5	8/18	15521	Rob #5: Word order (cont.)
53	Jason #6A	8/19	15522	Rob #5: Word order (cont.)
56	Jason #6B	8/20	15524	Jason#6 (Psalm 89/90:2)
59	Rob #6	8/30	15554	Rob #6: The PPA and Adverbial Phrases
70	Rob #7	8/30	15555	Rob #7: The PPA and Temporal Clauses with PRIN or PRO
77	Jason #7	9/2	15562	Rob #6: The PPA and Adverbial Phrases
82	Rob #8	9/5	15568	Rob #8: The PPA and Adverbial Phrases (cont.)
97	Jason #8	9/8	15584	Rob #7: The PPA and Temporal Clauses with PRIN or PRO
103	Jason #9	9/8	15585	Rob #8: The PPA and Adverbial Phrases (cont.)
115	Rob #9	9/8	15586	Rob #9: Shall we continue?
118	Jason #10	9/14	15636	Jason #10: Shall we continue?
124	Rob #10	9/26	15705	Rob #10: Looking forward to more
125	Rob #11	10/4	15716	Rob #11: Narrow and Broad Definitions of the

				PPA
136	Jason #11	10/8	15736	Rob #11: Narrow and Broad Definitions of the PPA
140	Rob #12	10/11	15754	Rob #12: Broad and Narrow Definitions of the PPA (cont.)
143	Jason #12	10/13	15758	Jason #12
146	Rob #13	10/14	15761	Rob #13: Where we go from here
154	Jason #13	10/14	15763	Rob #13: Where we go from here
162	Jason #14	10/16	15768	Jason #14
165	Rob #14	10/16	15772	Rob #14: Where we go from here (cont.)
172	Rob #16	10/17	15775	Rob #16 (read before #15): John 8:58 and the broad-band presents
176	Rob #15	10/17	15773	Rob #15: The PRIN (“before”) + aorist infinitive clause
191	Rob #17	10/17	15779	Rob #17: The relation of the two clauses in John 8:58
203	Rob #18	10/17	15780	Rob #18: Exegeting and translating John 8:58
205	Rob #19	10/18	15781	If Jason agrees, the discussion is now open to the forum
206	Jason #15	10/18	15784	Jason #15
209	Rob #20	10/18	15790	Rob #20: Where we go from here (again)
213	Jason #16	10/19	15797	Re: Rob #20: Where we go from here (again)
215	Rob #21	10/19	15799	Rob #21: Where we go from here (again)
216	Jason #17	10/22	15823	Jason #17
228	Jason #18	10/23	15826	Jason #18
236	Jason #19	10/24	15830	Jason #19
252	Jason #20	10/25	15832	Jason #20
265	Jason #21	10/26	15835	Jason #21
270	Jason #22	10/29	15857	Jason #22
271	Rob #22	11/14	15992	Rob #22: Changing your position on what is “fractured syntax”
274	Jason #23	1/11	16597	Jason #22 [sic]
276	Rob #23	1/12	16600	Rob #23: Word order revisited
284	Rob #24	1/12	16601	Rob #24: Refocusing the revisitation of the PPA
290	Rob #25	1/13	16602	Rob #25: Broad-band presents
296	Jason #24	1/17	16616	Jason #24
300	Rob #26	1/17	16620	Rob #26: Gnomie or static presents
309	Jason #25	1/18	16623	Jason #25: Revisiting the PPA
312	Jason #26	1/19	16629	Jason #26
315	Jason #27	1/22	16651	Jason #27
321	Jason #28	1/22	16652	Jason #28: Question of Clarification
322	Rob #27	2/12	17006	Rob #27: Antecedent time vs. duration to the present, and the PPA
331	Rob #28	2/13	17053	Rob #28: Three disputed LXX examples of the PPA

346	Rob #29	2/14	17055	Rob #29: Concluding remarks on the infinitive of antecedent time
348	Jason #29	2/23	17163	Jason #29
355	Jason #30	2/23	17165	Jason #30
361	Rob #30	2/28	17208	Rob #30: The Relation of the two clauses, and EIMI as absolute, in John 8:58
375	Rob #31	3/10	17255	Rob #31: Exegeting and translating John 8:58
382	Rob #32	3/11	17257	Rob #32: Exodus 4:10 and 21:36 and the PPA
384	Rob #33	3/11	17258	Rob #33: Once again, word order
386	Rob #34	3/11	17259	Rob #34: PPA and other broad-band presents
395	Rob #35	3/11	17260	Rob #35: Antecedent time, LXX parallels, and the meaning of EIMI in John 8:58

### Topical Flow Chart of the Debate

General	Word Order	Define PPA	PRIN Clause	Absolute?	Context
Jason #1 (opening statement)					
Rob #1	Rob #3	Rob #6	Rob #7	Rob #17	Rob #18
Jason #2	Jason #4	Jason #7	Jason #8		
Rob #2	Rob #5	Rob #8			
Jason #3	Jason #6A-6B	Jason #9			
Rob #4		Rob #11	Rob #15		
Jason #5		Jason #11			
Rob #9		Rob #12			
Jason #10		Jason #12			
Rob #10		Rob #16			
Rob #13					
Jason #13,14	Jason #17(b)	Jason #17(c)	Jason #19	Jason #20	Jason #21
Rob #14	Rob #22	Rob #24	Rob #27-29	Rob #30	Rob #31
	Jason #23	Jason #18	Jason #22		
Rob #19	Rob #23	Rob #25-26	Rob #32		
Jason #15	Jason #24	Jason #25-28	Jason #29-30		
Rob #20	Rob #33	Rob #34	Rob #35		
Jason #16					
Rob #21					
Jason #17(a)					

**JASON #1 – 8/4 – #15318:  
JOHN 8:58**

Dear Readers,

This is my first message for a dialogue with Rob Bowman on John 8:58.

In my book, *Truth in Translation*, I have argued that most English Bibles have incomplete translations of John 8:58. They read in this verse like interlinears, failing to render the sense of the passage into normal English grammar and syntax. First, they usually give a rote rendering of the grammatical tense of the main verb, ignoring its modification by an adverbial clause. Second, they place the main clause after the adverbial clause, rather than before it, violating standard English syntax. Both errors are found in the KJV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, NAB, TEV (Good News), and Amplified Bible. The second error only is found in the New World translation. Of the versions surveyed in my book, only the Living Bible provides what can be considered a completed translation in normal English syntax. Since the same sort of defective translation is not found in these Bibles in other passages of similar construction in the Greek, there is reason to suppose that this verse has been impacted by bias in the translators. That bias is most likely to be the mistaken notion found in popular theological discussion that Jesus employs “I am” as some sort of theological declaration, echoing the epiphany of God in Exodus 3:14 (the NAB, TEV, and AB tip their hand to this idea by capitalizing ‘I Am’). This theological notion is ill-informed, and distorts the obvious, contextual use of language found in the verse. Although it is challenging to get the full nuance of the original Greek into an English sentence, the closest rendering would be something like “I have been (since) before Abraham came to be.” You will find the full argument in my book.

My position is on how best to translate, and in this way convey the meaning of, John 8:58. I have not pursued the Christological or theological implications of what Jesus says here in my published work. I am a historian, not a theologian. I can talk about the range of possible meaning in the original Greek sentence, as well as the history of how the passage has been read and understood by later generations. But if the Greek itself does not limit the meaning to the point of agreeing with only one of the historical interpretations at the expense of the others, I object to claims that it does.

It was suggested to Rob and I that we read each other’s published work on this verse and engage in a dialogue on the subject. Now that I have briefly stated my position, I wish to comment on Rob’s approach to the same passage, as found in his book *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*.

Different purposes

Rob and I have written on John 8:58 for different purposes. I have written to explore accuracy and bias in TRANSLATION. Rob states that he is concerned with INTERPRETATION (12, 17). These are distinct, if connected, subjects. But let's define our terms. To me, translation precedes interpretation in the sense I take Rob to mean. He refers to the JW and Trinitarian interpretations of this verse, and elaborates that they concern the difference between a limited or an eternal pre-existence of Christ. This sort of doctrinal interpretation depends on translation in a way that translation does not depend on doctrinal interpretation. You can (and I would argue you should) translate the Greek of this or any other verse of the NT without reliance on a preconceived doctrine of either limited or eternal preexistence of Christ. But you cannot come to either of those doctrinal positions in a Bible-based belief system without relying on the meaning of individually translated passages. Even if you are just reading the original Greek and arguing about its meaning, the fact that you think and write your arguments in English mean that a translation is involved. You cannot make sound doctrine on the basis of bad translation. The inaccuracy of the translation would invalidate any doctrine built upon it. That is why I say that translation precedes interpretation. One can also use the word "interpretation" simply to refer to getting at the meaning of a passage, within its linguistic, literary, and cultural context. In this sense, interpretation is an intrinsic part of translation. Only in this sense would I agree with Rob when he says "translation should reflect interpretation and be guided by it" (90). But as I read through Rob's argument I find it has to do with interpretation in the first sense, that is, how this passage is to be fit into larger Christological and theological doctrines. In that meaning of interpretation, I cannot agree with Rob about interpretation dictating translation. I do not think it is the Evangelical position that our human-elaborated theological systems have a right to dictate to the Bible what it can or cannot say. That would be erecting an institutional or personal authority over the Bible that the Protestant movement was precisely aimed at rejecting.

#### Common ground

Rob and I agree that the connection of John 8:58 to Exodus 3:14 is a dead end. Rob notes correctly that the early church fathers did not see this connection, for the simple reason that their Bibles did not have the close match of phrasing found in most modern English Bibles. I have said myself on numerous occasions what Rob says in his book: "Jesus certainly does not say, in so many words, 'I am the 'I AM,'" nor does he quote Exodus 3:14 in its entirety and apply it to himself. The words *egō eimi* in John 8:58 do not function as a title of Christ" (124). Rob holds out the possibility that Jesus is somehow alluding to Exodus, but there really is nothing to support this. He cites the fact, which JWs have pointed out in arguing this point, that in the Greek Old Testament in Exodus 3:14 the words *egō eimi* are not a name or title of God, but the ordinary first person pronoun and be-verb leading up to the identification God makes of himself there: *ho on*, "the being," or "the existent one." Rob's criticism that this observation "is not quite telling the whole truth, however" because the words *egō eimi* appear in the verse (124-125) totally misses the point, and comes across as a bit silly. If John meant his readers to recognize in Jesus' words a citation of Exodus 3:14, he left out the crucial words that distinguish this passage from any other sentence involving a first person pronoun and be-verb. But overall Rob and I agree that taking Jesus' words

as a direct quote of Exodus is misguided, and that any assertion of identity Jesus is making in John 8:58 works more “indirectly” (129) than explicitly.

#### Translation issues

Rob acknowledges that “several twentieth-century biblical translators and scholars have rendered *eimi* with some form of the English past tense,” while noting that they held to an interpretation of the verse that involved eternal preexistence (90). I have no problem with that. The Greek of John 8:58 does not preclude fitting what Jesus says in this one sentence into a larger Christology that includes eternal preexistence. The verse does not provide this idea in itself; you would have to derive it from some more explicit statement elsewhere. The fact is that *eimi* should be rendered with some form of the English past tense, because of its modification by the adverbial clause “before Abraham came to be.” This holds true whether one goes on to interpret the passage within an eternal or limited preexistence understanding of Christ. In fact, Greek present tense verbs are best translated in their context with English past tense forms quite regularly in the NT, and this includes the Greek *be-verb*. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the Greek and English present tense in their respective standard usage.

Rob provides a good discussion of the argument that the narrow grammatical tense of the isolated verb *eimi* must be qualified by its larger grammatical context, and be recognized as a Greek idiom sometimes called the “present of past action still in progress” (PPA) (103-104). Rob defines this well as “an idiomatic use of the present tense to speak of a state of action which was occurring in the past and has continued to occur up to the time of the speaker” (104). I mention in my book that Smyth’s Greek Grammar calls this the “progressive perfect.” I cite two examples of this usage from John 14:9 and 15:27, where most translations properly translate *eimi* in its context as “have been,” just as I propose for 8:58. Rob lists several more examples of PPAs from other NT passages. He takes two of these that are “usually . . . rendered in English as present tenses” as evidence that PPAs can be translated as presents. He asserts that 1 John 2:9 and 2 Peter 3:4 are not just usually but “properly” translated using the present tense (105-106). I must disagree. 1 John 2:9 should be translated “The one who says he is in the light yet hates his brother has been (*estin*) in the darkness so far.” This is because the apparent present form is modified by the adverbial clause *he&#333;s arti* (“until now” or “so far”). The commonly found translations that rotely give the present “is” here are awkward in English. Likewise, the normal English way to render 2 Peter 3:4 would be “For since the ancestors fell asleep, everything has remained as it was from the beginning of creation,” rather than “everything remains as it was.” In both cases, the present tense rendering is inferior English in the larger context of the sentence. But Rob does not rest much on this point, because he wants to argue that John 8:58 is not really a PPA at all (105, 110-111).

Looking at the list of generally recognized PPAs in the NT, he suggests that “all of these expressions refer to a period of time beginning at some point (whether specified or not) in the past and continuing up to the time of the speaker,” but this is not the case with John 8:58 (109-110). Now what he asserts here is true of many of the verses on the list, particularly those that employ *apo* in the modifying phrase or clause. But it is not true of several of the verses he is looking at, including Luke 2:48, Luke 15:29, John 5:6, John

14:9, 2 Corinthians 12:19, and 1 John 2:9. Grammatically speaking, none of these passages contain an expression that alludes to a beginning point in time. They are all durative expressions that leave the beginning of the action out of consideration. Logically, the reader might introduce the notion that the durative action referred to must have had a beginning in time that remains unspecified in the passage itself. But one could do the same in John 8:58. It may be so, but it goes beyond what the words themselves provide in either case. The interpretive argument has nothing to do with determining whether or not John 8:58 belongs to the grammatical category of the PPA.

Rob makes much of the difference that in John 8:58 the action of the main verb occurs “before” rather than “from” or “until.” But this simply comes from the fact that the NT happens to be a limited body of literature in which the preposition “before” (*prin*) turns up only a few times. Here Rob makes the mistake of saying that “before” sets the end of the action of the main verb: “the expression does not refer to a period of time beginning at Abraham’s birth, but rather ending then. In other words, *prin* Abraam *genesthai* does not point forward from Abraham’s birth up to the time of Jesus’ speaking, but instead points backward from Abraham’s birth to the more distant past” (110). What Rob says here would be true if the main verb of the sentence was in a past tense, which is precisely why John did not employ a past tense verb here. To do so would imply that Jesus had a past life at some period before Abraham was born, and by implication would be some sort of reincarnated being. The use of the PPA precisely avoids this misunderstanding by providing a continuing sense the main verb: Jesus has remained in existence from before Abraham up to the time he is speaking. So when Rob argues elsewhere (115) that John could have used an imperfect here, that would have meant something quite different than what a PPA means and John apparently wanted to say. Rob continues: “a clause beginning with *prin* cannot specify ‘duration’ up to the present, since it refers to a period prior to the past event specified in the clause” (110). This needs to be qualified. It is true enough about the meaning internal to the *prin* clause itself, ignoring the information carried by the main clause. But what one finds in the main clause can change it. For example, when the main verb is negated, *prin* actually has the reverse meaning, of some action that did or must precede the main verb, and so marking the beginning rather than the end of the main verb’s action (“Do not go out to play BEFORE you have washed the dishes”). Even in affirmative sentences, it is not *prin* that “refers to a period prior to the past event specified in the clause” as Rob asserts; it is the main verb of the sentence that refers to that. So Rob’s conclusion that the *prin* clause in 8:58 “does not fit the requirements of a clause indicating the duration of a PPA verb” (110) has no bearing whatsoever on whether or not the main verb *eimi* is a PPA verb. A PPA verb does not even need such a modifying clause, for example in Luke 2:48 listed by Rob, or John 2:9 not included in his list (and there are many others).

Rob goes on to maintain that *eimi* in John 8:58 is a “predicate absolute” (111). He bases himself on A. T. Robertson, whose remark that *eimi* in the verse as “really absolute,” that is, without a complement in the sentence, is one of the rare foolish assertions Robertson makes. If this were the case, then what does one do with the *prin* clause? This is the problem with most translations of this passage. If “I am” stands by itself as some absolute statement by Jesus, then “before Abraham came to be” is not a part of the same



sentence. But it is not a complete sentence in itself, so it must be part of the “I am” sentence and, of course, it forms part of the predicate of that sentence, as the adverbial clause modifying the “am.” Thus it is simply false to call *eimi* in any sense a predicate absolute. I really can’t imagine anything more obvious on the page of the text in front of us than that.

Rob raises the additional point that *eimi* must be translated as “I am” to avoid obscuring other passages where Jesus employs the same phrase and it is properly translated as “I am” (111-112). I agree that one should try to bring out in a translation significant connections of expression visible in the Greek. The question here, then, is whether “I am” is such a significant expression. Most of the time when Jesus speaks of himself with the present tense *be*-verb, there is a predicate noun with which he wishes to identify himself (“I am the light,” “I am the good shepherd,” etc.). This is just normal use of the first person pronoun and *be*-verb to make an identification, and the significance is to be found entirely in the predicate noun that gives the identification. Rob is interested not in these passages, but where Jesus says “I am” absolutely, without any other explicit content to the predicate. There are several examples of this in John, of which John 8:58 is not one, however. As I have pointed out, John 8:58 is not a case of “I am” used absolutely, for it quite clearly has an adverbial clause in the predicate. So there seems little point in comparing it to sentences where the main verb has no explicit predicate complement. But even if we go to the trouble of looking at these false parallels, we can see that in every case there is a grammatically implied predicate pronoun. In passages such as John 8:24, and 28 (cited by Rob, who mistakenly includes 8:12 in his list), Jesus is responding to people looking for someone by saying “I am (he).” Notice the response of people to his first statement, “Who are you?” This shows that they understand him to be identifying himself with someone, just who is not immediately clear to them. They would not ask this question if they understood his statement to be “I exist.” In answering, Jesus clearly says that he is the Son of Man, for “when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he,” not “then you will know that I exist.” In the other superficially absolute uses of “I am” Rob cites from Sanders and Mastin, we see the same usage. In each and every case there is an implied predicate pronoun “I am he” or “It is I.” This is just standard Greek. And as I point out in my book, other people in the Bible make use of it, such as the blind man in John 9. If it is a divine proclamation or an assertion of eternal preexistence for Jesus, then it would have to be for the blind man as well. So one must be careful about putting too much significance into what turns out to be very ordinary expressions.

Rob and I agree that “By itself, of course, the word *eimi* does not connote eternal preexistence” (114), and I further agree with him that there is a contrast implied between the *eimi* used of Jesus and the *genesthai* used of Abraham. Jesus’ preexistence and continued existence trump Abraham on both sides. This is quite clear from the literary context of the gospel. The authority of the ancestors is largely dismissed on the grounds of their own limitation and mortality compared to Jesus’ claim to intimate connection to the divine. But I cannot agree that this contrast is so specific as to definitively connote eternity. It could have that implication, but it does not necessarily do so. While it is true, as Rob says, that Jesus could have used the same verb of himself that he uses of

Abraham to say simply that he came into existence at some time prior to Abraham, all one can say is that this was not something Jesus was interested in discussing at this point. He is not talking at all about his origins in John 8:58, but only about his superiority to Abraham in the dual terms of priority and survival. That suits his immediate purpose. It may frustrate us that he wasn't more explicit about things we are interested in. But we can't pretend he addressed these things in John 8:58 when he did not.

Finally, let me provide two comparative examples from Greek literature outside of the Bible to show how the present tense Greek be-verb often has a past meaning when complemented by an adverbial *prin* clause, just as it is in John 8:58:

Testament of Job 2.1: “For I was (eg&#333; eimi) Jobab before (*prin*) the Lord named me Job.”

Menander, *Dyscolus* 616: “For I have been (eimi) a friend to you long before (*prin*) I knew you.”

There are of course dozens of examples of the formally present tense be-verb used as a PPA with or without a *prin* clause. But let me leave my remarks here and open the dialogue with Rob. My position on translation is that *eimi* should be translated with an expression conveying present continuance of past existence such as “have been.” My position on interpretation is that the verse does not provide enough specificity for us to claim that the passage asserts either a limited or eternal preexistence of Christ. It precludes neither interpretation, and the context of the larger gospel is not sufficiently explicit on this question to settle it. I look forward to your comments, Rob.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #1 – 8/4 – #15326:**

**JOHN 8:58 – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Jason,

Thank you for agreeing to this discussion and for your thoughtful response to my treatment of John 8:58 in *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*. I have also read your chapter on John 8:58 in your book *Truth in Translation*.

In this opening post, I will review how English translations handle John 8:58 and make some preliminary, general observations about translation and interpretation. In subsequent posts, I will respond piecemeal to the specific arguments that you have presented in both your chapter and your post.

I. REVIEW OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF JOHN 8:58

In John 8:58, the apostle John quotes Jesus as saying the following:

PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI EGW EIMI

Translators have usually rendered the above statement into English something like this:

“Before Abraham came into existence, I am.”

Such translations include the KJV and NKJV, the Douay-Rheims, the ASV and NASB, the RSV and NRSV, the NAB (New American Bible—Catholic), the NEB and REB, the NIV, the ESV (English Standard Version), the TEV, the WEB (World English Bible), the NET Bible, and versions by independent translators such as Darby, Phillips, Weymouth, Young, and many others. The vast majority of translations render John 8:58 essentially as shown above.

This rendering has precedent running throughout church history in many languages. The Latin Vulgate translates the same words, “antequam Abraham fieret ego sum.” Martin Luther’s German Bible reads, “Ehe denn Abraham ward, bin ich.”

We should note one variation among the above English versions: a few render EGW EIMI as “I AM” (notably the NAB and NKJV) or “I Am” (TEV). As you have pointed out, the capitalization expresses the translators’ judgment that Jesus’ words here echo some of the words of God in Exodus 3:14.

Two alternative translations occur in some English versions, both of which use a form of the past tense in translating EIMI into English. Some use the simple past tense:

“Before Abraham came into existence, I was.”

The Scholars Version (produced by the Jesus Seminar) takes this approach. Other versions adopting this or essentially the same rendering include the International English Version, the Simple English Bible (SEB), and a number of other versions by independent translators, including the Living Bible (LB), the Cotton Patch Version (CPV), and versions by Beck, Goodspeed, Schonfield, Williams, and others. In your chapter on John 8:58, you argued that the LB rendering (“I was in existence before Abraham was ever born!”) is the best.[1]

One version with wide circulation uses a progressive perfect (grammarians give the form various names):

“Before Abraham came into existence, I have been.”

The New World Translation (NWT) is the only influential English version adopting this rendering. The NASB had “I have been” as an alternate translation in the margin until 1973. A few scholars have defended this rendering over the years, including K. L. McKay,[2] whom you cited in your chapter.

Finally, a few versions adopt something of a compromise, using both present and past forms of the verb “to be” to render EIMI:

Contemporary English Version (CEV): “even before Abraham was, I was, and I am.”  
New Living Version (NLV): “before Abraham was born, I was and am and always will be!”

The CEV combines the traditional rendering with the most common alternative rendering. The NLT goes a step further, expressing a state of everlasting existence by adding “and always will be.”

The preceding review of the different ways translators have rendered EIMI in John 8:58 is not exhaustive, but it is representative.

## II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Before discussing the details of the exegesis of the verse (in subsequent posts), I will make some general observations regarding translation and interpretation and apply them to this case.

### A. The Burden of Proof

In matters of the proper translation and interpretation of a sacred text, I put the burden of proof on those who advocate a minority or outside view in the history of the religion that

regards that text as sacred. We may illustrate the principle using a text other than the Bible. In seeking to understand the Qur'an, for the most part we should take the mainstream of Islamic interpretation as our guide. If someone claims that Muslims have historically mistranslated or misunderstood a particular passage in the Qur'an, the burden of proof rests on him. If he can make the case, well and good; but the translator or interpreter who wants to break with the dominant view within the confessing community must fully acknowledge and bear that the burden of proof.

Moreover, the burden of proof increases if the scholar is not working as a member of that confessing community and yet advocates a view of the text at variance with the dominant understanding of that community. After all, the scholars within the religious community of faith that views the text as sacred understand that text "from the inside." They tend to share the worldview of the sacred text more than do those outside the community. They generally have a richer and more thoroughly grounded understanding of the text than those who do not regard it as the primary text of their way of life. Thus, we may generally expect Muslims to understand the Qur'an more accurately and fully than non-Muslims; and we may likewise expect Mormons to understand the Mormon scriptures more accurately than non-Mormons. Again, a scholar from outside the confessing community might be able to make a case for a minority or outside view of the text's meaning, and if so, well and good. The burden of proof, though, will be on that alternative position.

Based on this principle, I put the burden of proof on those who would depart from the traditional translation of John 8:58. The overwhelmingly dominant view of the text throughout church history understands EIMI as a present tense set in contrast to the aorist GENESQAI. The vast majority of English translators for four centuries have rendered EIMI in John 8:58 with the word "am." In doing so, they are in agreement with the most influential and accepted versions in other languages as well. Those who advocate a different view bear the burden of proof.

Moreover, the burden of proof increases dramatically the more dogmatic the stance taken in favor of the alternate rendering and against the traditional one. It is one thing to suggest an alternate rendering; it is quite another to assert that the traditional rendering is flat wrong, religiously biased, or poor scholarship. It is possible such claims are true, but those making them bear an enormous burden of proof.

I point this out, of course, because you have made such claims. For example, in your chapter on John 8:58, you write: "It is natural to assume that the majority are correct and the odd ones at fault. It is only when translations are checked against the original Greek, as they should be, that a fair assessment can be made, and the initial assumption can be seen to be wrong."<sup>[3]</sup> One would think from such a statement that nearly all of the English translators of the Bible for the past four centuries have failed to check the original Greek, or that they were such poor or biased translators that they checked the Greek and still managed to get it wrong. I believe such a claim bears a heavy burden of proof indeed.

B. Types of Translations

The controversy over the translation of John 8:58 often is conducted as if there were only one possibly correct or legitimate way of translating any given text into a particular “receptor” language. This presupposition is not above challenge. Different versions of the Bible reflect different translation goals; it is possible that more than one rendering of a particular verse like John 8:58 might be sound given the goals of the version in which it appears.

Translations range across a kind of spectrum from the interlinear to the paraphrase, from the rigidly word-for-word approach to the free thought-for-thought approach. I see no reason to insist that only one translation methodology is valid. An interlinear has its place; a translation that is predominantly word-for-word (like the NASB) has its place; a translation that is largely thought-for-thought (like the NLT) has its place; and a translation that fits somewhere between these two approaches (like the NIV) also has its place.

Some versions put a premium on readability, even to the point of limiting the translation to a set number of vocabulary words or setting the grade level quite low. Those who produce such versions may be targeting the young, those with little education or limited reading ability, or readers whose native language is not English. A version with these goals may sacrifice nuances, allusions, and subtleties that other versions do not. These other versions may sacrifice some measure of ease of readability in the interest of conveying more of the fine details of the meaning that the original text expresses. Again, versions range across a spectrum; readability concerns dominate at one end of the spectrum while precision concerns dominate at the other end.

Literal.....	Mediating.....	Paraphrase
Precision.....		Readability
NASB.....	NAB.....	NIV.....
	NLT.....	SEB...LB
	NRSV.....	REB.....
		CEB.....
		CPV

(I hope the above chart comes through all right!)

If I am right to take this “pluralistic” approach to translation methodology, then it is entirely possible to conclude that one rendering of John 8:58 is appropriate in some versions while another rendering is appropriate in other versions. It turns out that there is some empirical evidence to support the contention that differences in translation methodology are responsible, at least to a considerable extent, for the different ways in which English versions render John 8:58. The Simple English Bible epitomizes the extreme end of the spectrum in which ease of readability takes precedence. In their own more idiosyncratic ways, the same is true with respect to the Living Bible and the Cotton Patch Version. Schonfield’s translation and the Scholars Version both have the dual purpose of readability and “freshness”—giving them a heavy preference for unusual or alternative renderings of familiar biblical expressions and statements. (Both Schonfield

and the Jesus Seminar also have theological reasons to favor such revisionist renderings.) The CEV and NLV, which clearly belong on the paraphrase end of the spectrum, offer more wordy renderings in an attempt to capture more of the import of Jesus' statement. On the other hand, versions that range toward the other extreme end of the spectrum in which precision takes precedence almost uniformly render EGW EIMI as "I am."

The NWT presents an unusual case. The front matter of the various editions of the NWT explains the goals and principles that readers are to understand guide the translation choices of the NWT. The NWT purports to adhere to an essentially word-for-word translation methodology. The translators state that the NWT is "as literal as possible" giving "an almost word-for-word statement of the original." They expressly deny producing a paraphrase and warn readers that they have rendered many Hebrew and Greek idioms literally. They also state that when possible they have rendered each "major word" in the Bible with the same English word in all of its occurrences.[4] Given the stated translation methodology of the NWT, one might expect the NWT to translate John 8:58 in the same way that essentially all other versions do that lean toward a similar word-for-word methodology. Yet, it does not. Why is this? The answer lies in another aspect of the NWT approach to translation. The NWT front matter decries the religious bias, traditionalism, and pagan influence in all preceding versions and promises "a fresh translation" in which "the pure truth of God's word may shine forth." [5] Given such a stance, one expects the NWT to favor revisionist renderings, just as Schonfield's translation and the Scholars Version do. Such is in fact often the case. The result is that the NWT is in some places woodenly literal and in other places decidedly not.

Arguably, the rendering "I have been" in John 8:58 is an example of a verse in which the translators' antipathy toward the traditional Christian understanding of the text took precedence over their stated methodology of a literal, word-for-word rendering that reflects the idiom of the original.

Although a plurality of translation methodologies may be valid, we must still assess translations to determine if they have successfully carried out their stated goals according to a consistent methodology. Thus, the position I am espousing is a kind of "principled pluralism" in which different kinds of translations are valid and worthwhile, yet each translation is subject to evaluation and critique.

### C. Translation and Interpretation

In your post, you discussed two different meanings of the word "interpretation." In one sense, interpretation has to do with "getting at the meaning of a passage, within its linguistic, literary, and cultural context." In this sense, you say that you would agree with me when I said in my book that "translation should reflect interpretation and be guided by it." [6] In another sense, though, you say that interpretation means the task of fitting biblical passages "into larger Christological and theological doctrines." In this sense, you say that translation must precede interpretation. You then comment, "In that meaning of interpretation, I cannot agree with Rob about interpretation dictating translation."

Regrettably, you have misconstrued what I had written. First, when I said that “translation should reflect interpretation and be guided by it,” I was referring to interpretation in your first sense—what is often called exegesis. Where I think you may have misunderstood me here is that I include the biblical writers’ own “theological” context as part of what interpreters must consider in interpreting their meanings. You spoke of “linguistic, literary, and cultural context”; well, one must also include the biblical writers’ intellectual context, including their theological context. I certainly did not say, suggest, or mean that postbiblical theological systems should govern translation. Second, I spoke of interpretation \*guiding\* translation, not “dictating” it, as you put it. My point was that the task of translation cannot be conducted adequately without paying attention to the larger questions of what the biblical authors \*meant\* by what they wrote. If we conclude that John meant one thing, it would be irresponsible to translate his text in such a way as to say something else. The translator is not merely a parsing machine; his task is to grasp the meaning of the text and then convey that meaning in his own language.

Still, translators can use different methods to fulfill that task, as I have already explained. Let me return to my spectrum of translation methodologies and translations, from the literal, word-for-word, precision-oriented extreme to the paraphrase, thought-for-thought, readability-oriented extreme. Translations on the “literal” end of the spectrum have as their purpose to minimize the role of the translators’ own understanding in the final product. They cannot eliminate all “interpretation” from their work, but they seek to minimize the extent to which their own interpretation comes across in the text. Where the text is arguably ambiguous, they seek to leave it so. At the other, “readability” end of the spectrum, translators seek to make the meaning of the text as clear and easy to grasp as possible, and so clear up possible ambiguities by rendering the text in light of their interpretive judgments. In this respect, “interpretation” justifiably plays a larger role in versions designed to be easy to read than in the more conventional “literal” translations.

That a discussion of translation is incomplete without also discussing the “theological” significance of the text is evident from your own chapter on John 8:58. At one point you state, “It is Jesus’ claim to be superior to Abraham, and to have a superhuman longevity, not a claim to a divine self-designation, that enrages his audience.”[7] You may be right, but in any case you are doing here what all translators must do: You are considering the implications of the statement in its broader context as an integral part of the task of deciding on the best translation. That’s all I was advocating.

In subsequent posts, I will address the specific issues pertaining to the translation of John 8:58.

## NOTES

[1] Jason BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* (University Press of America, 2003), 111.



[2] Kenneth L. McKay, “‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel,” *Expository Times* 107 (1996): 302-303.

[3] BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation*, 111-12.

[3] *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, 2d ed. (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1951), 9-10 (hereafter NWTCGS); *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures: With References* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1984), 7 (hereafter NWT [1984]); *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), 9-10 (hereafter KIT).

[4] NWTCGS, 5-7; KIT, 7-8.

[5] Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 90.

[6] BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation*, 111.

**JASON #2 – 8/5 – #15327:  
JOHN 8:58 – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Rob,

Thank you for your thoughtful reply. You have wisely chosen the most foundational issues to address first. This allows our readers to see the differences in our respective approaches, which will in turn make what we say down the road more understandable.

You begin with

> I. REVIEW OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF JOHN 8:58

This is related to your subsequent principles about burdens of proof. Leaving the latter aside for the moment, I want to explain why a numeration of how "translators have usually rendered" a biblical passage is not a valid argument. It falsely takes the form of a scientific principle of duplicated results. I say "falsely" because the history of English translation of the Bible is not a scientifically controlled experiment. As you well know, translators for the last four hundred years are influenced by two forces: (1) the dominant theological tradition, and (2) the dominant literary (in this case, KJV) tradition. While in theory all translators go back to the original and translate it afresh, in reality some of them (such as the author of the Living Bible) do not do even that, and the rest of them are deeply influenced both by the theological systems they carry in their heads and by the pressure of public expectation, especially in the case of favorite passages, such as John 8:58. One or both of these influences have been at work throughout the history of English Bible translation. Therefore there is no basis to conclude that what the majority prefer is more valid as a translation. On the other hand, it is true that, in both public and academic opinion, the burden of proof is always on the position that goes against the comfortable consensus. That is just the reality of argumentation. Nevertheless, the "burden of proof" argument has far too often become an all-too-easy escape, since one can always say the other has not made his or her case "enough" to satisfy us.

My point about the translations you cite in your very thorough survey is that they are not normal English syntax. We will no doubt have a separate discussion about whether the present tense is theologically important here. But leaving that aside for the moment, and looking at these various versions just as English sentences, they are not English sentences. That's true of the NW as well as of almost all of the others. The syntax is fractured, and the expected complementarity of verbal tenses is disrupted. It's ironic, isn't it, that in my book I am forced to conclude that the Living Bible is the best translation of this verse. That version as a whole is a travesty. The author didn't even consult the original Greek! What he did in this verse, however, is look at existing English translations and conclude, correctly, that it's bad English, and he simply completed the translation into correct English of what other translations had left incomplete. So I

suppose my question to you here is, do you consider these versions to provide good English sentences, employing standard English syntax? If not, then they shouldn't be acceptable and we should get to work figuring out the best way to convey what we think the Greek means in English.

Next you discuss your view of

> A. The Burden of Proof

>

> In matters of the proper translation and interpretation of a sacred text, I put the burden of proof on those who advocate a minority or outside view in the history of the religion that regards that text as sacred.

After giving an example using the Qur'an within the Islamic tradition, you go on

> Moreover, the burden of proof increases if the scholar is not working as a member of that confessing community and yet advocates a view of the text at variance with the dominant understanding of that community.

As before, I acknowledge that the burden of proof, whether it be in matters of translation or science or politics, always lies with the novel or minority position against the majority or consensus. This is a fact of life, rather than a principle. Of course, every revolution of thought began as a novel or minority position. Christianity itself had the burden of proof against both Judaism and larger Greco-Roman religion. Protestantism had (and has, considering its minority position within world Christianity) the burden of proof against Catholicism. But you must excuse me, I am too much of a historian of religion to accept what you say as a principle of truth. I know too much of the political and social vicissitudes of history to assume that the consensus has it right. And I also know too well the difference of motive and purpose between the confessing community that, by definition, is motivated to advocate and defend already established truth, and the academic community that, at least in principle, is dedicated to constantly probing and testing established truth. This marks, I believe, a fundamental difference in our perspectives. You add

> After all, the scholars within the religious community of faith that views the text as sacred understand that text "from the inside." They tend to share the worldview of the sacred text more than do those outside the community. They generally have a richer and more thoroughly grounded understanding of the text than those who do not regard it as the primary text of their way of life.

The question here is, "from the inside" of what? Do they exist inside a world wholly constructed by the text, or do they understand the text from inside of a developed theological tradition that colors their reading of the text? Of course I understand your point about sharing the worldview of the text. I know the public sometimes views academics as attacking and tearing down the text, and so hardly someone to be accepted

easily as a valid interpreter of it. Sometimes that view of academics is justified, and other times it is not. Of course, the majority of academics belong to a community of faith, and that membership is not the essential question, but rather how honestly and self-consciously they employ their academic training and skills. I cannot agree that someone by the mere fact of being within a religious community of faith (you say "the" community of faith, which is probably an issue we would best leave aside here) in the 21st century necessarily has a "richer and more thoroughly grounded understanding of the text," or even that they are in closer contact with its worldview. As an academic, I read the text in the original language, I familiarize myself with the whole body of early Christian interpretation, I study the surrounding culture to understand the worldview within which the Bible communicates. That puts me closer to the text, with a richer understanding of its worldview, than any modern person who reads a derivative translation and has no familiarity with the society and culture and language within which the Bible was created. Any scholar, whether working overtly within or without a modern community of faith, would have these same academic advantages. I presume you mean those scholars who wear their faith on their sleeve, as part of their public role as interpreter of the text. The question to be asked of such people is always whether their commitment to a tradition of faith supercedes any facts they may chance upon in their research, whether in practice their faith is so vulnerable that it must obscure facts to defend itself. I have frankly found many self-professed "scholars" acting as authorities in this field who would be more accurately designated apologists.

I often find in my students the view you express that

> Thus, we may generally expect Muslims to understand the Qur'an more accurately and fully than non-Muslims; and we may likewise expect Mormons to understand the Mormon scriptures more accurately than non-Mormons.

That sounds good, but my experience is that most people, of any faith, are poor students of it. You should stand in my shoes sometime, in front of a class made up mostly of modern American Christians, reviewing the basic concepts of Christianity. Not to mention my Bible classes. They have grown up in Christian families, go to church every week . . . and haven't got a clue what I'm talking about. It's very, very sad. But suppose you mean the experts within a faith, that they necessarily have a better understanding of part of their tradition than any outsider. In that case, you are ignoring the historical development of religion, the fact that a community of faith represents the current culmination of hundreds or thousands of years of trends, influences, orthodoxies, responses to competition, etc. The myth that religions are timeless and changeless is just that – a myth. A contemporary authority within a community of faith is an excellent source on that community of faith as it exists today: what it reflects on a daily basis as the chief tenets of faith, the main practices, how it views itself, its history, its sacred scripture. But to what degree that reflects what the community or any part of it was 500, 1000, or 2000 years ago is a matter to be investigated, not presumed. Of course communities of faith have the ideal of reflecting the faith as it was first created and intended. But the conditioning of the modern world, and the baggage of generations of transformation within the faith, separates them from being able to fully realize this ideal.

Just as it is possible for a scholar of 7th century Arabia to fully immerse him or herself in the culture, society, expectations and assumptions of that time more fully than most modern adherents of Islam, and in this way grasp essential things about what the Qur'an says that are harder for the average believer to grasp, so too with Christianity and the Bible. The biblical scholar, even from the "outside," understands many things that the typical minister does not about the sacred text.

You conclude

> Based on this principle, I put the burden of proof on those who would depart from the traditional translation of John 8:58.

Accepted. But if the "traditional translation" is not a translation at all, because it is not English? There are traditional editions of Shakespeare, copied over and over through the centuries, where certain lines of speech are gibberish. Are we wrong to correct them when we have better, albeit minority witnesses to the correct reading? Likewise in the text of the Bible: it is widely recognized how inferior the vast majority of manuscripts are to a handful of good ones. Do we ignore that? And my next question to you is, what exactly is at stake in preserving either the present tense or the broken syntax of this sentence? What is lost that is precious to you by translating it as "I have been since before Abraham was born"?

You next go on to say

> Moreover, the burden of proof increases dramatically the more dogmatic the stance taken in favor of the alternate rendering and against the traditional one. It is one thing to suggest an alternate rendering; it is quite another to assert that the traditional rendering is flat wrong, religiously biased, or poor scholarship. It is possible such claims are true, but those making them bear an enormous burden of proof.

>

> I point this out, of course, because you have made such claims. For example, in your chapter on John 8:58, you write: "It is natural to assume that the majority are correct and the odd ones at fault. It is only when translations are checked against the original Greek, as they should be, that a fair assessment can be made, and the initial assumption can be seen to be wrong."<sup>3</sup> One would think from such a statement that nearly all of the English translators of the Bible for the past four centuries have failed to check the original Greek, or that they were such poor or biased translators that they checked the Greek and still managed to get it wrong. I believe such a claim bears a heavy burden of proof indeed.

You are not being fair, here, Rob. Read the quote again, and in context, please. I am arguing against the public ASSUMPTION that simply counting up the versions that have one reading against those that have another reading identifies who is right and who is wrong. And I am arguing for checking the original Greek as the more valid test of accuracy. There are times, then, when one finds that the majority of versions are in the wrong (because there are relations of interdependence that generate a plethora of versions

that copy each other's poor readings). I am talking about the PUBLIC's habit of just comparing English translations, and accepting the reading found in most of them against the minority, not the work of translators. The fact remains, however, that in the examples I discuss in my book, the translators soemtimes, as you say, "still managed to get it wrong." Please don't blame the messenger. Do you accept the NIV, even though in many verses it diverges from the KJV? Is it possible that the KJV translators got some things wrong? Would it be an indictment of the KJV translators to say so? We have new translations all the time because we can improve on the work of the past. I don't think you really object to that in principle, or that you consider it rude to correct the work of earlier translators.

You then take up

> B. Types of Translations

This is very valid to cover, as I have also in my book, and I'm sure it is useful to our readers. You are quite right that for any given verse there may be a range of possible translations depending on the type of rendering intended. And I say this repeatedly in my book. I am always careful to talk about the range of possible translation, and the "better" translation when other renderings are still possible. I would only criticize your inclusion of "interlinear" as a kind of translation. An interlinear rendering is not a translation, it is a translation aid or a study aid. You cannot read an interlinear sequentially as a meaningful English rendering of a passage. The point I have made about most translations of John 8:58 is that they have, in effect, left things at the stage of the interlinear, and not completed the translation process. What they do cannot even be called literal translation. I think you and I agree that the only reason for the broken syntax -- having "I am" at the end of the sentence -- is the mistaken notion that Jesus is quoting Exodus. So at least can we agree that the main subject and verb should stand at the beginning of any English translation ("I am before Abraham was born") before we go on to debate the proper rendering of the tense of the main verb?

You conclude

> If I am right to take this "pluralistic" approach to translation methodology, then it is entirely possible to conclude that one rendering of John 8:58 is appropriate in some versions while another rendering is appropriate in other versions.

You and I completely agree on this "pluralistic" approach. For me it applies as well when there is more than one possible meaning of a verse, not just more than one possible way to render the same meaning.

You then add

>It turns out that there is some empirical evidence to support the contention that differences in translation methodology are responsible, at least to a considerable extent, for the different ways in which English versions render John 8:58.

You discuss the goal of readability shaping some of the more paraphrastic versions. My point about John 8:58 is that most renderings of it are UNREADABLE. They are not English. We would not accept such a sentence from students in their papers, but would correct it. Now many of these same versions range far and wide on your scale from literal to paraphrase. Suddenly in 8:58 they drop below the spectrum into the interlinear range. Why here? Because of the mistaken notion that Jesus is quoting Exodus 3:14, and so the separation of the "I am" to the end of the sentence and the awkward resort to the present tense, to bolster the notion that it is such a quote. Since you agree with me that this interpretation of the verse is invalid, you understand with me the bias at work in the traditional translation, and you should be able to see how without that bias the verse doesn't work as an English sentence. The NW is also defective in this verse because, while rendering tense complementarity correctly, it has followed the KJV tradition in putting the main clause at the end of the sentence. You say about this

>The translators state that the NWT is "as literal as possible" giving "an almost word-for-word statement of the original." They expressly deny producing a paraphrase and warn readers that they have rendered many Hebrew and Greek idioms literally. They also state that when possible they have rendered each "major word" in the Bible with the same English word in all of its occurrences.[4] Given the stated translation methodology of the NWT, one might expect the NWT to translate John 8:58 in the same way that essentially all other versions do that lean toward a similar word-for-word methodology. Yet, it does not.

Your expectation that adhering to its stated principles would mean the NWT would render John 8:58 in the same way as other versions is a straw man. The main verb in the verse is the Greek be-verb, and the NWT has translated it with the English be-verb, thus following its stated "word-for-word" and consistent-rendering-of-a-word principles ("have been" is every bit as much the same English verb as "am"). Moreover, by translating it as "have been," the NWT has correctly adhered to the Greek idiom, the so-called PPA, employed here. The NWT frequently renders formally present-tense verbs in the past tense, either as PPAs or as historical presents, and this is correct to do. This is actually literal translation, because the Greek verb means what the English verb means exactly, even though Greek and English use different forms of the verb to achieve that identical meaning. Your argument here is, I think, a bit misleading to our readers, because it implies that "am" is the only word-for-word and idiomatic rendering of eimi, which is simply false. The NWT does not claim to be an interlinear, and nothing it does in this verse can be called paraphrase.

So when you say

> Arguably, the rendering "I have been" in John 8:58 is an example of a verse in which the translators' antipathy toward the traditional Christian understanding of the text took precedence over their stated methodology of a literal, word-for-word rendering that reflects the idiom of the original.

I would have to say that's an argument you should now, in light of my comments above, withdraw. There may or may not have been "antipathy toward the traditional Christian understanding of the text" in the mind of the NW translators, but you cannot prove this with the accurate translation they produced. As I say in my book, you can only start to suggest bias in a translation when there is some anomaly, some visible inaccuracy that is otherwise unaccountable. The NW rendering of John 8:58 has only the anomaly of broken syntax (the main clause at the end of the sentence), which it shares with almost all the other versions, and that's just a residue of the English translation tradition of the verse as far as I can see. It's a weakness in the translation, just as having "am" is a weakness in the other translations. In itself, either weakness does not cry out "bias." It could just be lame translating. But when there is inconsistency (do the translations usually follow Greek word order in violation of standard English? do the translations usually render PPAs as simple presents in violation of standard English?), and the weaknesses begin to pile up in a single verse, and there are other clues (such as capitalizing "I Am") to the translators' thinking, then one starts to have grounds for suspecting bias.

Finally, you address

> C. Translation and Interpretation

Where you state

>When I said that "translation should reflect interpretation and be guided by it," I was referring to interpretation in your first sense-what is often called exegesis. Where I think you may have misunderstood me here is that I include the biblical writers' own "theological" context as part of what interpreters must consider in interpreting their meanings. You spoke of "linguistic, literary, and cultural context"; well, one must also include the biblical writers' intellectual context, including their theological context.

Thank you for clarifying what you mean. I absolutely agree with you. So, now, where do we go to look for "the biblical writers' intellectual context"? It is not to be found in 21st century Christianity, because we cannot assume that the latter fulfills its aspirations to perfectly emulate its 1st century form. It is to be found in the time and place of the writer. I did not list intellectual and theological context separately in my book because these are entirely subsumed in the "linguistic, literary, and cultural context" as regards our access to them. That is, we turn first to the biblical writers' own writings to tell us what they were thinking and how they expressed it. The meaning of their terms will become more clear to us as we reference Greek linguistics, literary traditions, and cultural references, as well as considering the other works produced at the time by other writers within the general community of which the individual author was a part. So I suppose where I want to draw a caution in where you may or may not be going with this, is that we cannot assume we know the mind or worldview of the writer independently of what the writer says. The writer must supply the reference points for us to have any confidence of knowing what he is thinking. And these are reference points within the world of two thousand years ago, not of our own time and thinking. I don't assume you disagree.



You then add

> My point was that the task of translation cannot be conducted adequately without paying attention to the larger questions of what the biblical authors \*meant\* by what they wrote. If we conclude that John meant one thing, it would be irresponsible to translate his text in such a way as to say something else. The translator is not merely a parsing machine; his task is to grasp the meaning of the text and then convey that meaning in his own language.

Again, we agree completely. You cannot translate each word, or each sentence, as an isolated fragment with no reference to the full literary context within which it has meaning. And to not be "merely a parsing machine" in John 8:58, a translator must recognize that *ego eimi* does not stand by itself, in isolation from the rest of the sentence, that the rest of the sentence provides the necessary information to render the meaning of the sentence as a whole, including *ego eimi* as a part of it, into a meaningful English sentence. The majority of English translations precisely fail to do that.

You conclude this part by saying

> That a discussion of translation is incomplete without also discussing the "theological" significance of the text is evident from your own chapter on John 8:58. At one point you state, "It is Jesus' claim to be superior to Abraham, and to have a superhuman longevity, not a claim to a divine self-designation, that enrages his audience." [7] You may be right, but in any case you are doing here what all translators must do: You are considering the implications of the statement in its broader context as an integral part of the task of deciding on the best translation. That's all I was advocating.

I understand now what you mean. In each chapter of my book, which is strictly speaking on translation alone, I stop at some point to explain the sentence in context, as to its meaning within the surrounding verses, to show how the accurate translation makes sense. This is part of that "burden of proof" you mention, to support the claim that a certain translation is the one that works best to convey what the author says in the original Greek. You are quite right that such interpretation, or exegesis, is part of the research and translation process, to check for oneself that one's results actually work in their context. You can be perfectly satisfied that the Greek of an isolated clause reads, "Run faster, James." But if you then read it in context and find, "And tasting the wine, Nathaniel exclaimed, 'Run faster, James,'" you know you probably have a problem in your translation. So we agree that this is part of the work.

I look forward to your further discussion.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #2 – 8/5 – #15328:  
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS (CONT.)**

Jason,

Your second post convinces me that we agree to a considerable extent on the foundational issues. I will offer some brief comments and in my next post address a specific translation issue that dominated your second post.

I agree, of course, that the KJV exerted enormous influence on later translators. On the other hand, its influence on Catholic versions in the English language has presumably been far less than on Protestant versions. Yet we see both older and newer Catholic versions rendering John 8:58 in the same way as the Protestant versions. Moreover, at least some of the contemporary versions show sufficient independence from the KJV tradition as to call into question the notion that all of them have simply parroted the KJV. The NRSV comes especially to mind.

Although you detected “a fundamental difference in our perspectives” with regard to the matter of the burden of proof, I am not so sure. I did not make the burden of proof “a principle of truth,” as you put it. It is a principle of argumentation, not of truth per se. And in many contexts I accept the burden of proof. As a Protestant, I accept the burden of proof where Protestant theology differs from the mainstream Catholic tradition that preceded it for a millennium.

When we compare knowledge of a religious text demonstrated by those “inside” and “outside” the community of those who regard that text as their primary or sole authority for faith and life, we must be careful to compare apples with apples. Naturally, “outside” scholars can have a much greater knowledge about the text in many respects than “inside” adherents who lack basic instruction. Let me use Islam again as an example. Rank-and-file Muslims on the street may be woefully ignorant of various elements of the Qur’an familiar to non-Muslim scholars of religion, but their ignorance is likely to pale in comparison to that of people who are neither religion scholars nor Muslims. On the other hand, Muslim scholars of religion are likely to know more about the Qur’an than Buddhist or Christian scholars of religion. A good Christian scholar writing on the Qur’an will surely defer to Muslim scholars specializing in Qur’an studies on a wide array of matters, and would properly bear the burden of proof in claiming that most such scholars have got something wrong in their reading of the Qur’an.

I had written:

“For example, in your chapter on John 8:58, you write: ‘It is natural to assume that the majority are correct and the odd ones at fault. It is only when translations are checked against the original Greek, as they should be, that a fair assessment can be made, and the

initial assumption can be seen to be wrong.’[3] One would think from such a statement that nearly all of the English translators of the Bible for the past four centuries have failed to check the original Greek, or that they were such poor or biased translators that they checked the Greek and still managed to get it wrong. I believe such a claim bears a heavy burden of proof indeed.”

You replied:

“You are not being fair, here, Rob. Read the quote again, and in context, please. I am arguing against the public ASSUMPTION that simply counting up the versions that have one reading against those that have another reading identifies who is right and who is wrong. And I am arguing for checking the original Greek as the more valid test of accuracy. There are times, then, when one finds that the majority of versions are in the wrong (because there are relations of interdependence that generate a plethora of versions that copy each other's poor readings). I am talking about the PUBLIC's habit of just comparing English translations, and accepting the reading found in most of them against the minority, not the work of translators.”

Perhaps I was being unfair. I am unclear, though, as to how you expect “the public” to check the original Greek. I agree that the public should be encouraged to understand that determining the best translation is not simply a matter of counting how many versions support a particular rendering. Where there are significant differences between versions in a particular passage, I recommend that those unfamiliar with Greek consult commentaries to understand the issues underlying those differences. Of course, I agree with you that sometimes the majority of versions are wrong. Again, I was addressing two issues in this regard: the burden of proof, and the differences among versions that result from different translation goals and methods.

You make a legitimate point when you say that the NWT rendering “I have been” for EGW EIMI fits within a “word-for-word” translation methodology insofar as “have been” is a form of the English “be” verb. Whether the NWT has correctly interpreted the verb EIMI is a matter of controversy to which I will respond in later posts. That question must be resolved, and the original rationale for the NWT rendering understood, before reaching any conclusion about it reflecting theological bias.

Happily, we seem to agree on the relationship between translation and interpretation, so I have nothing to add on that subject.

The main point remaining from your second post that I need to address is the matter of the word order in John 8:58. I will take up that subject in my next post.

**ROB #3 – 8/5 – #15329:  
ROB #3: WORD ORDER**

Jason,

Please note that in the interests of ease of reference, I am numbering my posts in this discussion, and I will refer to your posts by number as well. That may be easier than resorting to dates and times or to the message number on the web site.

In this post, I will respond to your argument that most English versions fail to translate John 8:58 correctly because they incorrectly follow the Greek word order. This turned out to be a dominant theme in your second post. You claim that these translations of John 8:58 “are not English sentences,” that they are “not English” or are “bad English,” and that their “syntax is fractured” or “broken.” The translations are so bad in this respect as to be “UNREADABLE.” At one point, you write:

“I think you and I agree that the only reason for the broken syntax -- having ‘I am’ at the end of the sentence – is the mistaken notion that Jesus is quoting Exodus. So at least can we agree that the main subject and verb should stand at the beginning of any English translation (‘I am before Abraham was born’) before we go on to debate the proper rendering of the tense of the main verb?”

The answer to your question is No. I do not agree that the main subject and verb must appear first in “any English translation.” I do not agree with your assessment of the conventional rendering of John 8:58 as not being English, or being bad English, or having fractured or broken syntax. And I do not agree that “the only reason” these translations are worded this way “is the mistaken notion that Jesus is quoting Exodus.”

In your book, you say that the normal word order in English is “subject + verb + object or predicate phrase.” However, you observe, the word order of the Greek in John 8:58, and of the conventional translations, is “predicate phrase + subject + verb.” So, the Greek word order may be “before Abraham came into existence, I am,” but the normal word order in English for this sentence ought to be “I am before Abraham came into existence.” You write: “Just as we do not say ‘John I am’ or ‘Hungry I am’ or ‘First in line I am,’ so it is not proper English to say ‘Before Abraham came to be I am.’” You conclude that of the translations you were comparing in your book, only the Living Bible avoids “this sort of mangled word order.”[1]

The three examples of poorly worded English sentences that you give are all of a particular kind. In all three sentences, the expression wrongly placed first in the sentence is a noun or adjective (or adjectival phrase) that gives a further description of the subject. Other kinds of predicate expressions and phrases might appear first in an English sentence without violating normal English word order.

In your first post, you state that most of the Bible translations you reviewed “place the main clause after the adverbial clause, rather than before it, violating standard English syntax.” However, none of the examples you gave in your book of malformed sentences contained adverbial clauses.

The fact is that adverbial clauses often appear first in English sentences with no sense of abnormality, let alone of them having “mangled word order,” as you claimed. Here are two examples, with the “offending” adverbial clauses in all capital letters:

“For example, WHEN THE MAIN VERB IS NEGATED, prin actually has the reverse meaning....”

“MOST OF THE TIME WHEN JESUS SPEAKS OF HIMSELF WITH THE PRESENT TENSE BE-VERB, there is a predicate noun with which he wishes to identify himself (‘I am the light,’ ‘I am the good shepherd,’ etc.).”

You probably recognize these sentences; I took them from your first post. Notice that the emphasized clauses are adverbial clauses expressing time, as in John 8:58. Here is another one, taken from the very page of your chapter on John 8:58 where you explain this objection from word order:

“WHEN VERB TENSES OR ANY OTHER PART OF GRAMMAR IS USED IN A WAY OUTSIDE OF USUAL EXPECTATIONS, we call it an ‘idiom.’”[2]

Here are some more examples, using sentences created to illustrate the point:

“WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES MIDNIGHT ON NEW YEAR’S EVE, the ball always drops in Times Square.”

“WHEN YOU READ SOMETHING A SCHOLAR HAS WRITTEN, you should not assume that he’s always right.”

In your first post, you wrote: “Since the same sort of defective translation is not found in these Bibles in other passages of similar construction in the Greek, there is reason to suppose that this verse has been impacted by bias in the translators.” Likewise, in your chapter you say that the conventional word order of English translations in John 8:58 “violates...normal English usage” and that “the reason for doing so” is “theological bias.”[3]

Yet adverbial clauses often appear first in sentences in English translations of the Bible. Here are several examples, all involving adverbial clauses beginning with the word “before” (as in John 8:58). I quote each of these from the NRSV, though almost any English version will be similar:

“But BEFORE they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house” (Gen. 19:4).

“BEFORE he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder” (Gen. 24:15).

“BEFORE the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, bore to him” (Gen. 41:50).

“BEFORE they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof” (Josh. 2:8).

“Moreover, BEFORE the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say...” (1 Sam. 2:15).

“BEFORE the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps. 90:2).

“BEFORE the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth” (Prov. 8:25).

“For BEFORE the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted” (Is. 7:16).

“For BEFORE the child knows how to call ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria” (Is. 8:2).

“...BEFORE they spring forth, I tell you of them” (Is. 42:9b).

“BEFORE they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Is. 65:24).

“BEFORE she was in labor she gave birth;  
BEFORE her pain came upon her she delivered a son” (Is. 66:7).

“BEFORE I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and BEFORE you were born I consecrated you” (Jer. 1:5).

“For BEFORE those days there were no wages for people or for animals” (Zech. 8:10).

“Truly I tell you, this very night, BEFORE the cock crows, you will deny me three times” (Matt. 26:34; similarly 26:75; Mark 14:30, 72; Luke 22:61).

“But BEFORE all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you” (Luke 21:12).

“BEFORE Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:48).

“Now BEFORE the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father” (John 13:1).

“Now BEFORE faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed” (Gal. 3:23).

Let me repeat your claim: “Since the same sort of defective translation is not found in these Bibles in other passages of similar construction in the Greek, there is reason to suppose that this verse has been impacted by bias in the translators.” The preceding 23 verses all have adverbial clauses beginning with “before” (PRIN or PRO in Greek, including in the LXX translations of the OT verses). These are relevant because you argue that adverbial clauses in English translations (like “before Abraham came into existence”) should come after the main clause. As you can see, most Bible translations simply don’t follow this rule. If they often place adverbial “before” clauses prior to the main clause, the placement of the adverbial clause in John 8:58 simply cannot qualify as evidence of theological bias. Moreover, the fact that so many Bible translations do this in so many places strongly suggests that your criterion of good English is simply wrong.

I suppose, though, that by “passages of similar construction in the Greek” you might mean more narrowly passages using the PPA. These don’t typically have “adverbial clauses” (a point I will explore more fully in a later post). Still, let’s look at some of the standard textbook examples of the PPA and see how the NRSV translates them. For these texts, I will put the qualifying adverbial phrases in all capitals.

“FOR THREE YEARS I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none” (Luke 13:7).

“FOR ALL THESE YEARS I have been working like a slave for you...” (Luke 15:29).

“For in every city, FOR GENERATIONS PAST, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21).

“...and how FROM CHILDHOOD you have known the sacred writings” (2 Tim. 3:15).

“For EVER SINCE OUR ANCESTORS DIED, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!” (2 Peter 3:4).

Again, I have limited my examples to the NRSV for sake of economy, but one can see the same phenomenon in many other translations.

Of course, I do not deny that *sometimes* it is clearer or smoother English to put the adverbial phrase after the verb. Sometimes it is a matter of feel or style. However, your claim that adverbial clauses or phrases in good English must appear after the verb is simply false.

You might be tempted to contend that the NRSV and many other English translations \*frequently\* violate good English word order by putting adverbial clauses before the main verb, or adverbial phrases before the subject. If you take this route, though, you will have to say the same about your own writing. Indeed, I would venture to predict that you would have to say the same thing about every major English writer for the past five hundred years. I would hope that the absurdity of the claim is already sufficiently evident that you will not venture down that road. In any case, the charge that these translations put “Before Abraham came into existence” before the main clause “I am” because of theological bias is without merit.

-----

NOTES

[1] BeDuhn, *Truth in Translation*, 105.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 104.

-----



**JASON #3 – 8/6 – #15331:  
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS (CONT.)**

Rob,

Yes, we do seem to have established a substantial common ground, with the first couple of messages involving coming to understand what each other means by various expressions. In response to your message #2 I only want to push a little more on the point of "insider" vs. "outsider." You say:

> Rank-and-file Muslims on the street may be woefully ignorant of various elements of the Qur'an familiar to non-Muslim scholars of religion, but their ignorance is likely to pale in comparison to that of people who are neither religion scholars nor Muslims. On the other hand, Muslim scholars of religion are likely to know more about the Qur'an than Buddhist or Christian scholars of religion. A good Christian scholar writing on the Qur'an will surely defer to Muslim scholars specializing in Qur'an studies on a wide array of matters, and would properly bear the burden of proof in claiming that most such scholars have got something wrong in their reading of the Qur'an.

It seems to me that you are speaking here from experience in apologetics, where it is a worthy ideal to defer to authorities of other faiths for fair representations of what they believe and practice, and only on the other faith's self-presentation undertake a comparison or critique. But this is a very different undertaking than the non-apologetic historical study of religion. I am among those trained in the field of religious studies, which is committed to the principle of "bracketing" personal faith commitments in the research and teaching process. I teach in a state university, where such objectivity is a constitutional necessity. I have colleagues who research Buddhism without being Buddhists, Hinduism without being Hindus, Islam without being Muslims, etc. I can tell you that they do not "defer to Muslim scholars" or so forth. Once they are trained in the language, the culture, the history of the religion, and all the other things that make them "scholars," they conduct their research objectively and without submission to religious authority. It is certainly possible, and often the case, that an "outside" scholar has insight into material well beyond that manifested in the contemporary work of "inside" authorities, precisely because the latter typically labor under the necessity of conforming their research to the already established tenets of their faith. By a commitment to the scientific ideals of religious studies, by "bracketing," even those scholars who happen to study their own religious tradition have the advantages of an "outsider" in not being subject to this pressure of conformity. That is how new things are discovered, whereas faith communities by definition are not looking for new discoveries, but confirmations of already established truth. What I am saying, then, is that diligent scholarship closes the gap between insider and outsider knowledge of religious matter, and quite frequently allows the outsider (whether personally or by bracketing) to surpass even the scholars among the insiders in knowledge and insight into the material. There can be no argument

from authority, therefore. Everything must be judged on the evidence. Getting back to the situation you seem to be imagining: there is every reason to give preference to the insider on the subject of what contemporary believers think about a specific matter of religion. The outsider usually has a disadvantage here (but even that can be closed, for example when the outsider conducts extensive fieldwork, and may discover that the insider scholar is out of touch with his or her own constituency). But on any historical question (including the historical meaning of sacred scripture) the insider loses any inherent advantage to the serious outside scholar.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #4 – 8/6 – #15333:**

**ROB #4: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS (CONT.)**

Jason,

You may be surprised to hear that I also have training in religious studies and have some experience teaching religious studies (in the community college setting). I do place the burden of proof on non-adherents to support their claim that most adherents have misunderstood their own religious writings. Assigning the burden of proof in this way is perfectly compatible with “the principle of ‘bracketing’ personal faith commitments in the research and teaching process.” It appears that we may still be speaking past each other somewhat, since you think it necessary to reject an “argument from authority” and to tell me that religion scholars conduct research into religions other than their own “without submission to religious authority.” I thought I was quite clear that I was not advocating the need for such “submission” to inside scholars as religious authorities. Outside scholars are free to argue for their own interpretations of religious writings; I simply maintain that they bear the burden of proof when they claim that their interpretation is superior to that of the mainstream of scholarship within that religion.

It appears to me that you have now made two conflicting claims. On the one hand, you now assert that outside scholars actually have something of an advantage because they are free to make new discoveries while inside scholars feel pressured to conform and are seeking only confirmation of existing beliefs. Yet in your second post, you acknowledged the “generations of transformation within the faith,” even pressing this point. “The myth that religions are timeless and changeless is just that – a myth.” Indeed it is. A more nuanced position would consider several factors:

- \* The apologetic motive of some insiders to confirm what they already believe
- \* The creative motive of some insiders to learn more and to solve certain puzzles or difficulties in the prevailing system
- \* The polemical motive of some insiders to defend their position on matters of controversy within the community
- \* The anti-apologetic motive of some outsiders to show the fallible side of the religion
- \* The preemptive motive of some outsiders to show the coherence of the religion with another religious perspective

The myth of the objective outsider is just that – a myth. Both insiders and outsiders can and should strive for objectivity as an ideal, and both can make valuable strides in the pursuit of knowledge. But the notion that “religion scholars” are characteristically objective while theologians and “apologists” are characteristically captive to their religious authority is an oversimplification of a high order.

**JASON #4 – 8/9 – #15367:**

**JASON #4**

Rob,

Thank you for your thorough and searching post. One of the reasons I do these forums is a selfish one: to see where I can improve defects of clarity in my book. One can read a manuscript over and over again, read it aloud to oneself, read it aloud to others, have others read it, and still overlook that the intended communication is imperfect. I know what I mean to say. My manuscript readers assure me they understand what I am saying. Yet the general reader, or the particularly careful critical reader such as yourself does not see what I thought I was saying (and evidently did not successfully say). So I greatly appreciate you uncovering one of these weaknesses in the book that I can now seek to improve. I worked so hard to keep the book slim and simple that sometimes I fall into oversimplification, particularly when it comes to self-evident and common sense knowledge of modern English. It is ironic that more than one of these public forums on an issue in my book has turned more on my facility in explaining English grammar than on my grasp of Greek. But to fairly respond to your points, I am willing to provide a more technical discussion than I thought was suitable for my book (so long as you don't take my prose as a standard of good English!).

I suppose it may be useful here to also see if you and I are on the same page regarding how "rules" of language are determined. There is no authority over the rules of language; it is a matter of common usage. Grammars of a language are post hoc constructions of implicit rules found in practice. The "rules" of English in the time of the KJV are not the same as those of modern English. As one can see by comparing the same passages in modern Bibles which take as primary the nobility and poetics of classical English with other Bibles that are more interested in broad readership and comprehension, the displacement of temporal clauses to a position before the main clause has greatly declined in common English usage. But, going back to the point you made in an earlier post, we must acknowledge the different purposes of these different translations, and not judge them by the same template.

Our current point of disagreement is summed up nicely in your post#3:

>I do not agree with your assessment of the conventional rendering of John 8:58 as not being English, or being bad English, or having fractured or broken syntax. And I do not agree that "the only reason" these translations are worded this way "is the mistaken notion that Jesus is quoting Exodus."

We can, I think, agree that that mistaken notion is clearly at work in the NAB, TEV, and AB, since they all capitalize "I Am." But what about the rest?

You are perfectly correct that English generally has the flexibility to place a subordinated adverbial (in this case temporal) clause before the main clause of a complex sentence. This is not the primary standard order in English, but it is acceptable as a variation of style. Please note that I have said both in my book and in my earlier post that the single weakness of inverting standard subject-verb-predicate complement is not in and of itself enough to judge a translation of John 8:58 faulty, or to provide grounds for charges of bias. It is only the combination of inversion of standard word order with the anomalous tense of English "am" that together gives reason to fault the translation significantly. See the last paragraph of page 110 in my book where I enumerate three anomalies that, stacked one upon the other, build up progressively increasing grounds for suspecting bias; and my post #2 where I say: "In itself, either weakness does not cry out 'bias.' It could just be lame translating. But when there is inconsistency . . . and the weaknesses begin to pile up in a single verse, and there are other clues (such as capitalizing "I Am") to the translators' thinking, then one starts to have grounds for suspecting bias."

You are also correct that in my book I gave weak comparative examples because I failed to include an adverbial complement along with nominal or pronominal complements as examples of typical English word order in sentences with the be-verb.

You have rightly pointed out that in my book I did not seem to note the general flexibility found in modern English in placing subordinate clauses relative to the main verb. I skipped right over that fact, although I shouldn't have, for the simple reason that in this general flexibility of placement of a subordinated predicate complement is not found in connection with the English be-verb. The English be-verb, whether used as a copula or existentially, always has an explicit or implicit predicate complement that completes the idea of the verb. The English be-verb is incomplete without such a complement, whether it be a noun, adjective, or adverb. The English be-verb cannot stand alone without such an explicit or implicit complement as a self-standing meaningful expression, as far as I know. When in modern English we wish to make an existential statement independent of all complement, we abandon the be-verb and resort to some other existential verb, such as "exist." Take the expression sure to leap to everyone's mind here, Descarte's cogito ergo sum. In the English of Descarte's day it was acceptable to translate this as "I think, therefore I am." This is retained in its classical form the same way Shakespeare is preserved in its original form, as an historical artifact. But just as modern English Bibles abandon many characteristics of King James English because they have dropped out of general use, so an expression of Descarte's is no longer considered straightforward contemporary common English, which would render it instead "I think, therefore I exist."

The majority of the excellent examples you provided from the NRSV of preposed temporal clauses do not involve "to be" as the main verb of the sentence (there are three exceptions to which I will return). I would propose that there is a reason for that. In the examples you provide, the subordinate temporal clause is what grammarians call an ADJUNCT to the main clause, because the main verb has sufficient meaning in itself for the main clause to stand alone as the intended meaningful statement, to which the adjunct only adds some sort of supplementary information. But with the be-verb, as in John 8:58, the subordinate temporal clause is what grammarians call a COMPLEMENT to the main

clause, that is, it is an internal part of it, directly qualifying the sense of the main verb and completing a meaning that it would not have without such a complement. There are many verbs that have an OBLIGATORY complement, that is, they cannot be used alone without a predicate complement to complete the meaning of the verbal expression. The be-verb is one, and there are several others. For example, you cannot say "She perused." There must be a predicate complement, as in "She perused the report." In this case, as in many others, the complement is a direct object. Other verbs of this type are consist, tend, intend, seem, feel. Many more verbs have obligatory complements when used actively, although they do not require them when used passively, e.g., blame, prove, refer, prefer, send, keep. The English be-verb does not, of course, take a direct object, but requires a predicate noun or adjective when it is used as a copula, or a DEPICTIVE COMPLEMENT such as an adverb when used existentially. This fact of English is stated, for example, in R. Huddleston & G. K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), on page 222: "Most obviously, the verb be almost always requires an internal complement." For example, one can say "Jill is in her study" but not "Jill is." One can say "The meeting was on Monday" but not "The meeting was." For the apparently intended meaning of the two unacceptable statements just given, an English speaker resorts to some other existential verb: "Jill exists." "The meeting occurred." The verb "to be" is not employed in modern English in this uncomplemented existential function. The authors of the Cambridge Grammar state that "only a small number of verbs (or verbal idioms) take complements of temporal location; clear examples include: i. be . . ." (page 694). This is precisely the case with John 8:58, where the prin clause is, I think, an obligatory temporal complement to eimi.

This brings us to position within the sentence. Quoting again from the Cambridge Grammar, page 225: "Complements are more restricted than most adjuncts as to what positions they can occupy in a clause. In general, there is a basic or default position for a given kind of complement, with its occurrence in other positions being permitted only under a limited set of conditions." The authors go on to add "the preposing construction . . . is relatively unusual" for a complement (while being commonly employed for an adjunct). The preposing construction is what most translations employ in John 8:58. So, for example, you can say "The office is operating independently" but not "Independently the office is operating." You can say "We will make our decision separately" but not "Separately we will make our decision." The English be-verb generally does not take preposed complements. The only exception that I am aware of being locative expressions -- such as "Here I am" or "There she is" -- and when the verb is part of a relative expression with "which" or "that" -- such as "in which she is," or "among which you are." In other words, there are a limited number of expressions where the complement is permitted to precede the be-verb in English, and the kind of expression we have in John 8:58 is not one of them.

The exceptions among your examples involving the be-verb are:

1. "BEFORE he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder" (Gen. 24:15). Note that in this example, the "before" clause is an adjunct, not a

complement, since "was" is provided with a more immediate complement (the locative "there") for the complete meaningful statement "Rebekah was there." This doesn't help us with the kind of apparently uncomplemented "I am" of John 8:58 as it is commonly translated.

2. "BEFORE the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2). Note again that that the main clause is a copulative sentence, unlike John 8:58, with a nominal complement to the be verb: "You are God." The "before" clause is an adjunct, not a complement.

3. "For BEFORE those days there were no wages for people or for animals" (Zech. 8:10). This is the closest parallel to John 8:58, with a typical English existential form supplying a "dummy" complement "there" that allows what would normally being an obligatory depictive complement ("before those days") to be shifted to adjunct status with its relatively greater flexibility of placement. Note that if one does not employ the dummy complement "there," one cannot say "Before those days no wages for people or for animals were" or "Before those days were no wages for people or for animals." A similar case is "How many thousands there are" for lexical Greek "how many thousands are (eisin)" (Acts 21:20)

Now suppose one wants to argue that *eimi* is meant as an existential absolute, that the *prin* clause functions not as a verbal complement that completes the meaning of the verb, but only as a verbal adjunct that adds supplementary information to the basic existential claim (like Descartes' "I exist," plain and simple). In that case, modern English normally, usually, and regularly abandons the be-verb and substitutes some other existential verb. In other words, one could then argue that the *prin* clause can be preposed in English, before the main clause, but only with a different existential verb: "Before Abraham was born, I have existed" or "Before Abraham was born, I have been in existence." This is still inverted order from the primary standard sequence of an English sentence, but it is allowable for emphasis. It does not work with "am" because "am" leads the reader to expect some verbal complement.

A similar set of circumstances is found in Acts 17:28, which reads lexically: "in/by him for we live and move and are." As in John 8:58 we are dealing here with an adverbial complement taking the form of a prepositional phrase or clause which in Greek is preposed to the main verb(s). This is translated fairly literally by the LB: "For in him we live and move and are," whose awkwardness as an English sentence serves to highlight how ungrammatical such a translation is, where the normal word order would be "We live and move and \*are in/by him." Note, too that "are" is only retained in English if the expression is understood locatively as "in him" ("we are in him") or "by (that is, 'beside') him ("we are by/beside him"). If the prepositional phrase is understood to signify means or agency, "are" is dropped in favor of another existential verb, as in the NW: "For by him we have life and move and exist" (NW). Most translations, in any case, abandon "are" for some other existential expression that works better in English in a sentence of this sort: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (KJV, NIV, NRSV, NAB, AB), "For in him we live and move and exist" (NASB, TEV). This reflects the

translators seeing the "in/by him" as an adjunct, rather than a complement, to the main verbs, and so taking the be-verb to have an absolute existential meaning, leading them to choose some appropriate existential expression in place of the unacceptable isolated "are." This shows how the be-verb is generally not used in English existential expressions where it would stand in isolation, as at the end of a sentence, because it is seen as incomplete without an immediate depictive qualifier in such a position. Even if seen as an adjunct, however, "in/by him" is not normally preposed to the main verb in modern English prose. So we can see here the strong influence of the KJV on the other translations in retaining a poetic, rather than a prosaic word order. When the translators take the a prepositional phrase as an intrinsic depictive complement to the verb, as in 1 Jn. 2:5, we see the phrase following the verb: "We are in him" for lexical Greek "in him we are" in all major translations.

Of course you have not provided parallel examples of "I am" or "You are" or so forth as predicate absolutes in the Bible. Since it is inevitable that we address this, I have taken the liberty of beginning the search (which takes some time), at least within the New Testament. When we scout around in the NT for such be-verb predicate absolutes, we find that most apparent examples are actually copulative sentences with an implicit predicate noun or predicate pronoun. For example, there are quite a few cases where translators supply the implicit noun or pronoun from the context, "I am (he)" or "I am (Christ)" or so forth, for lexical Greek "I am":

Mk. 13:6 [LB omits]; Lk. 21:8 [LB omits]; Jn. 4:26 [NW: "I . . . am he"]; Jn. 8:24 [NIV: "I am the one I claim to be"; NAB: "I AM"; TEV: "I Am Who I Am"]; Jn. 8:28 [NIV: "I am the one I claim to be"; NAB: "I AM"; TEV: "I Am Who I Am"]; Jn. 9:9 [NASB: "I am the one"; NIV, NRSV, AB, TEV: "I am the man"; LB: "I am the same man"; NAB: "I am"], Jn. 13:19 [NAB: "I AM"; TEV: "I Am Who I Am"; LB omits]; Jn. 18:5, 6, 8 [NAB: "I AM"].

Translators similarly supply the implicit copulative meaning of Greek "I am" in Jn. 13:13, "(so) I am" or "(that is what) I am" [NAB: "indeed I am"; NW: "I am such"; LB: "it is true"], and in Acts 13:25, "I am not (he)" or "I am not (that one)" [TEV: "I am not the one you are waiting for"; LB: "no"]. But in other passages, the nominal complement is left implicit, as in Lk. 22:70, "You say that I am [the Son of God]" [AB "I AM"], 1 Cor. 9:2, "to/for you I am [an apostle]." The use of the relative pronoun is often involved, as in 1 Cor. 15:10 (lexically: "I am what I am") "I am what I am" (all except LB: "whatever I am now").

Similarly, when a statement is an affirmative or negative answer to a direct question, we find "I am" and so forth as an acceptable English translation of Greek "I am" because and only because they have an implicit nominal or pronominal complement. For example, "I am [the Christ]" [AB "I AM"] (Mk. 14:62), and "I am not [one of them/Elijah]" for lexical Greek "not I am" (Lk. 22:58; Jn. 1:21 [LB: "no"]; Jn. 18:17).

In other cases where "I am" appears in the original Greek as a specifying copulative expression with an implicit (often self-referential) complement, English makes use of



either a "dummy" subject to make a complete English sentence, or employs some sort of rephrasing to avoid what would be a nonsensical statement in English. For example:

"It is I" (neg. "it is not I") or "Is it I?" for lexical Greek "I am": Mt. 14:27 [AB "I AM"; LB omits]; Mt. 26:22 [negative, "Surely not I?" common; TEV: "Surely . . . you don't mean me?"; LB "am I the one?"]; Mt. 26:25 [same]; Mk. 6:50 [AB "I AM"]; Lk. 24:39; Jn. 6:20 [AB "I AM"; LB omits]

None of these examples provide good parallels to John 8:58 because they all involve the be-verb as a copula, not in its existential function. They do provide some examples of the limited number of expressions in which modern English tolerates "I am" as a self-standing expression (namely, in affirmative answers to direct questions or as part of a relative clause). Otherwise, English translations ignore the many cases where Greek word order and form of expression could, in isolation from all syntax, be translated as "I am," and provide something meaningful in English.

We agree that in John 8:58 the be-verb is not a copula, but has an existential function. One of the points we are seeking to resolve is whether it is a predicate absolute or occurs with a dependent depictive complement. I have argued that it cannot be a predicate absolute, since "before Abraham was born" must form part of the sentence. For comparison, here are some examples of true predicate absolute be-verb sentences in the NT:

Lk. 9:13 (lexically: "not are [eisi] with us more") translated as absolute: "We have no more" (KJV, NASB, NRSV, AB), "We have nothing more" (NW); translated as non-absolute: "We have only" (NIV, LB), "All we have" (NAB, TEV).

Jn. 11:9 (lexically: "not twelve hours are [eisi]") "Are there not twelve hours?" (all except NW: "There are twelve hours . . . are there not?"; TEV: "A day has twelve hours, doesn't it?")

Acts 24:11 (lexically: "not more are [eisi] for me days twelve") "There are yet but twelve days" (KJV), "It is not more than twelve days" (NRSV, AB), "It has not been more than twelve days" (NW), "It was no(t) more than twelve days" (TEV, LB), "Not more than twelve days have passed" (NAB), (others drop verbal form of expression)

1 Cor. 8:5 (lexically: "are [eisi] ones called gods") "there are those that are called gods" (NW), "there are so-called gods" (NASB, NIV, NAB, TEV), "there may be so-called gods" (NRSV, AB), "there be that are called gods" (KJV)

1 Cor. 8:5 (lexically: "are [eisi] gods many") "there are many gods" (NASB, NIV, NRSV, NAB, AB, NW), "there are many of these gods" (TEV), "there be gods many" (KJV)

Rev. 1:19 (lexically: "that are [eisi] and that is about to become") "the things which are, and the things that shall be" (KJV), "the things that/which are, and the things that/which

shall take place" (NASB, NW), "the things that are now and the things that will happen" (TEV), "what is, and what is to take place" (NRSV), "what is now and what will take place" (NIV), "what is happening, and what will happen" (NAB), "what they are and what is to take place" (AB, written as a copula), (LB omits)

We see here how English deals with be-verb predicate absolutes. It supplies a dummy subject "there" to make a complete English sentence "There are x," or rephrases the sentence to avoid a dangling be-verb at the end. The one exception here is Rev. 1:19, which involves the relative pronoun. In such expressions, English does permit the be-verb to end the clause. I have argued that if the be-verb is to be taken as an absolute in John 8:58, then English would normally substitute some other existential verb, such as "exist."

But in fact John 8:58 is much more similar to be-verb sentences with obligatory depictive complements. That is, the be-verb is modified by some adverbial qualifier that provides the full meaning of the verbal element in the sentence, and without which there is no meaningful statement in the be-verb alone. There are very many examples of this in the NT (my results are based on a survey of all present tense forms of eimi except third person singular – there are so many of the latter that I haven't had time to survey them yet).

There is, first of all, eimi with a locative complement. In this usage, the subject of the verb is not said simply to be, but to be in a particular location. Even those these expressions employ pronouns, the latter function adverbially, and so are included here.

Here/there: Mt. 18:20 (lexically: "there I am") "There am I" (KJV, NIV, NAB), "There I am" (NASB, NW, AB:"there I AM"), "I am there" (NRSV, TEV), "I will be right there" (LB) (other examples: w/esmen Lk. 9:12; w/eisi Mk. 6:3) (Examples with pronoun following verb: w/semen Acts 16:28

Where: Jn. 7:34; Jn. 12:26; Jn. 14:3; Jn. 17:24 (lexically: "where am I") "where I am" (all except TEV 7:34: "where I will be"; LB omits 17:24)

Before: Rev. 7:15

Note that English allows the be-verb to follow a pronominal complement, but not a prepositional one, in locative expressions. For example: Lk. 22:27 (lexically: "in midst of you I am") "I am in your midst" (NW, AB), "I am among you" (all others; LB omits).

Second, eimi is often used with a stative complement. In this usage, the subject of the verb is not said simply to be, but to be in a particular state. Here, too, when the complement is a pronoun, English word order permits the be-verb to trail the complement, as in Jn. 7:28 (lexically: "whence [pothen] I am") in the KJV "whence I am." This order is retained even when it is a prepositional phrase is used rather than a pronoun "from where I am," although this form is losing ground in contemporary English

to "where I am from" (all others except LB: "where I was born and raised"). Other examples include Lk.13:27 and Jn. 19:9.

Participles can also be used as stative complements to eimi, as in:

Acts 25:10 (lexically: "at the judgment seat of Caesar standing I am") "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat" (KJV), "I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat" (AB), "I am standing before the judgment seat of Caesar" (NW), "I am standing before the tribunal of Caesar" (NAB), "I am now standing before Caesar's court" (NIV), "I am standing before the Emperor's own judgment court" (TEV), "I am appealing to the emperor's tribunal" (NRSV) , "I demand my privilege of a hearing before the Emperor himself" (LB)

But most frequently, the stative complement involves a prepositional phrase. So as to not make the list of examples too cumbersome, I will limit it to close parallels to John 8:58 in word order (i.e., with main verb at end of Greek sentence, with preceding prepositional phrase):

1. with (meta/pros):

Jn. 7:33; Jn. 13:33; Col. 2:5 (lexically: "with you I am") "am I with you" (KJV\*), "I am with you" (NASB, NRSV, AB\*, NW\*, NAB 2:5, TEV 2:5, NIV 7:33, KJV 13:33), "I will be with you" (NAB, NRSV 7:33, NIV 13:33), "I shall (not) be with you" (TEV\*), "I am to be with you" (AB 13:33), "I am to be here" (LB 7:33), "I am present with you" (NIV 2:5), "I continue with you" (NW 7:33), "my heart is with you" (LB 2:5) – LB omits 13:33 (other examples: w/ei Lk. 15:31; w/eisi Lk. 11:7)

2. from (ek):

Jn. 7:29 (lexically: "from him I am") "I am from him" (all except TEV: "I come from him"; AB: "I come from his presence"; NW: "I am a representative from him"; LB: "I was with him") (other examples: w/esmen 1 Jn. 3:19; 1 Jn. 5:19; w/este Jn. 8:47; Jn. 15:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; w/eisi Jn. 17:14; 2 Tim. 3:6; 1 Jn. 4:5)

3. in (en):

Phil. 4:11 (lexically: "in which I am") "in whatsoever state I am" (KJV), "in whatever state I am" (AB), "in whatever circumstances I am" (NASB, NW), "whatever the circumstances" (NIV), "with whatever I have" (NRSV), "with what I have" (TEV), "in whatever situation I find myself" (NAB), "whether I have much or little" (LB) (other examples: w/ei Lk. 23:40; w/este Rom. 1:6; 2 Cor. 7:3). Note that the relative pronouns used in the first three translations open up the possibility of having the be-verb last in the clause.

Acts 17:28 (lexically: "in/by him for we live and move and are [esmen]") "For in him we live and move and are" (LB), "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (KJV, NIV, NRSV, NAB, AB), "For in him we live and move and exist" (NASB, TEV), "For by him we have life and move and exist" (NW). Note the abandonment of the be-verb for some other existential expression.

1 Jn. 2:5 (lexically: "in him we are [esmen]") "we are in him" (all except NAB, NW: "we are in union with him"; TEV "we are in union with God"; LB: "you are a Christian").

Finally, we have the usage found in John 8:58, where a temporal complement is employed. Here the subject of the verb is not simply said to be, but to be in reference to a designation of time. I have two examples of this:

Jn. 14:9 (lexically: "for such a time with you I am") "Have I been so long time with you" (KJV), "Have I been so long with you" (NASB), "I have been among you such a long time" (NIV), "Have I been with you all this time" (NRSV), "Have I been with you for so long a time" (NAB), "Have I been with all of you for so long a time" (AB), "Have I been with you men so long a time" (NW), "Even after all this time I have been with you" (LB), "For a long time I have been with you all" (TEV)

Jn. 15:27 (lexically: "from [the] beginning with me you are") "you have been with me from the beginning" (all except KJV: "ye have been with me from the beginning"; TEV: "you have been with me from the very beginning"; NW: "You have been with me from when I began")

Note how here the temporal reference almost necessarily makes the present tense anomalous, since past and future are much more commonly used to qualify a verb (what would it mean to qualify a true present verb temporally? In English we do so by adding an adverb such as "now" or "currently". A closer parallel to the form found in John 8:58 would be to use a prepositional phrase such as "at the present time."), and leads to a redefinition of the tense of the verb on the basis of the temporal significance of its complement.

This survey shows in practice the "rules" that govern the English be-verb as discussed in English grammars and employed by English writers and speakers generally. Modern English Bibles generally adhere to them, unless influenced either by traditions of translation in which archaic expressions are sometimes preserved, or by interpretations that they wish to reinforce by deviation from standard English. I apologize for the length of this discussion and survey here, but I wished to put as much at our disposal as I could in such short order. I hope this fills in the gap of any terse statements I have made in the past, and shows what I mean when I criticize most translations of John 8:58 as ungrammatical English. In short, it is ungrammatical to place "I am" after its adverbial complement in modern English in a sentence such as John 8:58. Even if we ignore what is arguably the obligatory depictive complement (the prin clause) and translate ego eimi as an absolute, modern English favors the substitution of another existential verb for the be-verb, or risks producing a meaningless sentence that needs itself to be translated into meaningful English.

Okay, I think that's enough to chew on for now.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.

**JASON #5 – 8/10 – #15378:  
BURDENS OF PROOF**

Rob,

The conclusion to be reached on this line of argument, then, is that assessing any position is not a matter of who but of what. Any resort to "so-and-so says so" is a resort to authority, rather than evidence and demonstration. You and I may occasionally lapse into whipping out our favorite big name scholars, but ultimately the issues can only be settled by the preponderance of evidence.

To any two people committed to the ideal of objective and neutral research, the designation of one as "insider" and the other as "outsider" would presumably not add a shred of relevant information. So this whole line of discussion you introduced seems a bit of a red herring. The so-called "insider" brings nothing inherently different to an inquiry than an "outsider" if they are both committed to the same standards of evidence and demonstration. That is why I am puzzled by this line of your argument, and why I have to assume that by "insider" you do not mean simply someone who personally has a particular belief that is bracketed in the research process, but rather someone whose research and conclusions are explicitly produced within, and bounded by, a public proclamation of faith. All that I have tried to point out is that such a position (position, not person) is, by definition, the product of historical forces and traditions that have placed the contemporary believer at a considerable distance from the state of things two thousand years ago. And someone who approaches two thousand year old material while publicly avowing that he or she sees no possibility of finding anything outside the bounds of a particular contemporary understanding of the faith cannot be considered to be committed to the ideal of objective and neutral research. That's their choice, and perfectly fine in itself, but has nothing to do with how we determine the better of two positions on translation.

Perhaps we should check to see if we are even interested in the same thing in a Bible translation. Something like the TEV (Good News Bible) was pretty clearly put together to be a carrier of a contemporary Christian faith, not a communicator of the original meaning of the biblical text. That, too, is a kind of translation that fills a certain niche and serves certain goals. That might suit a certain segment of Bible readership. But in my experience those Christians passionately interested in reading the Bible are exercising a kind of private "Protestant" revolt (even among Catholics) to have their faith "direct" from the earliest Christian tradition, as much as possible unmediated by the intervening history of dogmatic developments. So my "bias" for history referred to in my book happens to coincide with the interest of many modern Christians not just to find new meaning in their sacred scripture (and so continue the process of dogmatic development step by tiny step) but to have that newly discovered meaning be in some way related to what the scripture did and could have meant two thousand years ago.

And I do maintain in my book, and wonder if you agree, that translation depends on certain basic secular skills in language and the referential meaning of that language within a particular historical and cultural situatedness. Despite the fact that some translation projects have limited their participants to people who are committed not to reach a conclusion contrary to certain dogmas, I am unaware of claims that a particular translation is directly inspired in a way that other translations are not. If that is the case with individual translations, then it holds equally true of traditions of translation within a faith community, which have more to do with the strength of tradition and trends of interpretation than they do with issues of accuracy. That being the case, the debate over more or less accurate translations must again fall to evidence equally within the skills of "insiders" and "outsiders." And all translations must be placed on an equal playing-field of assessment. "Mainstream," "non-mainstream," "orthodox," "unorthodox" are all designations of the subsequent history of dogma -- an area that I don't think is what we have agreed to discuss here.

At least we can agree that there is no dogmatic reading of John 8:58. It has been utilized for, and integrated into, various dogmas. But that use does not in turn dictate what the verse in itself says. I have already stated that an accurate translation of the verse does not preclude its integration into a dogma along the lines you have advocated (eternal preexistence Christology), just as it does not preclude integration into an alternative dogma (limited preexistence Christology). You and I agree that one interpretation of the verse -- one that has shaped a commonly found English rendering -- that could be seen as weighing against one of the two dogmatic integrations is not really valid (that is, a direct quote of Exodus 3:14 is not involved here). Nevertheless, you have so far maintained a fondness for the rendering of the verse that I have argued is actually dependent on this invalid interpretation of the verse. So I expect our discussion to now move on to the fine points of meaning of the verb, and what we both feel is found or lost in various renderings of it. My argument to date has been simply this (and you will see that it is a kind of burden of proof claim): if such Greek constructions are typically and usually translated without a dangling be-verb at the end of the sentence and with suitable tense complementary between the main verb and its dependent clause, then one must explain why it should be translated differently here. And "differently" takes two forms: differently than any given translation typically handles such Greek, and differently than contemporary standard English normally expresses itself.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #5 – 8/18 – #15521:  
ROB #5: WORD ORDER (CONT.)**

Jason,

Thank you for your latest contribution to our discussion. Some of the issues you raise take us beyond the matter of English word order; I will postpone these for a later post.

I am gratified that my previous post was sufficiently probing that it elicited such effort on your part to clarify your argument concerning the word order of traditional renderings of John 8:58.

You are right that the study of grammar is descriptive, though we must not ignore the prescriptive dimension of how language is learned. To the best of my knowledge, in all languages and throughout recorded history, parents and teachers have corrected the grammar of the young. When we study how people actually use language, though, our concern is descriptive, not prescriptive. I think this observation cuts both ways, as I hope to explain in a later post.

I recognize that you did fault traditional versions at John 8:58 for the cumulative effect that you perceived in their “inverted word order” combined with their rendering of EIMI with “am.” However, if such “inversion” is not itself bad English, as you had claimed, it cannot be a valid part of a cumulative complaint against the versions exhibiting that word order. You argue that most versions are faulty in two respects and that it is that combination of the two faults that suggest bias. Well, if one of these faults is not really a fault, the argument based on the combination of the two “faults” is unsound.

The third “anomaly,” namely, the use of unusual capitalization—“I AM” or “I Am”—applies to only a few English versions. Moreover, in this case one can hardly blame the KJV, since it does not employ such unusual capitalization at John 8:58. I agree that the versions using such capitalization have tipped their hand; or, to put it more neutrally, they have made their understanding of the text more explicit. But one of the problems with your argument, from a polemical standpoint, is that you seem to allow your strong disapproval of these modern, explicitly worded renderings to “feed back” to the more traditional rendering “I am.” I would suggest reviewing the chapter of your book with this concern in mind.

If I understand you correctly, you agree with me that subordinate predicative clauses often can stand before the main verb in normal English, but you maintain that they cannot do so when the main verb is a form of the “be” verb:

<< ...this general flexibility of placement of a subordinated predicate complement is not found in connection with the English be-verb. >>

There are two main steps in your newly clarified argument. First, you argue that the “be” verb in English, unlike most other verbs, requires a predicate complement:

<< When in modern English we wish to make an existential statement independent of all complement, we abandon the be-verb and resort to some other existential verb, such as "exist." >>

Second, you argue that when we use the “be” verb with a predicate complement, that complement follows the “be” verb rather than preceding it. The only exceptions are irrelevant to John 8:58 (e.g., the locative “Here I am” or relative clauses such as “which you are”).

I think the first step of your argument is open to question. You note that in English we usually translate Descartes’ famous statement, *cogito ergo sum*, as “I think, therefore I am.” However, you regard this translation as “its classical form” that we retain “as an historical artifact,” just as we preserve Shakespeare in its original Elizabethan English. If we were serious about translating the *cogito* today, we would render it, “I think, therefore I exist.” Here, I must confess that I am unclear as to what you mean by “its classical form.” Are you referring to the Latin or to the conventional English translation? It would seem that you must mean the English translation, but I may be mistaken. If you do mean the English translation, then you seem to be suggesting that the translation “I think, therefore I am” was acceptable English centuries ago but is no longer good English. I am unsure if English has changed in this respect since, say, 1700.

If we move forward to the contemporary period, I think we can find examples of the “be” verb without an expressed complement that cannot qualify as mere “artifacts.” The famous Beatles’ song, “Let It Be,” which features a line that ends with those words, comes to mind. Should the line have been better expressed in English with the words, “Let it exist”?

You quoted *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* as stating, “Most obviously, the verb be almost always requires an internal complement” (222). “Almost always” is not the same as “absolutely always.”

On your second point, you quote *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* again as stating, “the preposing construction . . . is relatively unusual” for a complement. Well, “relatively unusual” is not the same as “bad English.”

Remember, your earlier claim was that these translations of John 8:58 “are not English sentences,” that they are “not English” or are “bad English,” and that the translations are so bad in this respect as to be “UNREADABLE.” In order to justify your conclusion (that the translations are theologically biased), you need to show that the English is unreadable to the point where it is not English at all. The more moderate statements of the *Cambridge Grammar* that such constructions are “relatively unusual” or that the “be” verb “almost always requires an internal complement” won’t do.



I would be happy with an assessment of the wording of the traditional translation of John 8:58 that described it as unusual or even odd. The reason I could accept such an assessment is that I think the wording of the original text is also unusual. In the end, how we resolve the issue of the propriety of the English rendering depends on how we understand the original language text. You think that the Greek wording of John 8:58 follows a perfectly normal Greek idiom. I do not, and that is the root of our real difference over this text.

Your comments on the difference between an “adjunct” subordinate temporal clause and an “obligatory” or “complementary” subordinate temporal clause are interesting. Throughout most of the long paragraph explaining this difference, you seem to be referring to English. At the end, though, you seem to be referring to the Greek. Picking up the paragraph about half way through, you wrote:

<< . . . The English be-verb does not, of course, take a direct object, but requires a predicate noun or adjective when it is used as a copula, or a DEPICTIVE COMPLEMENT such as an adverb when used existentially. This fact of English is stated, for example, in R. Huddleston & G. K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), on page 222: "Most obviously, the verb be almost always requires an internal complement." For example, one can say "Jill is in her study" but not "Jill is." One can say "The meeting was on Monday" but not "The meeting was." For the apparently intended meaning of the two unacceptable statements just given, an English speaker resorts to some other existential verb: "Jill exists." "The meeting occurred." The verb "to be" is not employed in modern English in this uncomplemented existential function. The authors of the Cambridge Grammar state that "only a small number of verbs (or verbal idioms) take complements of temporal location; clear examples include: i. be . . ." (page 694). This is precisely the case with John 8:58, where the prin clause is, I think, an obligatory temporal complement to eimi. >>

Perhaps you can see my confusion. The second to last sentence is a quotation from a “grammar of the English language”; the last sentence, immediately following, is an assertion that “this is precisely the case” in the \*Greek\* text of John 8:58. I think we need to distinguish two issues here: whether the PRIN clause is “an obligatory temporal complement” to EIMI (and if so, what that means), and whether in English we should translate the sentence to reflect the same grammatical structure as in the Greek.

I would be interested to know how you think we should translate the following Greek text:

“Before (PRO) the mountains were brought into being (GENHQHNAI) and the earth and the inhabited world were formed, even from age to age, you are (SU EI)” (Ps. 89:2 LXX).

I do hope to start posting soon on the exegesis of John 8:58 itself, and in particular on the question of the PPA.

**JASON #6A – 8/19 – #15522:  
ROB #5: WORD ORDER (CONT.)**

Rob,

Thank you for your latest post. It seems to me there are only a couple matters that require a response from me.

You say:

> You are right that the study of grammar is descriptive, though we must not ignore the prescriptive dimension of how language is learned. To the best of my knowledge, in all languages and throughout recorded history, parents and teachers have corrected the grammar of the young.

Yes, they do. And they correct any novice in English if they utter a sentence such as "Before Abraham was born, I am." You know it, and I know it. This is "Yoda English," if I may borrow a phrase from a correspondent, and is put into Yoda's mouth in the Star Wars movies precisely to make him quaintly alien.

You say:

> The third "anomaly," namely, the use of unusual capitalization--"I AM" or "I Am"--applies to only a few English versions. Moreover, in this case one can hardly blame the KJV, since it does not employ such unusual capitalization at John 8:58. I agree that the versions using such capitalization have tipped their hand; or, to put it more neutrally, they have made their understanding of the text more explicit.

So we have agreed that they are erroneous translations. The next question, then, which I have asked before, is what other basis is there for the "unusual" and "rare" (if you like) word order of those translations that are more careful not to "tip their hands"? I do not know for a fact that the KJV translators adhered to the interpretation that connects John 8:58 to Exodus 3:14. They could simply have been, as they often were, leaning a bit too heavily on the Vulgate.

You cite me as saying:

> If we were serious about translating the *cogito* today, we would render it, "I think, therefore I exist."

Then say:

>Here, I must confess that I am unclear as to what you mean by "its classical form." Are you referring to the Latin or to the conventional English translation? It would seem that you must mean the English translation, but I may be mistaken. If you do mean the English translation, then you seem to be suggesting that the translation "I think, therefore

I am" was acceptable English centuries ago but is no longer good English. I am unsure if English has changed in this respect since, say, 1700.

Sure it has. Haven't you read Shakespeare lately?

You say:

> If we move forward to the contemporary period, I think we can find examples of the "be" verb without an expressed complement that cannot qualify as mere "artifacts." The famous Beatles' song, "Let It Be," which features a line that ends with those words, comes to mind. Should the line have been better expressed in English with the words, "Let it exist"?

(1) It's an imperative clause, not an indicative one; (2) it's poetry, not prose, and has the wording it does to blur the boundary between the idea "Let it come to be" or "Let it exist" and "Leave it alone," if, as a life-long Beatle fan, I understand the song correctly. But I don't want to claim any special "insider" status. ;) For both reasons, it does not help us with the kind of English sentence we see in John 8:58.

You next pointed out the qualified language of the Cambridge Grammar: "almost always," "relatively unusual." If you've read the Cambridge Grammar, you know how revolutionary it is in the direction of descriptive, not prescriptive analysis of the language, how it accepts what people do as the grammar of the language, despite its violation of many of the "rules" you and I were taught as kids (rules that our publishers still adhere to, I may add), and how the authors phrase all of their descriptions of what we used to call the rules of the language in this qualified, cautious manner.

You say:

> I would be happy with an assessment of the wording of the traditional translation of John 8:58 that described it as unusual or even odd.

Good. We agree. Then the burden is on you to give a strong reason for adopting wording that is "unusual or even odd" here.

You seem to add a tentative reason:

>The reason I could accept such an assessment is that I think the wording of the original text is also unusual. In the end, how we resolve the issue of the propriety of the English rendering depends on how we understand the original language text. You think that the Greek wording of John 8:58 follows a perfectly normal Greek idiom. I do not, and that is the root of our real difference over this text.

Yes it is, because there is nothing at all unusual or abnormal about the Greek here. Please be precise: what is it that you consider out of the ordinary for Greek grammar here?

You note that at the end of a paragraph on English grammar, I refer back to the Greek of John 8:58. I am sorry if this confused you. I have gotten so use to the shorthand of "the

prin clause" and "eimi" that I simply reverted to these labels to refer to the two parts of the sentence. My point was about the English sentence.

So since we now agree that the English word order commonly found in translations of John 8:58 would require unusual justification, we can move on to probing what that justification might be, presumably in the Greek. I think it would also be helpful for you to answer the question from my previous post as to what specific meaning you find in "Before Abraham was born, I am," that is not present in "I have existed since before Abraham was born." I will then, of course, expect you to demonstrate that that meaning is the only valid one for the Greek of John 8:58.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**JASON #6B – 8/20 – #15524:  
JASON #6 (PSALM 89/90:2)**

Rob,

In your last message (#5), you asked me to comment on Psalm 89:2 (LXX). In a previous post, you had offered this verse as an example of an English sentence in which an adverbial clause preceded a main clause that employed the verb "to be." This is Psalm 90:2 in English Bibles. The NIV translation is: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." I pointed out that this provides no parallel to John 8:58 because the main clause is a complete copulative clause, "You are God," and so the adverbial clause is an adjunct, not a complement to the verb. One should also note that the Psalms are poetry, not prose.

Now you have asked me to comment on the Greek of this verse, as found in the Septuagint (LXX). Of course, the English verse is not a translation of the Greek of the LXX; it is a translation from the Hebrew, which reads substantially as the NIV has it. The Greek differs. I give it in the transliteration used on this site, along with an interlinear (lexical) rendering of each word:

PRO TOU ORH GENHQHNAI  
before the mountain came to be  
KAI PLASQHNAI THN GHN KAI THN OIKOUMENHN  
and was formed the earth and the world  
KAI APO TOU AIWNOS EWS TOU AIWNOS  
and from the age until the age  
SU EI  
you are

You have asked me how I would translate this verse. If we remove the second adverbial modifier (the APO phrase), and keep only the first adverbial modifier (the PRO clause) with the main clause, this would clearly have to be translated:

"You have been before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed."  
or better

"You have existed before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed."

The formally present tense verb of the main clause (EI) is a PPA, because it is modified by an adverbial clause indicating past time. Therefore the subject did and continues to do the action of the verb (that's what a PPA is), in this case, "exist."

One COULD NOT translate this sentence as:

"You are before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed."  
Such a translation (1) ignores the Greek idiom that indicates continuation of past action in the present, and so violates the Greek, and (2) ignores English verbal tense complementarity, and so violates English. Unlike Greek, English does not (cannot) use a present tense verb to convey continuation of past action in the present. English uses the imperfect tense for that meaning. This is the case with this verse because of the adverbial clause which indicates that the action of the main verb began in the past.

Granted that the Psalms are poetry, and as such may employ more varied word order than prose, one could arguably translate this sentence with the adverbial clause first:

"Before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed, you have existed."

Note that this form of the sentence is to be preferred to:

"Before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed, you have been."  
As I said in a previous post, in modern English such a dangling be-verb calls out for a depictive complement, and the reader or listener must mentally go back over the sentence and, in effect, retranslate, either restoring standard prose word order or substituting "existed" for "been" for the sentence to make sense.

The simple sentence I have been discussing is complicated by the addition of a second adverbial modifier, this one a phrase rather than a clause. This addition moves the verse away from the close similarity of structure to John 8:58 that the more simple sentence would have. It adds a new adverbial element that may impact the best translation of the main verb. Whether it does or not depends upon the temporal meaning of "from the age until the age," which as it stands in the Greek is ambiguous. Are the ages referred to here, in their immediate literary context, all ages past and future, or only ages of the past? Note that I am not asking a theological question, but a literary one. I am not asking if the Psalmist believes God to exist through all ages past and future; I am asking if the Psalmist refers to such an eternal existence here, or is making another point. Note the previous verse, in both its verbal tense and structure (I give it in the NIV translation): "Lord, you have been (EGENHQHS) our dwelling place throughout all generations (EN GENE KAI GENE)." The Psalmist is speaking of a past record of accomplishment, and the close structural parallelism of "in generation and generation" to "from the age until the age" would lead me to read the latter as referring to past ages as well. If that is the sense of the APO phrase, then the translation of the rest of the verse is not significantly changed:

"You have existed from age to age, before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed." or, more poetically,

"Before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed, from age to age, you have existed."

But let's assume that the Psalmist is shifting from what God has been to what he is in the middle of verse 2, and that "from the age until the age" refers to all ages past and future.

In order to avoid a non sequiter, with conflicting temporal modifications of the main verb (one past tense adverbial clause and one trans-temporal present adverbial phrase), we must choose one of the two adverbial expressions as having priority over the other in connection with the main verb. That is, we need to consider one of them a depictive complement to the verb, and the other as a more distantly connected adjunct. So, if we choose the APO phrase as the complement, and understand it as a trans-temporal present, then we would translate the main verb differently, using the present tense:

"You exist from age to age, before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed." or "Before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed, from age to age, you exist."

Note that "exist" is the verb we would normally use in English for the sense of this sentence, and not "You are from age to age" or "From age to age, you are." Note, too, that the presence of the past tense adverbial PRO clause makes any translation with the main verb as a present tense awkward, since the PRO clause does not provide a suitably trans-temporal modification of the main verb (something like "Before the mountain came to be and after it is reduced to dust") – it contains only past time reference. For this reason, I think that my first reading, with both adverbs having a past tense reference, remains the best:

"You have existed from age to age, before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed."

Or

"Before the mountain came to be and the earth and world were formed, you have existed from age to age."

Finally, note that only the presence of the APO phrase gives us any reason to hesitate on the PPA status of the main verb. Without the APO phrase, with the main verb EI (2nd person singular form of EIMI) modified only by an adverbial clause of past time reference (the PRO clause here, the PRIN clause in John 8:58), it would be absolutely clear that the main verb is used to express continuation of past action. God is not said to now exist before mountains and earth were formed, as if the mountains and earth are things that will in the future come to be. They already came to be in the past, and so God's existence "before" them is a past fact, but also an ongoing fact, and that is why the Greek employs EI as the standard idiomatic way to convey this complex verbal meaning. This is exactly the same in John 8:58, where the same idiom is employed.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.



**ROB #6 – 8/30 – #15554:**

**ROB #6: THE PPA AND ADVERBIAL PHRASES**

Jason,

In this post, I will begin commenting on the question of EIMI in John 8:58 as a present of past action in progress (PPA). I will start by reviewing what Greek grammar textbooks say about the PPA, surveying all of the NT texts cited as examples of the PPA and then addressing the issue of the role of adverbial phrases in the PPA. See the end of this post for a bibliography of Greek grammar textbooks cited. References are to page numbers rather than sections unless otherwise indicated.

I. SURVEY OF GREEK GRAMMARS ON THE PPA

A. What the Greek Grammars Say about the PPA

Let me begin by setting out what Greek grammars say about the PPA.

Winer (334): “Sometimes the present tense includes a preterite..., viz., when the verb indicates a state which commenced at an earlier period but still continues,--a state in its continuance.”

Goodwin (9): “The present is often used with expressions denoting past time, especially PALAI, in the sense of a perfect and a present combined.”

Jannaris (434): “It often stands with adverbial expressions denoting past time, such as PALAI ‘long since,’ ARTI or ARTIWS ‘just (now),’ where in English the progressive present would seem to be required (\_I have long been looking\_).”

Burton (10): “\*The Present of past Action still in Progress.\* The Present Indicative, accompanied by an adverbial expression denoting duration and referring to past time, is sometimes used in Greek, as in German, to describe an action which, beginning in past time, is still in progress at the time of speaking. English idiom requires the use of the Perfect in such cases.... This Present is almost always incorrectly rendered in the R. V.”

Robertson (879): “\_The Progressive Present\_. This is a poor name in lieu of a better one for the present of past action still in progress. Usually an adverb of time (or adjunct) accompanies the verb.... Often it has to be translated into English by a sort of ‘progressive perfect’ (‘have been’), though, of course, that is the fault of the English.”

Dana and Mantey (183): “Sometimes the progressive present is retroactive in its application, denoting that which has begun in the past and continues into the present. For

the want of a better name, we may call it the present of duration. This use is generally associated with an adverb of time, and may best be rendered by the English perfect.”

Smyth (422): “\*Present of Past and Present Combined.\*--The present, when accompanied by a definite or indefinite expression of past time, is used to express an action begun in the past and continued in the present. The ‘progressive perfect’ is often used in translation.”

BDF (168): “The pres[ent] is not perfective in those cases where the duration or repetition of an act up to and including the present is to be designated (a temporal expression indicates the intended period of the past).”

Turner (62): “The Present which indicates the continuance of an action during the past and up to the moment of speaking is virtually the same as Perfective, the only difference being that the action is conceived as still in progress (Burton, [sect.] 17).”

Brooks and Winbery (77): “Durative Present. Some grammarians call this the progressive present. An action or a state of being which began in the past is described as continuing until the present. The past and the present are gathered up in a single affirmation. An adverb of time is often used with this kind of present, but a verb alone is sometimes sufficient as in the final example given below [2 Cor. 12:9]. This use of the Greek present is usually translated by the English present perfect. Although impractical to bring out in English translation, the full meaning is that something has been and still is.”

Greenlee (49): “Past action continuing into the present (requires a specific phrase expressing the past aspect).”

Fanning (217-18): “Far more specialized than the customary or gnomic presents but sharing the same broad frame of reference is the use of the present indicative to denote a situation which began in the past and continues in the present. This is more specialized because it always includes an adverbial phrase or other time-indication with the present verb to signal the past-time meaning. However, it is otherwise like the customary or gnomic in sense.... It is unlike the other uses in that it explicitly includes a period of the past during which the situation continued as well.... Because of the past-time indication, the idiomatic translation is an English present perfect, and not a simple or progressive present.... There seems to be no shorthand term which serves well this category.... But most grammars are content to use some form of the lengthy description ‘past action still in progress’ without a shorthand title, and this seems the most accurate approach.”

Young (111): “A present tense form is called durative when the context conveys an action that began in the past and continues into the present. The time element is often explicit in the context.... English translations will therefore employ the present perfect.”

McKay (41, 42): “Extension from Past. When used with an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications (but not in past narrative, for which see 4.2.5),

the present tense signals an activity begun in the past and continuing to the present time: . . . This is a form of the continual realization of the imperfective aspect, and similar uses are found with the imperfect tense and with imperfective participles. . . .”

Wallace (519): “Extending-from-Past Present (Present of Past Action Still in Progress). 1. Definition. The present tense may be used to describe an action which, begun in the past, continues in the present. The emphasis is on the present time. . . . It is different from the progressive present in that it reaches back in time and usually has some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase, to show this past-referring element. Depending on how tightly one defines this category, it is either relatively rare or fairly common.”

#### B. Analysis of What the Greek Grammars Say about the PPA

Some summary observations are in order.

First, almost all of these grammars note that the action or state that the verb expresses is “still in progress at the time of speaking” (Burton). The action or state “still continues” (Winer), is “still in progress” (Burton; Robertson; Turner; Fanning), “continues into the present” (Dana and Mantey; Young), is “continued in the present” (Smyth), is “continuing until the present” and so “still is” (Brooks and Winbery), is “continuing into the present” (Greenlee), is “continuing to the present time” (McKay), and “continues in the present” (Fanning again; Wallace). Only Goodwin, Jannaris, and BDF do not make this explicit.

Second, most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression modifies the present-tense verb. These are described as “expressions denoting past time” (Goodwin), “adverbial expressions denoting past time” (Jannaris), “an adverbial expression denoting duration and referring to past time” (Burton), “an adverb of time (or adjunct)” (Robertson), “an adverb of time” (Dana and Mantey; Brooks and Winbery), “a definite or indefinite expression of past time” (Smyth), “a temporal expression [that] indicates the intended period of the past” (BDF), “a specific phrase expressing the past aspect” (Greenlee), “an adverbial phrase or other time-indication” (Fanning), “an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications” (McKay), and “some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase” (Wallace). Of those who offer any description of the PPA beyond a title, only Winer, Turner, and Young fail to mention this temporal adverbial expression.

Third, we should note the somewhat varying assessments that these grammars give as to how often these adverbials accompany a PPA verb. Goodwin, Jannaris, Burton, Smyth, and McKay all say that the PPA occurs when such adverbials accompany the verb. (By “often” Goodwin and Jannaris mean that the PPA usage often occurs, not that it often has such adverbials associated with it.) Greenlee says that such an adverbial is “required” and Fanning states that the PPA “always includes” such an adverbial. BDF defines the PPA as having such an adverbial, but then cites one text, Acts 26:31, as an exception. Robertson and Wallace say that such an adverbial “usually” occurs; Dana and Mantey

say “generally.” Brooks and Winbery say that such an adverbial occurs “often” but not always; again, they cite only one exception (2 Cor. 12:9).

In short, eight grammars (Goodwin, Jannaris, Burton, Smyth, BDF, Greenlee, Fanning, and McKay) regard the use of such an adverbial as part of the definition of the PPA (with one, BDF, noting one apparent exception), while four grammars state that the PPA “usually,” “generally,” or “often” has such an adverbial accompanying it. It would seem from this review that clear-cut examples of the PPA will have such an adverbial. We can investigate whether the PPA ever occurs without such an adverbial on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, by an “adverbial expression” of past time most of these grammars evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase. Three mention “an adverb of time” and two (Fanning and Wallace) mention “an adverbial phrase.” Robertson says “an adverb of time (or adjunct).” Here “adjunct” evidently means a phrase or group of words that are not strictly necessary for the sentence or clause to be complete. Most of the examples that the grammars cite, as we will see, have such adjuncts or adverbial phrases. The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA).

## II. SURVEY OF NT EXAMPLES OF THE PPA CITED IN GREEK GRAMMARS

At this point, I will quote the relevant portions of the NT texts that NT Greek grammars have cited as examples of the PPA, including John 8:58 for now. I am listing every example that I have seen listed in the grammars, regardless of whether I agree that the verb is a PPA. The verbs that these grammars identify as PPAs are marked with asterisks; the Greek words of the (real or alleged) qualifying adverbial expressions, as well as some of the verbs, are in all capitals. Following each verse, I have placed in brackets the references in the grammars supporting each, and any dissenting comments.

### A. The PPA Example Texts Cited in the Grammars

“Look, your father and I have been searching\* (EZHTOUMEN; alt., ZHTOUMEN) with great anxiety (ODUNWMENOI) for you” (Luke 2:48). [Turner, 62; Moule, 8; Robertson, 879, says “descriptive present”]

“Look, for three years (TRIA ETH AF’ hOU) I have been coming\* searching for\* fruit” (Luke 13:7). [Burton, 10; Robertson, 879; BDF, 168; Turner, 62; Moule, 8; Dana & Mantey, 183; Brooks and Winbery, 77; Fanning, 217; McKay, 41]

“Look, all these years (TOSAUTA ETH) I have been serving\* you” (Luke 15:29). [Burton, 10; BDF, 168; Turner, 62; Moule, 8; Greenlee, 49; Brooks and Winbery, 77; Fanning, 217; Young, 111; McKay, 41]

“Jesus, seeing him lying there, and knowing that he had been\* (ECEI) that way a long time already (POLUN HDH CRONON)...” (John 5:6). [Jannaris sect. 1834; Burton, 10; Robertson, 879; Turner, 62; Moule, 8; Brooks and Winbery, 77; Fanning, 217]

“Before Abraham came into existence (PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI), I am\*” (John 8:58). [Winer, 334 (who says to compare Jer. 1:5; Ps. 89:2 LXX); BDF, 168; Turner, 62; McKay, 42; Robertson, 880, says EIMI is “really absolute”; Wallace, 531 n. 46, says this is not “convincing”]

“I have been\* (EIMI) with you so long a time (TOSOUTWi CRONWi MEQ’ hUMWN)” (John 14:9). [Robertson, 879; Turner, 62; Young, 111; Greenlee, 49; Fanning, 217; McKay, 41]

“And you testify, because you have been\* (EIMI) with me from the beginning (AP’ ARCHS MET’ EMOU)” (John 15:27). [Winer, 334; BDF, 168; Robertson, 879; Turner, 62; Dana & Mantey, 183 (but cf. 186, “static present”); Brooks and Winbery, 77; Fanning, 218; Young, 111]

“For Moses has had\* (ECEI) from ancient generations (EK GENEWN ARCAIWN) in every city those who preach him” (Acts 15:21). [Burton, 10; Turner, 62; Moule, 8; Fanning, 218]

“This man has been doing (PRASSEI) nothing worthy of death or imprisonment” (Acts 26:31). [BDF, 168, “without temporal designation (referring to Paul’s whole way of life, especially his Christianity)”; Turner, 62, who says “his manner of life still continues”; but cf. Winer, 334, “the reference is not to Paul’s previous life, but to his conduct generally, \_this man...does nothing bad\_.”]

“You are going\* a fourteenth day today (TESSARESKAIDEKATHN SHMERON hHMERAN) without food, living in suspense, and have eaten nothing” (Acts 27:33). [Fanning, 218; Wallace, 520]

“Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain\* until now (hEWS ARTI), though some have died” (1 Cor. 15:6). [Wallace, 520, says this is a “possible” instance]

“My grace is sufficient (ARKEI) for you, for power is perfected (TELEITAI) in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). [Dana & Mantey, 183 (could be misprint for 12:19); Brooks and Winbery, 77; Robertson, 879, says “descriptive present”; Fanning, 217 n. 30, says these verbs “are better understood as gnomic presents”]

“Have you been thinking\* all this time (PALAI) that we have been defending\* ourselves to you?” (2 Cor. 12:19). [BDF, 168; Robertson, 879; Turner, 62]

“...and that from childhood (APO BREFOUS) you have known\* (OIDA) the sacred writings...” (2 Tim. 3:15). [Burton, 10; Robertson, 879; Turner, 62; Moule, 8]

“For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have remained\* the same from the beginning of creation (AP’ ARCHS KTISEWS)” (2 Pet. 3:4). [Winer, 334; Robertson, 879; Turner, 62; Fanning, 218; but Dana & Mantey, 186, call it “static present”]

“The one saying he is in the light and yet hating his brother is\* (ESTIN) in the darkness up to now (hEWS ARTI)” (1 John 2:9). [Robertson, 879; Turner, 62]

“...the devil has been sinning\* from the beginning (AP’ ARCHS)” (1 John 3:8). [Winer, 334; Robertson, 879; Turner, 62; Fanning, 218; Young, 111; but Dana & Mantey, 186, call it “static present”]

#### B. Why These Grammars Omit John 2:9 and Similar Texts

I need to make one comment about this list, before proceeding further. In your first post, Jason, you wrote:

“A PPA verb does not even need such a modifying clause, for example in Luke 2:48 listed by Rob, or John 2:9 not included in his list (and there are many others).”

I will comment on Luke 2:48 later. However, regarding John 2:9 (not to be confused with 1 John 2:9), I should point out that Winer (335) expressly excludes from the PPA texts using the present tense in place of a past tense where this is the result of mixing direct and indirect discourse. The lead example Winer gives is John 2:9, though he lists quite a number of other examples. Likewise, Robertson in his comment on this verse in *Word Pictures in the New Testament* states that POQEN ESTIN expresses an “indirect question retaining present indicative.” Moreover, I have not found a single grammar that lists John 2:9 in this category. I will therefore follow Winer here and exclude 1 John 2:9 and other texts fitting this category from the list of possible PPAs.

#### B. Undisputed Examples of the PPA

The grammars in the survey above list 17 NT references as examples of the PPA. Of these, 11 are uncontested (Luke 13:7; 15:29; John 5:6; 14:9; 15:27; Acts 15:21; 27:33; 1 Cor. 15:6 [which one writer, Wallace, lists as “possible”]; 2 Cor. 12:19; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 John 2:9). In each of these 11 uncontested examples of the PPA, the present-tense main verb is modified by a temporal adverb or adverbial phrase:

“for three years” (Luke 13:7)

“so many years” (Luke 15:29)

“a long time” (John 5:6)

“so long a time” (John 14:9)

“from the beginning” (John 15:27)

“from ancient generations” (Acts 15:21)

“a fourteenth day today” (Acts 27:33)

“until now” (1 Cor. 15:6)

“all this time” (2 Cor. 12:19)  
“from infancy” (2 Tim. 3:15)  
“up to right now” (1 John 2:9)

Two of the contested examples also have such an adverbial phrase:

“from the beginning of creation” (2 Pet. 3:4)  
“from the beginning” (1 John 3:8)

Dana and Mantey classify these two texts as “static presents,” but it is difficult to see why. If we include these two texts, as we probably should, 13 of the 17 texts listed in the grammars as examples of the PPA have such a temporal adverb or adverbial phrase modifying the main verb. Of these 13 texts, 11 are undisputed examples.

### C. Disputed Examples (Excluding John 8:58 for Now)

Of the remaining 3 example texts that are disputed (excluding John 8:58 for now), \*none\* of them has a temporal adverb or adverbial phrase modifying the main verb (Luke 2:48; John 8:58; Acts 26:31; 2 Cor. 12:9). In other words, of the 16 examples besides John 8:58 listed in the grammars, 13 have temporal adverbials and are almost always acknowledged as PPAs, whereas the other 3 that do not have a temporal adverbial are all disputed as examples of the PPA. These data, at the very least, support the position that where a temporal adverbial word or phrase is lacking, the burden of proof is on the one who would argue that the present-tense verb is a PPA.

For a simple overview of how the grammars line up on these 17 texts, see the short paper “Greek Grammars and the PPA,” located in the Files section of this discussion group:

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/evangelicals\\_and\\_jws/files](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/evangelicals_and_jws/files)

Let’s look at the other three disputed examples of the PPA.

#### 1. Luke 2:48

Two grammars (those by Turner and Moule) classified the present tense verb ZHTOUMEN as a PPA. As noted above, though, A. T. Robertson classified ZHTOUMEN in Luke 2:48 under the heading “descriptive present” rather than a PPA (p. 879). The descriptive present expresses a “durative action” in “present time.” There is a very good reason to dispute Turner and Moule’s classification of ZHTOUMEN: The action clearly is not still in progress at the time of speaking. Mary and Joseph have found Jesus, and after finding him, Mary makes this statement. For this reason alone, we should not classify the verb as a PPA.

We could translate Mary’s statement as follows: “Your father and I are going crazy looking for you!” As I pointed out in *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel*

of John, Mary's statement is an emotional outburst, so the above translation probably captures the sense and tone of her statement quite accurately.

In addition, I should note that the preferred reading is EZHTOUMEN, which is imperfect, not present tense. The NA and UBS texts accept this reading; my 4th edition of the UBSGNT does not even mention the present-tense form as an alternate reading. (The Westcott-Hort text did have ZHTOUMEN.) In his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Robertson accepts the reading EZHTOUMEN: "Imperfect tense describing the long drawn out search for three days."

Given the dubious textual basis for the present-tense reading, the fact that the action of the verb is not still in progress at the time of speaking, the sense of Mary's statement as a whole, and the lack of any temporal adverbial expression, it is best not to count Luke 2:48 as an instance of the PPA.

## 2. Acts 26:31

As noted previously, two grammars classify Acts 26:31 as a PPA. BDF states here that the verb appears "without temporal designation (referring to Paul's whole way of life, especially his Christianity)" (p. 168). The reference in BDF to the lack of a "temporal designation" is an acknowledgment that such a temporal expression is at least customary with the PPA. Turner also classifies Acts 26:31 as a PPA, saying, "his manner of life still continues" (p. 62). However, Winer comments: "the reference is not to Paul's previous life, but to his conduct generally, *this man...does nothing bad*" (p. 334). In other words, Winer actually describes the verb as what Robertson calls a descriptive present or, perhaps somewhat more precisely, what Wallace calls a customary or general present (Wallace, 521-22). The actual explanation of the statement offered in BDF also agrees with this classification. Therefore, I conclude that Acts 26:31 is not a reliable example of the PPA.

## 3. Second Corinthians 12:9

"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient [ARKEI] for you, for power is perfected [TELEITAI] in weakness.'" (NASB) Brooks and Winbery clearly think this is an example of the PPA. Dana and Mantey also give this reference, although it is just possible that they meant 2 Corinthians 12:19, an undisputed example of the PPA. Robertson classifies 2 Corinthians 12:9 as another "descriptive present." Fanning states that the two verbs "are better understood as gnomic presents." Wallace says that this example "is debatable."

An exegesis of the text leads me to conclude that the two verbs in 2 Corinthians 12:19 are not valid examples of the PPA. Most English translations render the first verb, ARKEI, in the simple present tense, "is sufficient." Nothing in the context suggests that we should construe this verb as a PPA, which would then mean something like, "My grace has been and continues to be sufficient for you." The problem with such a rendering is not that it is impossible but that it is overreaching, unwarranted, and inferior to a much better



interpretation. The most likely force of the verb in this context is, as Fanning notes, \*gnomic\*—that is, expressing a general principle or maxim. This is a common use of the present (see, e.g., Wallace, 523-25). In this instance, the text is saying that the grace of Christ is always sufficient for Paul (and for us). A more dynamic translation might be, “My grace is all you need” (e.g., the NLT has “My gracious favor is all you need”). Christ is not making an historical observation about the sufficiency of his grace for Paul in the past up to the point of his speaking; he is stating a principle on which Paul is to maintain his faith or confidence in Christ despite his suffering.

The second verb, TELEITAI, is a present passive form, and thus literally translated “is perfected” or “is made perfect.” To construe it to be a PPA would mean understanding it to mean something like “has been and is continuing to be perfected.” Such an interpretation, again, would err by turning Christ’s statement from a statement of principle into a historical assertion. What Christ was telling Paul was that Christ most completely expresses his power in our lives when we are at our weakest. We should therefore construe this verb also as gnomic.

I conclude, then, that 2 Corinthians 12:9 is almost certainly not a valid example of the PPA.

#### D. Review of Undisputed and Disputed Examples

What do we have, then? We have 13 undisputed or reasonably clear examples of the PPA in the NT, all of which have a temporal adverb or adverbial phrase modifying the present-tense verb. Three other disputed examples of the PPA, each of which is classified as a PPA by only two grammar textbooks, lack such a temporal adverbial, and each of them can be just as well explained, and even better explained, as something other than a PPA.

This leaves us with John 8:58, another disputed example, which does not have a temporal adverbial word or phrase modifying the verb. Rather, it has a temporal subordinate clause with its own verb, PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI. Might it be that a temporal subordinate clause can create the conditions under which a present-tense verb functions as a PPA? The best way to answer this question is to compare John 8:58 to other texts in which we find the same pattern. I will do this in my next post.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Here are the grammars I include in this survey (listed in chronological order):

Winer, G. B. *\_A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek\_*, trans. W. F. Moulton. 3d rev. ed.; 9th Eng. ed. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882.

Goodwin, William Watson. *\_Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb\_*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1890.

Jannaris, A. N. *An Historical Greek Grammar Chiefly of the Attic Dialect*. New York: Macmillan, 1897.

Burton, Ernest De Witt. *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*. 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900. Reprint, Minneapolis: Kregel, 1976.

Robertson, A. T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931.

Dana, H. E., and Julius R. Mantey. *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Prentice-Hall, 1957.

Smyth, Herbert Weir. *Greek Grammar*. Rev. by Gordon M. Messing. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Moule, C. F. D. *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*. 2d ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959.

Blass, F., 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. [cited as BDF]

Turner, Nigel. *Syntax*. Volume III, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by James Hope Moulton. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963.

Brooks, James A., and Carlton L. Winbery. *Syntax of New Testament Greek*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1979.

Greenlee, J. Harold. *A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek*. 5th rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

Fanning, Buist M. *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Young, Richard A. *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.

McKay, K. L. *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

**ROB #7 – 8/30 – #15555:**

**THE PPA AND TEMPORAL CLAUSES WITH \_PRIN\_ OR \_PRO\_**

Jason,

In this post I will comment on texts that more closely parallel John 8:58 grammatically than the PPA texts. In the texts surveyed here, the main clause has a present indicative verb and is qualified by a subordinate clause with an aorist infinitive introduced by PRIN, PRIN H, or PRO TOU. I will first consider all of the biblical texts in this category, and I will then address the two extrabiblical examples you cited.

**I. BIBLICAL TEXTS**

In my research, I have found eleven texts in the canonical books of the Bible that parallel the grammar and syntax of John 8:58 (LXX: Ex. 1:19; Deut. 31:21; Job 8:12; Ps. 89:2 [90:2 Eng.]; Prov. 8:25; 18:13; Is. 46:10; Jer. 1:5; Mal. 3:22 [4:5 Eng.]; NT: Matt. 6:8; 13:19).

It turns out that not one of these eleven biblical texts is a PPA. In all of them, the main verb expresses an action, event, or state of being antecedent to the point in time specified in the PRIN/PRO clause. If that main verb denotes an action or state of being that continues after the point in time specified in the PRIN/PRO clause, it does so timelessly or eternally.

These eleven texts, I hasten to make clear, do not all use the present tense verb in the same way as John 8:58. In some of them, the verb is an iterative present (Ex. 1:19 LXX; probably Is. 46:10 LXX). One is a customary present (Job 8:12 LXX), another is a gnomic present (Prov. 18:13), another is a futuristic present (Mal. 3:22 LXX), and another is a conative or tendential present (John 13:19). The other five, in my estimation, are all instances of an unusual use of the present that I call the eternal present (Deut. 31:21 LXX; Ps. 89:2; LXX; Prov. 8:25 LXX; Jer. 1:5; Matt. 6:8). I expect you to challenge my judgment as to what use of the present each of these texts exhibits here or there. However, I think the evidence shows that *\*none\** of these texts as a PPA.

Let's look at each of these texts in canonical order. For details on the different uses of the present tense, see almost any standard Greek grammar; I have used terms found in Wallace's *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 513-39.

Exodus 1:19 LXX:

“...for they give birth [TIKTOUSIN] before [PRIN H] the midwives get [EISELQEIN, aorist infinitive] to them.”

Here TIKTOUSIN is probably to be construed as an \*iterative present\*. The speaker is saying that repeatedly the Hebrew women (of that general period) give birth before the midwives can arrive to assist.

Deut. 31:21 LXX:

“...for I know [OIDA, perfect indicative used as present] their wickedness which they do [POIOUSIN, present indicative] here this day, before [PRO TOU] I have brought [EISAGAGEIN, aorist infinitive] them....”

Of the standard classifications of uses of the present, the only one that comes close is the \*gnomic present\*, which expresses “a general, timeless fact” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 523). However, the gnomic present does not relate its timeless truth to a specific event in the past, and need not be durative. We seem to have here either an unusual subcategory of the gnomic present or a different category of use. It expresses a state of affairs that is timelessly true, that is, a state that has always been true, even before a particular event of the past to which that state of affairs is related. The sense is that God simply and always knows what wickedness these (and other) people will do, even before they do it. I will call this unusual usage the \*eternal present\*.

Job 8:12 LXX:

“...does not any herb wither [XHPAINETAI, present passive indicative] before [PRO TOU] it has received moisture [PIEIN, aorist infinitive]?”

The question in context appears to express rhetorically (and hyperbolically) a recurring situation of concern, in which case the verb is to be construed as a \*customary present\*. Job is complaining that life is bad—even herbs with their roots are drying up before they can get water.

Psalm 89:2 LXX (90:2 Eng.):

“Before [PRO TOU; in some mss., PRIN] the mountains were brought into existence [GENHQHNAI, aorist infinitive] and the earth and the world were formed [PLASQHNAI, aorist infinitive], even from everlasting to everlasting [APO TOU AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS], you are [SU EI, the second-person equivalent of EGW EIMI].”

This is one of the two LXX texts that Winer compared John 8:58. The present indicative EI here is clearly an \*eternal present\*. The phrase “even from everlasting to everlasting” makes this connotation rather explicit. Note the progression in the text:

Before the mountains were brought into existence,  
And the earth and the world were formed,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting,  
You are.

Each successive clause or phrase widens the temporal scope of God’s existence, from the rise of the mountains to the antecedent formation of the earth and the world to the omnitemporal passing of the ages. This progression eliminates any supposed ambiguity as to whether “from the age to the age” expresses omnitemporal (everlasting) existence. It also proves that the climactic present tense verb EI expresses some kind of transtemporal existence: God is literally “ageless.” It is a mistake to circumscribe the temporal force of EI to that typical of the PPA, a state continuing from the past into the present, since to limit it in this way would ignore the literary feature of the poetic progression and would not take into account the future-oriented hEWS TOU AIWNOS.

However, the verb EI is qualified not only by that phrase but also by the subordinate PRO/PRIN clause. The force of EI is the same in relation to both that subordinate clause and the shorter adverbial phrase. Thus, this text illustrates the fact that the present indicative qualified by such a PRO/PRIN + aorist infinitive clause can be construed as an everlasting present.

Prov. 8:25 LXX:

“...before [PRO TOU] the mountains were settled [EDRASQHNAI, aorist infinitive passive], and before [PRO] all hills, he begets [GENNAi, present indicative] me.”

Given the highly controversial status of this text (as part of Proverbs 8:22-31), agreement on the significance of the present tense here may be difficult to reach. Since wisdom’s “begetting” by the Lord cannot be a repeated or temporally ongoing event, we may set aside the iterative, customary, and PPA uses of the present. Since the begetting does not take place at the time of writing, we must eliminate the “punctiliar” and descriptive presents. The conative (“about to be”) and futuristic (“will be”) uses are clearly out. Again, this isn’t a “timeless truth” in the sense of a maxim or general principle. This leaves the historical present and the eternal present. If GENNAi is an historical present, it is a highly unusual one in many respects, though I am not sure that it can be ruled out absolutely. (The odds of an historical present in a translation of a bit of Hebrew poetry would seem to be extremely minute.) The eternal present has some merit to it, especially if verse 23 is understood (as I think it should) to be saying that wisdom was established before time (PRO TOU AIWNOS). In addition, the similarity between this text and Psalm 89:2 LXX supports the \*eternal present\* view. The main evidence against this reading of the Greek is the use of EKTISEN (“made”) in verse 22. It seems that any way we construe the verb GENNAi will have to recognize its use as part of a highly poetic passage.

Proverbs 18:13 LXX:

“He who answers [APOKRINETAI, present indicative middle] a matter before [PRIN] hearing it [AKOUSAI, aorist infinitive]....”

This is clearly a \*gnomic present\*. The sense is that giving an answer before one clearly hears and understands the question results in one's embarrassment. The proverb asserts this observation as a general, timeless truth (typical of proverbs).

Isaiah 46:10 LXX:

“...declaring [ANANGELLWN, present active participle] beforehand the last things before [PRIN] they come to be [GENESQAI, aorist infinitive]...”

Although ANANGELLWN is a participle rather than an indicative, the grammar appears to be sufficiently akin to the other examples to warrant including this text on the list. The present participle may be construed either as an iterative present (the Lord repeatedly announces through his prophets beforehand what will happen before it does) or as an eternal present (the Lord decrees from everlasting what will happen before it does). In my estimation, the \*iterative present\* is somewhat more likely here.

Jeremiah 1:5 LXX:

“Before [PRO TOU] I formed [PLASAI, aorist infinitive] you in the womb, I know [EPISTAMAI, present indicative] you; and before [PRO TOU] you came [EXELQEIN, aorist infinitive] from your mother's womb, I consecrated [HEGIAKA, perfect indicative] you; I appointed [TEQEIKA, perfect indicative] you as a prophet to the nations.”

This is the other LXX text that Winer compared to John 8:58. In view of the perfect tense verbs “consecrated” and “appointed” that parallel the first line, it would be a mistake to translate that first line “I have been knowing you since before I formed you in the womb” (as if EPISTAMAI were a PPA). The sense of the whole statement is that God has \*always\* known what he planned for Jeremiah to do. His consecration or appointment was not a contingency choice but God's intention for him all along. Thus, the best classification of EPISTAMAI in this context is the \*eternal present\*.

Malachi 3:22 LXX (3:23 MT; 4:5 Eng.):

“And behold, I am sending [APOSTELLW, present indicative] to you Elijah the prophet before [PRIN] the great and terrible day of the Lord comes [ELQEIN, aorist infinitive].”

This is actually a \*futuristic present\*; the sense is that God will send this Elijah figure before the eschatological day of the Lord.

Matthew 6:8:

“...for your Father knows [OIDEN, perfect indicative with present meaning] what you need before [PRO TOU] you ask [AITHSAI, aorist infinitive] Him.”

Since the asking can occur at any time, the verb “knows” (OIDEN) can be construed as a \*general present\* (whenever you ask, it is the case that God already knows). On the other

hand, since the point of the text is that God already knows what one needs whether or not one asks, it seems likely that this is another \*eternal present\*.

John 13:19:

“From now on [AP’ ARTI] I am telling [LEGW, present indicative] you before [PRO TOU] it comes to be [GENESQAI]. . . .”

Thematically this statement recalls Isaiah 46:10 (see above) and similar statements in Isaiah. Grammatically, LEGW appears to be a kind of conative present, more specifically the \*tendential present\* (Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 533-34). The sense of the text is, “I am going to start telling you right now, before it happens. . . .”

To review so far: The evidence shows that none of these 11 biblical texts is a PPA. The only ones ever classified as a PPA, to my knowledge, are Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:5. However, I have shown that we should classify both of those texts as examples of the eternal present. In any case, at the very least, one can no longer argue that texts following this grammatical pattern \*must\* be assigned the category PPA. Beyond any reasonable doubt, nine of the eleven texts simply cannot be PPAs. Therefore, we now know that it is quite possible that John 8:58 is not a PPA—and I would argue that the evidence strongly supports the conclusion that it is not.

## II. EXTRABIBLICAL EXAMPLES

In your opening post, you cited two extrabiblical texts that you said showed that EIMI qualified by a subordinate clause using PRIN “often has a past meaning.” Let us look at those two texts.

In Menander’s play *Dyscolos* 615-16, Sostratos says to Gorgias:

EIMI GAR AKRIBWS ISQI SOI PALAI FILOS PRIN IDEIN  
I am for fully be (imp.) to you a long time friend before to see (aor.)

We may translate these lines as follows:

“For I have been—be fully [sure]—a friend of yours a long time, [even] before I saw you.”

I agree that EIMI is a PPA here. However, what qualifies it as a PPA is not the subordinate clause PRIN IDEIN but the adverb of time PALAI. This particular adverb is often associated with the PPA (as in 2 Cor. 12:19), especially in older, classical Greek literature (William Watson Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, rev. Charles Burton Gulick [Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell, 1958], 268; Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. Gordon M. Messing [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959], 423).

In the Testament of Job, Job says:

EGW GAR EIMI IWBAB PRIN H ONOMASAI ME hO KURIOS IWB  
I for am Iobab before to name me the Lord Job

We may translate this statement as follows:

“For I was Jobab before the Lord named me Job.”

Whatever the verb EIMI is here, it is not a PPA. In a PPA, as I showed in my previous post, the state or action of the verb continues from the past into the present. But Job is not saying that he has continued to be Jobab even after the Lord named him Job. Rather, Job is saying that he used to go by the name Jobab before the Lord named him Job. The next sentence makes this clear: “When I used to be called (EKALOUUMHN, imperfect participle) Jobab...” (see also 12:17).

This is the third statement in a short space in which Job begins with the words, EGW GAR EIMI (“for I am...”):

“For I am your father Job” (1:5).

“For I am of the sons of Esau the brother of Jacob” (1:6).

“For I am Jobab before the Lord named me Job” (2:1).

There are different ways of interpreting this evidence. It is possible that the Greek version represented here assimilated the opening words of 2:1 to the previous affirmations. Possible support for this suggestion comes from the textual variants for this verse. Another version reads, “I was [EIMHN, a variant form of the imperfect HMHN] a very rich man living in the East in the land of Uz, and before the Lord called me Job, I was called (EKALOUUMHN, imperfect tense) Jobab.” It is difficult even to be certain whether the book was originally written in Greek (many scholars now think so). The extant manuscripts include four medieval Greek manuscripts, an Old Slavonic version, and an incomplete Coptic text. The variants may thus be explained either as the result of the assimilation just suggested or as the product of different translations from a different language.

If we accept EGW GAR EIMI IWBAB in 2:1 as correct, one possible classification of the verb EIMI is that of historical present. This verse does begin Job’s “story” proper, and so an historical present would not be out of place contextually. On the other hand, the use of EIMI as an historical present would be unusual. It would be helpful to know whether the Testament of Job uses historical presents elsewhere; unfortunately, I have not had the time to investigate this question.

However we understand Testament of Job 2:1, though, it cannot be a PPA.

Finally, I should point out that in neither of these texts is the verb EIMI absolute. That is, in both texts a complement follows EIMI: “For I have been... A FRIEND”; “For I was JOBAB.” The only examples I have seen so far of sentences in which the main verb is



EIMI with no complement expressed and that has a subordinate clause of the type PRIN or PRO plus an aorist infinitive are Psalm 89:2 LXX and John 8:58. These two texts are also similar in their use of the emphatic pronoun (SU or EGW, the emphatic and even dramatic position of SU EI or EGW EIMI at the end of the sentence, and the use of the same verb in the subordinate PRIN clause (GENEQHNAI is simply the passive form of GENESQAI).

The whole matter of whether EIMI is “absolute” and whether the text expresses or implies a complement deserves separate treatment. I will deal with this topic in a separate post.

**JASON #7 – 9/2 – #15562:  
THE PPA AND ADVERBIAL PHRASES**

Rob,

Once again I commend you for the great diligence of your research in preparing your posts 6 & 7. Your sample of grammars is more than sufficient for the purposes of our discussion, and you have thoughtfully provided me, and our readers, with the specifics so that each statement and example may be assessed. (Our readers may be puzzled why you left Moule out of your survey, even though you cite his examples among the biblical passages. So let me inform them that Moule provides no definition, but simply lists examples under the heading "Present of Past Action still in progress," with a reference to Burton, whose comments you do quote.) From this thorough research, however, you draw several dubious conclusions, as I shall point out.

The topic of your post #6 is what we, following several grammarians, have been calling the PPA (Present of Past Action still in progress), which is also called the Progressive Present (Robertson, Dana & Mantey), Present of Past and Present Combined (Smyth), Durative Present (Brooks & Winbery, Young), Extension from Past (McKay), Extending-from-Past Present (Wallace), or simply an aspect of the Greek present not given a specific designation (Winer, Goodwin, Jannaris, BDF, Turner, Greenlee). You draw four conclusions:

1. The action or state that the verb expresses continues in or to the present (all but three grammars). I agree that this aspect is what we mean when we speak of a "PPA." It should be noted, however, that translating this Greek idiomatic use into English is not always most felicitously achieved by using the "progressive perfect" (have been). Sometimes the simple past is used (I will return to this in the future).
2. "Most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression modifies the present-tense verb" -- you count all but three grammars in support of this conclusion. But this is a miscount, since Brooks & Winbery expressly say "a verb alone is sometimes sufficient" and Fanning adds "or other time-indication." You apparently interpret the latter as equivalent to "adverbial expression," as you do in the cases of Goodwin ("expressions of past time"), Smyth ("expression of past time"), BDF ("temporal expression"), Greenlee ("a specific phrase"), McKay ("expression of past time"), and Wallace ("some sort of temporal indicator"). I would contend that you have artificially narrowed the meaning of what these grammarians say, which would include in most cases a number of possible direct or indirect modifiers of the sense of the main verb. One could argue that any word, phrase, or clause that is construed as modifying the force of a verb is for that reason "adverbial" in the broad sense, but as we shall see, you wish to lead us into a much narrower sense.

3. There are varying assessments among these grammars of the necessity of an adverbial to identify the PPA. You say 8 of 15 "regard the use of such an adverbial as part of the definition of a PPA." So roughly half of the grammars have this view, while others are aware of exceptions, which you examine later. I certainly agree that some sort of adverbial expression is frequently what indicates to the reader that a PPA is being employed. I am not sure of the value of investigating PPAs without adverbial expressions since the case we are trying to settle, John 8:58, has such an adverbial expression.

4. "By an 'adverbial expression' of past time most of these grammars evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase." This is a wholly unwarranted conclusion. You find only 3 of 15 that mention an "adverb" (Robertson, Dana & Mantey, Brooks & Winbery), and forget to include in these references the accompanying "usually," "generally," and "often," they respectively say, as mentioned in your previous point. You also say that 2 of 15 say "adverbial phrase" (Fanning, Wallace), without noting that Fanning adds "or other time indication," and Wallace's statement is actually "some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase." This way of reporting the support for your conclusion is misleading, and even in this way you produce 5 of 15 grammars that happen to mention adverbs or adverbial phrases as the example that comes first to mind of the range of possible modifiers of the verb (scarcely "most"). The other grammars, as I pointed out above, use broader expressions for the modifying element, which include "adverbial expression" (Jannaris, Burton), "expression of past time" (Goodwin, Smyth, McKay), "temporal expression" (BDF), "time indication" (Fanning), "time element" (Young), "temporal indicator" (Wallace), and "a specific phrase" (Greenlee). Your conclusion, therefore, has no basis in the statements of these grammarians.

One might give you the benefit of the doubt, and assume that your interpretation of these broader expressions was narrowed by the examples the grammarians go on to cite. You in fact say, "Most of the examples that the grammars cite . . . have such adjuncts [which you define as 'a phrase or group of words that are not strictly necessary for the sentence or clause to be complete'] or adverbial phrases. The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." First of all, "most of the examples" is not "all of the examples," and even one example of a different sort invalidates your arbitrary interpretation of the deliberately chosen broad expressions of these grammarians. Second, you say only BDF and McKay cite the clausal example of John 8:58, when in fact Winer and Turner also do. Third, you say that BDF and McKay include whole clauses "only because they count John 8:58," suggesting there are no other examples of this form, when in fact your other grammars cite Acts 27:33 (Fanning, Wallace) and 2 Peter 3:4 (Winer, Robertson, Turner, Fanning), both of which involve adverbial clauses. So these five other grammarians also cite sentences involving adverbial clauses, like BDF and McKay, and examples other than John 8:58. Fourth, it is true of Greek, as it is of English, that simple adverbs and adverbial phrases are used much more commonly than more complex adverbial clauses. So in any sample, the number of examples of the latter will be statistically small. So the fact that any examples happen to be mentioned in a sample of a half-dozen is statistically significant. For these four reasons, I cannot accept that your review of the examples

provided by the grammars gave sufficient cause for you to arbitrarily narrow the meaning of their description of the modifying element in PPAs, a narrowing that strives to eliminate adverbial clauses from inclusion. Since the express purpose of your line of argument is to remove John 8:58 from the PPA category, this is a very suspicious and, may I say, unfortunate turn in your presentation, which has all the appearance of reasonable summation when in fact it significantly misrepresents the material before you. Your fourth conclusion, therefore, will not stand, and should be withdrawn.

This will be further demonstrated by looking at your examples. As Wallace states, "Depending on how tightly one defines this category, it is either relatively rare or fairly common." The range of defining the PPA to which he refers is what is involved in the "contested" examples in your list.

You say you omit John 2:9, to which I referred in a previous post as a PPA, because Winer expressly excludes it as a case of "using the present tense in place of a past tense where this is the result of mixing direct and indirect discourse," and that Robertson elsewhere refers to the clause in question as an "indirect question retaining present indicative." The fact that Winer takes the trouble to expressly exclude it indicates that someone had proposed to include it (although I stumbled upon it by chance). I do not agree with Winer and Robertson that indirect discourse is involved here at all. Nothing is said here of the subject saying anything, but rather knowing something. May I also point out that several of the examples you include involve either direct or indirect discourse, and so might be as arguably excluded as John 2:9. So you are inconsistent in applying this as a basis to exclude my earlier example. My research leads me to believe that the idiomatic use we are calling the PPA includes static, depictive expressions of identity that involve references to origin such as this. Nevertheless, since none of the grammars referenced includes John 2:9 as an example (although obviously none of them intends to provide an exhaustive set of examples), I have no problem leaving it aside here.

You divide all the examples into "contested" and "uncontested," which is a dubious move since what is involved in "contesting" classification of specific examples as PPAs is how many different subdivisions a grammarian trots out to categorize present tense verbs. In other words, it is not so much a matter of contesting as it is of how finely the grammarian is splitting hairs. Many of these subdivisions are questionable as distinct grammatical functions, and are multiplied somewhat arbitrarily. So the fact that some grammarians prefer to put forward categories such as "descriptive present" or "static present" only raises the question whether they have subdivided the PPA in a way that other grammarians don't see as valuable (and you yourself dismiss the "static present" as a separate category when it serves your purposes). I do agree that customary, procedural, or iterative statements are not PPAs, since they lack any contextual modification that would indicate past time. So I agree that 2 Cor. 12:9 should be set aside.

In any case, going along with you for the sake of argument, you identify 11 of 17 examples cited in the grammars as "uncontested," and point out that "in each of these 11 uncontested examples of the PPA, the present-tense main verb is modified by a temporal adverb or adverbial phrase." Actually, it's 10 of 17, since Dana & Mantey contest

themselves on the proper categorization of John 15:27. But your conclusion is also in error since one of the "uncontested" examples, Acts 27:33, actually involves an adverbial clause. You cite only the phrase "a fourteenth day today," leaving out its full clause: "observing a fourteenth day today without food" which includes a present participle. This whole clause is the depictive complement to the main verb "You have kept/continued/completed." They have not "kept/continued/completed a fourteenth day," but they have "kept/continued/completed OBSERVING a fourteenth day."

You go on to say that "two of the contested examples also have such an adverbial phrase." Again, you have failed to note that one of these examples, 2 Peter 3:4, actually involves an adverbial clause. "From the beginning of creation" is not the direct temporal modifier of the main verb, but a complement of *hOUTWS*, "the same since the beginning of creation." The verbal modifier is the clause "since the ancestors fell asleep," using an aorist indicative (this is supported by the immediate context of the sentence, as well as by the necessary relations of syntax, I think). Of course because you see these two contested examples as employing adverbial phrases, you think we "probably should" include them with the uncontested examples, while you do not extend the same tolerance to Luke 2:48 and Acts 26:31, evidently because they do not involve the adverbial phrases you want (we can leave aside 2 Cor. 12:9, which we agree is a "gnomic" present).

On Luke 2:48, you indicate that Robertson calls this a "descriptive present," which he defines as entailing "durative action" in "present time." Since several grammars define the PPA the same way, and two even call the PPA the "durative present," it should be obvious that Robertson has subdivided the broader PPA category recognized by other grammarians. You add interpretive remarks about the broader narrative context, in which you see the action as concluded, and therefore not a PPA. You might see it that way, but the Greek writer evidently did not. This is often what we mean by "idiomatic": we do not expect a concluded action to be described as ongoing. But as you suggest, the writer has augmented the vividness of the speaker's emotion by speaking as if the action is ongoing (one should note however that some of your grammars speak of action continuing "to" the time the statement is made, and not necessarily through it). The textual variant you also bring up in connection with this verse can be best explained as a scribal correction of the idiomatic expression with which some copyist evidently had the same interpretive issue you have with this statement. The more recent editions have in this instance abandoned the generally applied rule of "more difficult reading," and opted for a tidier verbal form, in my opinion illegitimately.

On Acts 26:31, you quote several grammarians as remarking on the ongoing nature of the verbal action in this verse as part of their discussion of the PPA, without expressly contesting its inclusion as a PPA. Since these grammarians include present ongoing action in their definition of the PPA, without a more explicit quote expressing an argument against inclusion, I must wonder whether they actually mean to contest it.

Based on my remarks above, it is not only erroneous (because of the misidentification of the adverbial element in some cases), but also irrelevant to point out that 11 (or 13) examples out of 17 involve adverbs or adverbial phrases, for the reason that the simple

adverb or adverbial phrase is so much more common in usage than adverbial clauses. And it is circular to treat as significant the fact that the 3 examples YOU have left over after extracting all cases where an adverb or adverbial phrase is involved do not involve an adverb or adverbial phrase (!). Therefore there is nothing here to establish a burden of proof on the adverbial clause; it is only a matter of statistically smaller occurrence. And since the grammars that you yourself have chosen to cite do not limit the characteristics of the PPA, by description or example, in the arbitrary manner you employ, your argument comes only to the rather obvious point, with which I agree, that the simple adverb or adverbial phrase is used more commonly in Greek (as in English) than the adverbial clause. It remains true that any occurrence of an adverbial clause as the temporal element modifying a present tense verb, however statistically small in a sample as narrow as the Greek Bible is within the whole body of Greek literature, invalidates your claim (contrary to the majority of grammarians you have yourself cited) that a PPA is involved only when a simple adverb or adverbial phrase is involved. The claim has the appearance of being arbitrary, since adverbial clauses are as much adverbial expressions as simple adverbs and adverbial phrases are, and the burden of proof would fall to those who contend that something about adverbial clauses exclude them from serving as adverbial complements as well as adverbial adjuncts (in fact, in several of your accepted, uncontested examples, the adverb or adverbial phrase is formally a secondary modifier, and hence an adjunct rather than a complement of the verb, and nonetheless exercises sufficient influence on the verb to make it a PPA; so if adjuncts can do this, complements such as is the case in John 8:58 can do so all the more). As we have seen and will see, when there is both an adverbial clause and a simple adverb or adverbial phrase within the same sentence, one needs to determine which is the complement and which is the adjunct (and I fully expect some debate from you on specific examples). An adverbial clause can be bumped to secondary, adjunct status by the presence of another adverbial expression, be it a clause, phrase, or word. But when an adverbial clause appears alone in the sentence with the main verb, as is the case with John 8:58, there is no reason to assume that the clause is an adjunct rather than a complement to the verb, and as a complement it finishes or completes the sense in which the main verb is to be taken.

I have company this weekend, so will reply to your post #7 next week.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #8 – 9/5 – #15568:  
THE PPA AND ADVERBIAL PHRASES (CONT.)**

Jason,

Thank you for your reply.

You had written:

<< Our readers may be puzzled why you left Moule out of your survey, even though you cite his examples among the biblical passages. So let me inform them that Moule provides no definition, but simply lists examples under the heading "Present of Past Action still in progress," with a reference to Burton, whose comments you do quote. >>

You are correct. Moule's lack of any comment, definition, or description of the PPA, beyond the heading, is precisely why I did not quote him when surveying "what Greek grammars say about the PPA."

In my analysis of what the Greek grammars say about the PPA, I had offered four observations. You agreed with the first (but with a proviso concerning translation, about which you will have more to say later). So let us go to the second. I had written:

\*\*\*Second, most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression modifies the present-tense verb. These are described as "expressions denoting past time" (Goodwin), "adverbial expressions denoting past time" (Jannaris), "an adverbial expression denoting duration and referring to past time" (Burton), "an adverb of time (or adjunct)" (Robertson), "an adverb of time" (Dana and Mantey; Brooks and Winbery), "a definite or indefinite expression of past time" (Smyth), "a temporal expression [that] indicates the intended period of the past" (BDF), "a specific phrase expressing the past aspect" (Greenlee), "an adverbial phrase or other time-indication" (Fanning), "an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications" (McKay), and "some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase" (Wallace). Of those who offer any description of the PPA beyond a title, only Winer, Turner, and Young fail to mention this temporal adverbial expression.\*\*\*

I have reproduced the entirety of the above paragraph for ease of reference, because I will be referring back to it repeatedly in what follows. You commented:

<< 2. "Most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression modifies the present-tense verb" -- you count all but three grammars in support of this conclusion. But this is a miscount, since Brooks & Winbery expressly say "a verb alone is sometimes sufficient" and Fanning adds "or other time-indication." You apparently interpret the latter as equivalent to "adverbial expression," as you do in the cases of Goodwin ("expressions of

past time"), Smyth ("expression of past time"), BDF ("temporal expression"), Greenlee ("a specific phrase"), McKay ("expression of past time"), and Wallace ("some sort of temporal indicator"). I would contend that you have artificially narrowed the meaning of what these grammarians say, which would include in most cases a number of possible direct or indirect modifiers of the sense of the main verb. One could argue that any word, phrase, or clause that is construed as modifying the force of a verb is for that reason "adverbial" in the broad sense, but as we shall see, you wish to lead us into a much narrower sense. >>

This criticism seems damaging unless you read my four points together and understand their logical sequence and relationship. In this second point, I was not addressing the issue of whether the grammars were saying that such adverbial expressions always accompanied a PPA verb. I addressed that question in my third point. Therefore, your claim that I "miscounted" because the Brooks/Winbery grammar allows exceptions jumps the gun because it actually relates to the third point, where of course I duly noted the Brooks/Winbery position. Nor was I addressing the issue of the grammatical form of this "adverbial" expression (word, phrase, or clause) in my second point; rather, I addressed that issue in my fourth point. Thus, the fact that five of the twelve sources do not use the term "adverb(ial)" and that two of the seven that do use that term also add some vaguer description (Fanning and Wallace) is only relevant to the fourth point, not to this second point.

On my third point, you wrote:

<< 3. There are varying assessments among these grammars of the necessity of an adverbial to identify the PPA. You say 8 of 15 "regard the use of such an adverbial as part of the definition of a PPA." So roughly half of the grammars have this view, while others are aware of exceptions, which you examine later. I certainly agree that some sort of adverbial expression is frequently what indicates to the reader that a PPA is being employed. I am not sure of the value of investigating PPAs without adverbial expressions since the case we are trying to settle, John 8:58, has such an adverbial expression. >>

Unfortunately, you missed from your review here my final two sentences under this third point:

\*\*\*It would seem from this review that clear-cut examples of the PPA will have such an adverbial. We can investigate whether the PPA ever occurs without such an adverbial on a case-by-case basis.\*\*\*

Please notice that I did NOT claim here that the PPA must be accompanied by an adverbial but that the "clear-cut examples of the PPA will have such an adverbial." The mode of argument here is one of assigning burden of proof (as you once indicated toward the very end of your post), not a claim that exceptions are impossible (as you more often seem to represent me as arguing).



That this point is relevant to John 8:58 is evident when one considers the importance you and other advocates of the PPA interpretation of John 8:58 have attached to the alleged exceptions.

Regarding my fourth point, you wrote:

<< 4. "By an 'adverbial expression' of past time most of these grammars evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase." This is a wholly unwarranted conclusion. >>

Your claim that my conclusion is “wholly unwarranted” is \*at best\* an overstatement, at worst simply wrong, as I shall explain. You continued:

<< You find only 3 of 15 that mention an "adverb" (Robertson, Dana & Mantey, Brooks & Winbery), and forget to include in these references the accompanying "usually," "generally," and "often," they respectively say, as mentioned in your previous point. >>

You are once again misreading my four points. The fourth point here has to do with what the grammars mean by “adverbial expression” or whatever term they use, not with how regularly the grammars say that such an expression occurs with a PPA (the issue covered with sufficient nuance under point #3).

You continued:

<< You also say that 2 of 15 say "adverbial phrase" (Fanning, Wallace), without noting that Fanning adds "or other time indication," and Wallace's statement is actually "some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase." This way of reporting the support for your conclusion is misleading, and even in this way you produce 5 of 15 grammars that happen to mention adverbs or adverbial phrases as the example that comes first to mind of the range of possible modifiers of the verb (scarcely "most"). The other grammars, as I pointed out above, use broader expressions for the modifying element, which include "adverbial expression" (Jannaris, Burton), "expression of past time" (Goodwin, Smyth, McKay), "temporal expression" (BDF), "time indication" (Fanning), "time element" (Young), "temporal indicator" (Wallace), and "a specific phrase" (Greenlee). Your conclusion, therefore, has no basis in the statements of these grammarians. >>

The crux of your argument here is that the grammars that don't say either “adverb” or “adverbial phrase” cannot count in support of my conclusion. You even exclude Jannaris and Burton, who both use the term “adverbial expression,” since “expression” is vaguer than “phrase.” You think that the use of this vaguer term is “broader” than referring to both adverbs and adverbial phrases and specifically that it allows for the subordinate clause “Before Abraham came into being” to be included in the definitions that these grammars give. However, the term “adverbial expression” is nicely suited to refer to both adverbs and adverbial phrases, and this is precisely what Jannaris and Burton appear to mean by the term. On the other hand, CLAUSES, which you want to include, are not

plausibly included under the rubric of “expressions.” One cannot plausibly argue that the clause “Before Abraham came into being” constitutes an “expression.”

That my interpretation of these grammars is not, after all, “wholly unwarranted” or completely without basis is evident when one looks at the specific examples that these grammars give. You indirectly acknowledged this consideration when you wrote:

<< One might give you the benefit of the doubt, and assume that your interpretation of these broader expressions was narrowed by the examples the grammarians go on to cite. You in fact say, "Most of the examples that the grammars cite . . . have such adjuncts [which you define as 'a phrase or group of words that are not strictly necessary for the sentence or clause to be complete'] or adverbial phrases. The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." >>

Of course, you go on to pull on some threads in my comments here in order to unravel the argument, and I will respond to that line of argument below. First, though, I must point out that my interpretation rests on three “legs”:

- (1) the more specific terms “adverb” and “adverbial phrase” that several of the grammars use
- (2) the fact that the term “expression” easily fits single adverbs and adverbial phrases but not whole clauses
- (3) the fact that most of the grammars that use these vaguer terms do not apply them to whole clauses

The first leg is not in dispute, and I have just defended the second leg. Now let us consider the third. You wrote:

<< First of all, "most of the examples" is not "all of the examples," and even one example of a different sort invalidates your arbitrary interpretation of the deliberately chosen broad expressions of these grammarians. >>

Your objection would be quite fair IF the argument I had presented was of the form “most proves all.” However, it was not. Rather, my argument was that most of the grammars appear to refer to adverbs or adverbial phrases, because most of the examples they gave were in fact adverbs or adverbial phrases. Thus, I wrote (emphasis added):

\*\*\*Finally, by an “adverbial expression” of past time MOST of these grammars evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase.... MOST of the examples that the grammars cite, as we will see, have such adjuncts or adverbial phrases.\*\*\*

For an easy overview of the evidence supporting this claim, see my paper “Greek Grammars and the PPA” in the Files section of this discussion group. I have revised that paper to include a table listing the descriptions given in the grammars of the temporal

expression and their examples that use temporal subordinate clauses. The only text these grammars cite in which a clause supposedly fulfills this function is John 8:58!

You continued:

<< Second, you say only BDF and McKay cite the clausal example of John 8:58, when in fact Winer and Turner also do. >>

Your objection here subtly yet significantly misunderstands my argument. Winer and Turner say nothing at all about expressions of past time accompanying the PPA verb. (This is one of the weaknesses of their treatment.) Of those that say anything about such expressions in connection with the PPA, BDF and McKay are the only ones that cite a clausal example, and in both cases, it happens to be John 8:58.

You wrote:

<< Third, you say that BDF and McKay include whole clauses "only because they count John 8:58," suggesting there are no other examples of this form, when in fact your other grammars cite Acts 27:33 (Fanning, Wallace) and 2 Peter 3:4 (Winer, Robertson, Turner, Fanning), both of which involve adverbial clauses. So these five other grammarians also cite sentences involving adverbial clauses, like BDF and McKay, and examples other than John 8:58. >>

Your objection here suffers from at least two distinct flaws.

(1) My statement that BDF and McKay include whole clauses "only because they count John 8:58" was a comment about those two grammars only. It simply meant that the only clausal examples either one of them gave was John 8:58.

(2) As I have already noted, counting Winer and Turner is a mistake because neither one says anything at all about temporal expressions of any kind.

I will comment on Acts 27:33 and 2 Peter 3:4 later in this post.

You wrote:

<< Fourth, it is true of Greek, as it is of English, that simple adverbs and adverbial phrases are used much more commonly than more complex adverbial clauses. So in any sample, the number of examples of the latter will be statistically small. So the fact that any examples happen to be mentioned in a sample of a half-dozen is statistically significant. >>

This is in my judgment the best of your four points here. I am not sure how to quantify the relative frequency of simple adverbs and adverbial phrases in relation to adverbial clauses, but I'm guessing you are probably right that the latter are significantly less frequent. So if there are real examples of subordinate clauses qualifying a present-tense

verb to make it function as a PPA, well then, there are such examples. Remember, all I claimed was that the clear-cut examples of the PPA in the grammars are those with adverbs and adverbial phrases, putting the burden of proof on those who would argue that verbs not having such modifiers are also examples of the PPA. I am willing to entertain suggested examples on a case-by-case basis, as I also stated.

On the other hand, if most of the grammars don't refer to a subordinate clause as functioning in this way in examples of the PPA (true), and if most of the grammars use terms that one would not normally apply to clauses (also true), then the conclusion still stands that most of the grammars don't implicitly include clauses. This is the point that I made, and as best I can see, it does indeed still stand.

You wrote:

<< For these four reasons, I cannot accept that your review of the examples provided by the grammars gave sufficient cause for you to arbitrarily narrow the meaning of their description of the modifying element in PPAs, a narrowing that strives to eliminate adverbial clauses from inclusion. Since the express purpose of your line of argument is to remove John 8:58 from the PPA category, this is a very suspicious and, may I say, unfortunate turn in your presentation, which has all the appearance of reasonable summation when in fact it significantly misrepresents the material before you. Your fourth conclusion, therefore, will not stand, and should be withdrawn. >>

I hope I have made clear why I do not find your critique sound. I did not claim that all of the grammars allowed only adverbs and adverbial phrases to mark a present-tense verb as a PPA. Had I made such a claim, your critique would have merit. What I claimed was that most of the grammars appear to refer to adverbs and adverbial phrases as performing this function, a conclusion borne out by both the language they use and the examples they give.

You wrote:

<< This will be further demonstrated by looking at your examples. As Wallace states, "Depending on how tightly one defines this category, it is either relatively rare or fairly common." The range of defining the PPA to which he refers is what is involved in the "contested" examples in your list. >>

To anticipate a point to which we may need to return later, I would remind you that in my 1989 book I did allow that by a broader definition of the PPA one might plausibly categorize EIMI in John 8:58 as a PPA (\_Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John\_, 111-12). In the fifteen years since I published that book, not one critic of my position on the PPA has given any attention to that observation. They have uniformly criticized my position as though I were maintaining that by no plausible definition of the PPA could John 8:58 be classified as an example.

You wrote:

<< You say you omit John 2:9, to which I referred in a previous post as a PPA, because Winer expressly excludes it as a case of "using the present tense in place of a past tense where this is the result of mixing direct and indirect discourse," and that Robertson elsewhere refers to the clause in question as an "indirect question retaining present indicative." The fact that Winer takes the trouble to expressly exclude it indicates that someone had proposed to include it (although I stumbled upon it by chance). I do not agree with Winer and Robertson that indirect discourse is involved here at all. Nothing is said here of the subject saying anything, but rather knowing something. >>

Your inference that Winer excluded texts like John 2:9 because "someone had proposed to include it" is unwarranted. Winer does not cite any secondary source with which he is disagreeing on this point. He may have included John 2:9 and similar texts because he anticipated someone misclassifying them. We do not know what was in his mind, but what is in his book categorically rejects such a classification.

I don't always agree with Winer, but on this point he is definitely correct. Greek uses what we would call indirect discourse with verbs of knowing, thinking, hearing, and seeing, as well as verbs of saying. Instead of writing, "Jason thought Winer was wrong," a Greek could write the equivalent of "Jason thought Winer is wrong." Instead of writing that the steward "did not know from where it WAS," John wrote that the steward "did not know from where it IS." Look at Winer's other examples. Here are just two of them:

John 4:1 -- "the Pharisees heard that Jesus IS MAKING AND BAPTIZING more disciples than John."

Mark 5:14 -- "they came to see what it IS that happened."

Classifying such texts as PPAs would be a mistake (see also Wallace, 537-39).

You continued:

<< May I also point out that several of the examples you include involve either direct or indirect discourse, and so might be as arguably excluded as John 2:9. So you are inconsistent in applying this as a basis to exclude my earlier example. >>

Only two of the texts I include as genuine PPA texts in the NT appear to fit this category. John 5:6 is a clear-cut example of this indirect speech form (literally, "knowing that he IS that way (ECEI) a long time already"). If we did not have the adverbial phrase "a long time already," we would translate it "knowing that he WAS that way" (in recognition of the indirect speech construction). However, the adverbial marks the present-tense verb as a PPA. If we did not have the participle "knowing," we would translate the rest, "he HAS BEEN that way a long time already" (in recognition of the PPA). The text uses both the indirect speech construction AND the PPA, which is why we translate it, "knowing that he HAD BEEN that way a long time already."

The only other example is the second present-tense verb in 2 Corinthians 12:19. The question literally reads, “Are you thinking all this time that we are defending ourselves to you?” We properly translate the first present-tense verb “Have you been thinking” because of the adverb PALAI, which marks it as a PPA. The second present-tense verb, strictly speaking, is not a PPA, but takes the temporal aspect of the first present-tense verb according to the indirect speech construction that Winer identifies.

My position here is not at all “inconsistent.” I did not claim that texts using indirect speech could not include examples of the PPA. I simply claimed that these were two different grammatical phenomena. The above two examples nicely illustrate that fact.

You wrote:

<< My research leads me to believe that the idiomatic use we are calling the PPA includes static, depictive expressions of identity that involve references to origin such as this. Nevertheless, since none of the grammars referenced includes John 2:9 as an example (although obviously none of them intends to provide an exhaustive set of examples), I have no problem leaving it aside here. >>

I hope that my analysis confirms to you the wisdom of doing so.

You wrote:

<< You divide all the examples into "contested" and "uncontested," which is a dubious move since what is involved in "contesting" classification of specific examples as PPAs is how many different subdivisions a grammarian trots out to categorize present tense verbs. In other words, it is not so much a matter of contesting as it is of how finely the grammarian is splitting hairs. Many of these subdivisions are questionable as distinct grammatical functions, and are multiplied somewhat arbitrarily. So the fact that some grammarians prefer to put forward categories such as "descriptive present" or "static present" only raises the question whether they have subdivided the PPA in a way that other grammarians don't see as valuable (and you yourself dismiss the "static present" as a separate category when it serves your purposes). >>

I begin with your last comment. I did not dismiss the “static present” as a separate category, and certainly not because it “serves my purposes.” What Dana and Mantey call the “static present” is what grammarians today usually call the \*gnomic\* present (e.g., Moule, Wallace). My disagreement with Dana and Mantey was regarding their choices of examples for this usage, not their distinguishing it from the PPA.

There is a clear difference between “the descriptive present” (as Robertson calls it) and the PPA. Examples of the descriptive present are “we are perishing” (Mark 4:38), “our lamps are going out” (Matt. 25:8), “how can you turn back” (Gal. 4:9), and “the light is already shining” (1 John 2:8). To dismiss any functional distinction between this usage and the PPA requires you to argue that all of these verbs should be translated using a

form of the past tense (“we have been perishing,” “how can you have been turning back,” etc.).

When a grammarian identifies the PPA and distinguishes it from another category, especially one recognized by other grammarians, and chooses to classify a particular text in that other category rather than as a PPA, it seems reasonable to me to say that he has “contested” the categorization of the text as a PPA. When the grammarian actually acknowledges that others categorize the text as a PPA and then rejects that classification, the term “contested” is, well, applicable beyond reasonable contesting.

You wrote:

<< I do agree that customary, procedural, or iterative statements are not PPAs, since they lack any contextual modification that would indicate past time. So I agree that 2 Cor. 12:9 should be set aside. >>

This means that you have now acknowledged that the one example that Brooks/Winbery give is invalid. It also means that your complaint above about the grammarians “splitting hairs” only goes so far, since it doesn’t help retain 2 Corinthians 12:9 as a valid example of the PPA.

You wrote:

<< In any case, going along with you for the sake of argument, you identify 11 of 17 examples cited in the grammars as “uncontested,” and point out that “in each of these 11 uncontested examples of the PPA, the present-tense main verb is modified by a temporal adverb or adverbial phrase.” Actually, it’s 10 of 17, since Dana & Mantey contest themselves on the proper categorization of John 15:27. >>

Really, who is now splitting hairs? If Dana & Mantey classify John 15:27 under two headings—which we may all agree is confusing—they are not contesting either one. By “contested” I meant classifying the text under a different category INSTEAD of as a PPA. All other texts are by definition “uncontested.”

You wrote:

<< But your conclusion is also in error since one of the “uncontested” examples, Acts 27:33, actually involves an adverbial clause. You cite only the phrase “a fourteenth day today,” leaving out its full clause: “observing a fourteenth day today without food” which includes a present participle. This whole clause is the depictive complement to the main verb “You have kept/continued/completed.” They have not “kept/continued/completed a fourteenth day,” but they have “kept/continued/completed OBSERVING a fourteenth day.” >>

The sentence literally reads, “A fourteenth today day watching without food you are going nothing having eaten.” The first participle is present tense (as you noted).

Translators usually treat the adverbial expression “a fourteenth day today” as if it were denoting a period beginning in the past and continuing up to the moment of speaking. Taking it this way makes it modify the present-tense participle, marking it as a PPA. That’s why most English Bibles translate it “have been watching” or the like. The adjective “without food” is the adjectival complement of the main verb “going.” Translators translate the main verb as a past tense to agree with the temporal aspect they have assigned to the participle. If we didn’t have that adverbial expression, we would translate the two verbs as present tenses: “While you watch, you are going without food” (or something along those lines). The only past-tense verb is the second participle, which ends the sentence. We should probably construe it as the ground of the main clause: “because you have eaten nothing.”

However, it is my opinion that identifying the present participle or the main verb as a PPA is a mistake. A more accurate translation would be something like the following: “You are going a fourteenth day today without food while you watch, since you have eaten nothing.” There are only two ways to turn the verbs into PPAs, and both require ignoring the actual grammar of the sentence. One way is the way English Bibles usually translate it: “Today is the fourteenth day you have been watching and going without food, having eaten nothing” (the NKJV, NASB, and NRSV have something like this). This translation turns “Today” into the subject of the sentence, which clearly is wrong. (The general sense of the sentence is of course the same, but we are focusing on the function of the verbs in Greek.) The other way to turn the verbs into PPAs would be to turn “a fourteenth day today” into “for fourteen days” (the NIV and NLT take this approach).

So, being the independent-minded person that I am, I disagree with the two grammarians (Fanning and, following him, Wallace) who classify Acts 27:33 as a PPA. Their classification is not misleading as far as the meaning of the sentence as a whole, but it is a misclassification of the way the present-tense verbs function in the sentence. If you are inclined to side with Fanning and Wallace, I would say that the only coherent way to do so would be to take “a fourteenth day today” as modifying both the present participle and the present indicative verbs, as most translations do.

You wrote:

<< You go on to say that "two of the contested examples also have such an adverbial phrase." Again, you have failed to note that one of these examples, 2 Peter 3:4, actually involves an adverbial clause. "From the beginning of creation" is not the direct temporal modifier of the main verb, but a complement of hOUTWS, "the same since the beginning of creation." The verbal modifier is the clause "since the ancestors fell asleep," using an aorist indicative (this is supported by the immediate context of the sentence, as well as by the necessary relations of syntax, I think). >>

I disagree. The main clause literally reads, “all things thusly continue since the beginning of creation” (PANTA hOUTWS DIAMENEI AP’ ARCHS KTISEWS). Given the choice between a prepositional phrase that immediately follows the main verb or a subordinate



clause that precedes the verb and is separated from it by the subject and another adverb, I think we should take the prepositional phrase as the direct temporal modifier. If you are right, we should translate the sentence something like this: “For all things have been continuing since the fathers fell asleep just as from the beginning of creation.” But evidently this is wrong; the sentence structure appears to require us to translate something like this: “For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have been continuing in this way from the beginning of creation.” This is how most translations construe the text, by the way.

You wrote:

<< Of course because you see these two contested examples as employing adverbial phrases, you think we "probably should" include them with the uncontested examples, while you do not extend the same tolerance to Luke 2:48 and Acts 26:31, evidently because they do not involve the adverbial phrases you want (we can leave aside 2 Cor. 12:9, which we agree is a "gnomic" present). >>

I gave additional reasons beyond the absence of a temporal adverbial word or phrase for disputing the classification of these texts as PPAs. Somehow my reasoning is suspect for Luke 2:48 and Acts 26:31 but not for 2 Corinthians 12:9. I don't think this is a fair assessment.

You wrote:

<< On Luke 2:48, you indicate that Robertson calls this a "descriptive present," which he defines as entailing "durative action" in "present time." Since several grammars define the PPA the same way, and two even call the PPA the "durative present," it should be obvious that Robertson has subdivided the broader PPA category recognized by other grammarians. >>

What is obvious to one is not always obvious to another. You are confounding the term “durative present” as a designation for the PPA with Robertson’s description of the descriptive present as “durative.” As I have noted, the descriptive present is not a subdivision of the PPA. One does not translate the present-tense verbs with past-tense English forms in such instances as “we are perishing” (Mark 4:38), “our lamps are going out” (Matt. 25:8), “how can you be turning back” (Gal. 4:9), and “the light is already shining” (1 John 2:8). Robertson describes these as “durative” to contrast them to “aoristic” presents such as “I say to you” (John 3:3, etc.) or “Jesus Christ heals you” (Acts 9:34) or “your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). If you wish to maintain that the “durative present” category is a subdivision of the PPA, then you will have to give up your claim that we should not translate the PPA using the English present tense.

You wrote:

<< You add interpretive remarks about the broader narrative context, in which you see the action as concluded, and therefore not a PPA. You might see it that way, but the

Greek writer evidently did not. This is often what we mean by "idiomatic": we do not expect a concluded action to be described as ongoing. But as you suggest, the writer has augmented the vividness of the speaker's emotion by speaking as if the action is ongoing (one should note however that some of your grammars speak of action continuing "to" the time the statement is made, and not necessarily through it). >>

Your last comment is technically correct. If this were the only issue, it would not be enough to reach any sort of definite conclusion as to the correct classification. However, this is one of four reasons to be dubious about Luke 2:48 as a PPA.

<< The textual variant you also bring up in connection with this verse can be best explained as a scribal correction of the idiomatic expression with which some copyist evidently had the same interpretive issue you have with this statement. The more recent editions have in this instance abandoned the generally applied rule of "more difficult reading," and opted for a tidier verbal form, in my opinion illegitimately. >>

Evidently other factors weighed more heavily with the editors of those editions; I would have to do more research before offering any definitive comment on the matter. One consideration that comes to mind is that one or more scribes may have accidentally dropped the initial epsilon in EZHTOUMEN because they did not hear it (hODUNWMENOI EZHTOUMEN sounds a lot like hODUNWMENOI ZHTOUMEN if you say it quickly). Textual critics tend to prefer explanations appealing to such accidental kinds of changes than to deliberate tampering with the text, all other things being equal. Unless you think the case for the present-tense reading is a slam-dunk, my point stands that the present-tense verb is textually uncertain.

You wrote:

<< On Acts 26:31, you quote several grammarians as remarking on the ongoing nature of the verbal action in this verse as part of their discussion of the PPA, without expressly contesting its inclusion as a PPA. Since these grammarians include present ongoing action in their definition of the PPA, without a more explicit quote expressing an argument against inclusion, I must wonder whether they actually mean to contest it. >>

Winer's grammar was the only one that I said disputed the classification of Acts 26:31 as a PPA. I don't think your response here really engages my argument on this point, or recognizes the force of my conclusion, which was that Acts 26:31 is not a \*reliable\* instance of the PPA.

You began your concluding remarks as follows:

<< Based on my remarks above, it is not only erroneous (because of the misidentification of the adverbial element in some cases), but also irrelevant to point out that 11 (or 13) examples out of 17 involve adverbs or adverbial phrases, for the reason that the simple adverb or adverbial phrase is so much more common in usage than adverbial clauses. >>

As I said, I think this statistical observation is one of your strongest points. To repeat, my argument was that clear-cut examples of the PPA have such adverbs or adverbial phrases, putting the burden of proof on examples that don't conform to this pattern. I did not exclude a priori the possibility that a text might deviate from that pattern and still have a PPA verb.

You continued:

<< And it is circular to treat as significant the fact that the 3 examples YOU have left over after extracting all cases where an adverb or adverbial phrase is involved do not involve an adverb or adverbial phrase (!). >>

Jason, you agreed with me about one of those three (2 Cor. 12:9), and I gave additional reasons beyond the absence of an adverb or adverbial phrase for questioning the classification of the other two texts as PPA. Therefore, your charge of begging the question is unfounded (to put it mildly).

You wrote:

<< Therefore there is nothing here to establish a burden of proof on the adverbial clause; it is only a matter of statistically smaller occurrence. >>

I am glad that you stated the matter here as one of burden of proof, though much of your criticism seems to me to misread my arguments as a priori defining such texts out of bounds. (You do so again just two sentences later; see below.) As for the point you make, I have, on grounds other than merely the absence of a simple adverb or adverbial phrase, shown that the few counterexamples to my generalization fail to be reliable or definite examples of the PPA. This means that your reliable counterexamples rate the statistical value of zero.

You wrote:

<< And since the grammars that you yourself have chosen to cite do not limit the characteristics of the PPA, by description or example, in the arbitrary manner you employ, your argument comes only to the rather obvious point, with which I agree, that the simple adverb or adverbial phrase is used more commonly in Greek (as in English) than the adverbial clause. It remains true that any occurrence of an adverbial clause as the temporal element modifying a present tense verb, however statistically small in a sample as narrow as the Greek Bible is within the whole body of Greek literature, invalidates your claim (contrary to the majority of grammarians you have yourself cited) that a PPA is involved only when a simple adverb or adverbial phrase is involved. >>

There it is again. You are misreading my argument as making a claim that a single counterexample would be sufficient to falsify. Linguistic study rarely can make such claims, if ever.

You wrote:

<< The claim has the appearance of being arbitrary, since adverbial clauses are as much adverbial expressions as simple adverbs and adverbial phrases are, and the burden of proof would fall to those who contend that something about adverbial clauses exclude them from serving as adverbial complements as well as adverbial adjuncts (in fact, in several of your accepted, uncontested examples, the adverb or adverbial phrase is formally a secondary modifier, and hence an adjunct rather than a complement of the verb, and nonetheless exercises sufficient influence on the verb to make it a PPA; so if adjuncts can do this, complements such as is the case in John 8:58 can do so all the more). As we have seen and will see, when there is both an adverbial clause and a simple adverb or adverbial phrase within the same sentence, one needs to determine which is the complement and which is the adjunct (and I fully expect some debate from you on specific examples). An adverbial clause can be bumped to secondary, adjunct status by the presence of another adverbial expression, be it a clause, phrase, or word. But when an adverbial clause appears alone in the sentence with the main verb, as is the case with John 8:58, there is no reason to assume that the clause is an adjunct rather than a complement to the verb, and as a complement it finishes or completes the sense in which the main verb is to be taken. >>

Sentences using adverbial clauses \*and\* a simple adverb or adverbial phrase are the trickiest sentences to use in trying to define a particular usage of the present-tense main verb that is dependent on an adverbial. This is so precisely because the way we diagram these sentences will be more complex and more open to revision or challenge.

My post #7 proves that adverbial clauses in conjunction with present-tense verbs of the kind closely paralleling John 8:58 in grammatical form usually if not always function differently than the adverbs and adverbial phrases in undisputed examples of the PPA. Such sentences rarely if ever use the present-tense main verb as a PPA. The two posts need to be studied together to appreciate the force of my argument. When you do so, you will find that none of the clear examples of the PPA in biblical Greek uses temporal subordinate clauses to mark the present-tense main verb as a PPA, while few or none of the nearly dozen texts that do parallel John 8:58 in this grammatical construction can possibly be a PPA. Put these two halves of the argument together, and the conclusion is irresistible: at the very least, it is quite possible that John 8:58 is not a PPA, and indeed the evidence strongly tilts in favor of concluding that it is not.

**JASON #8 – 9/8 – #15584:**

**ROB #7: THE PPA WITH TEMPORAL CLAUSES WITH \_PRIN\_ OR  
\_PRO\_**

Rob,

In reply to your message #7:

You set out eleven passages that you believe "more closely parallel John 8:58 grammatically than the PPA texts." This belief is grounded in an arbitrary narrowing of the PPA category in a way that excludes adverbial clauses, as I pointed out in my last post, where I also demonstrated that such a narrowing of the PPA is invalid.

You state at the beginning of your post #7 that "not one of these eleven biblical texts is a PPA," while several pages later conceding that two of them (Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:5) are usually "classified as a PPA." But, you argue, they should be reinterpreted as examples of a previously unheard of grammatical classification, the "eternal present." Now, Rob, if you would like to propose a brand new category of verbal tense in the Greek language, please write an academic argument and submit it to a peer reviewed journal dealing with such matters. In the meantime, I think it best that we stick to generally recognized grammatical categories as the level playing field on which we discuss the meaning of John 8:58. I simply see no convincing argument that there ever was such a thing as an "eternal present" in the Greek language, and I think this is another example where theological interpretation has invaded linguistic analysis. I often recommend to people, as an exercise to avoid this mistake, that they pretend that a sentence is said not of God or of Jesus but of John or Jane Doe. Would there be any PRESUMPTION that an ordinary present tense verb signified something eternal of John or Jane Doe? No. But if a biblical writer wanted to inform us that something said of John or Jane Doe is meant eternally, the writer will state so explicitly and clearly, and not by hoping that we will presume it and read it into perfectly ordinary verbs.

Of your eleven examples, we can quickly dismiss the following (using your preferred labels for the type of present involved):

Exodus 1:19 (iterative present)

Job 8:12 (customary present)

Proverbs 18:13 (gnomic present)

Isaiah 46:10 (iterative present)

These are all sentences in which the Greek present tense is used to refer to customary or repeated action.

We can also set aside:

John 13:19 (tendential present)  
Malachi 3:22 (futuristic present)

These are sentences where the Greek present tense verb refers to action initiated in the present "before" something that will happen in the future. The same construction is found in Deuteronomy 31:21, which you offer as an example of a so-called "eternal present": "I know their wickedness which they do HERE THIS DAY, before I have brought them into the land I promised them." The bringing into the promised land is a future event, and before that, "here this day" when God is speaking, God knows their wickedness. The sentence itself says no more than that. Even without the adverbial phrase "here this day," the present tense verb indicates God knows now, at the time of speaking, the wickedness of the people he intends to lead into the promised land. Grammatically, God knows in the present things that, from the context, one must read as still to happen in the future. One can integrate this information with other verses of the Bible into a theological position on the omniscience of God, and thus derive a theory of God's eternal knowing. But that is something that occurs beyond the sentence itself, beyond the passage itself, and outside of its first order narrative meaning. In other words, it's interpretation, not translation; it is not what the sentence means in itself, but what it might imply when made a part of a larger biblical theology. Notice that there are two verbs in parallel here functioning as present indicatives: "I know" and "they do." If one of them were an "eternal present," the other one would have to be as well. So if the sentence is read as saying that God knows eternally, then it must also be read as saying that the people do wickedness eternally. You would have to do this if you wanted to argue that the eternal character of God's knowing occurs at the level of the Greek grammar. You would not have to do this, and could distinguish the eternal knowing of God from the simple present or future doing of the people at an interpretative level, once you have started to meld the immediate meaning of this sentence with other sentences about God elsewhere in the Bible.

The same is true of Matthew 6:8: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." This is simply a customary or iterative present, a general truth that holds good in every case. You see it as "eternal" because of a theological concept you have of God's eternal omniscience. I have no problem with that theological concept; it's implicit throughout the Bible. But there is nothing in the verb itself, or in the syntax of the verb's use with a modifying "before" clause, that makes the verb signify "eternal." In its grammar and syntax, the sentence matches customary/iterative/gnomic uses of the present. It is formally no different than "A fool and his money ARE soon parted," or "A stitch in time SAVES nine." Are a fool and his money ETERNALLY parted? Does a stitch in time ETERNALLY save nine? Or is it just generally the case in individual events that these statements hold true? So eternal is part of an interpretation of the overall character of God that is read into an individual statement such as Matthew 6:8, and not something inherent in the grammar of the verse itself.

These eight of your eleven examples only superficially resemble John 8:58, because in each the aorist infinitive is employed not of past time, but of general or future time,

unlike John 8:58 where it is used of past time. That leaves three examples where the aorist infinitive is used in a similar manner to its use in John 8:58.

1. We have discussed Psalm 89/90:2 in detail already. I need only add here the following point:

The translation you use is not particularly close to the Greek; "even from everlasting to everlasting" is particularly tendentious. There is nothing at all in the Greek behind "even," which is added in this translation to heighten the supposed "progression" of the imagery. "Everlasting" is based on "the age," and I have discussed the ambiguity of this expression in my post on this passage. The addition of this phrase, "even from everlasting to everlasting" (or, "from age to age") is what suggests to you an "eternal" character to the present tense verb. Note that it is the CONTENT of this phrase, not the grammar employed in the sentence, that leads to your interpretation. As I pointed out in my post on this passage, there is no such additional phrase in John 8:58, and this verse is a closer parallel to John 8:58 if we remove this additional phrase, leaving only a PRO TOU/PRIN clause with a present tense main verb. When we do that, the action of the verb is a classic PPA, with existence predicated "before" certain other past events and continuing to the present time of the statement. I also pointed out that the presence of the PRO TOU/PRIN clause dominates the sentence and demands a PPA translation of it; otherwise, the clause is left awkwardly dangling. You can say either "You exist from age to age" or "You have existed from age to age." But while you can say "You existed before the mountains came to be" or "You have existed since before the mountains came to be," you cannot say "You exist before the mountain came to be." To use a present tense in English as in the latter example, you have to change the sentence into something more closely resembling the gnomic/iterative/customary form: "You exist before the mountains COME to be." There you have something you might call an "eternal present." Otherwise, it's a PPA, like John 8:58.

2. Jeremiah 1:5 is also quite clearly a PPA, and is usually translated that way in English Bibles. It should be, "I have known you since before I formed you in the womb, etc." You say: "In view of the perfect tense verbs 'consecrated' and 'appointed' that parallel the first line, it would be a mistake to translate the first line 'I have been knowing you . . .'" I'm sorry, but this makes no sense to me at all. Yes, there is parallelism of structure; both parts of the sentence involve adverbial "before" clauses modifying the main verb, and even the content of the two adverbial clauses is in parallel. So why does the writer employ a present tense in the first part of the sentence and perfect tense in the second part? There has to be a nuance of difference, and there is. In the second part of the sentence, the perfect verbs "consecrated" and "appointed" refer to acts at one point of time. The perfect tense signifies completed action of the past. But the present tense is used in the first part of the sentence because the action of the verb (God's knowing) was not a punctiliar past event, but a familiarity that was in place "before" and continues to the present of God's speaking. Hence, a classic PPA. May I also point out that in your previous post you stated that of the 15 grammars you surveyed, "The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses [among examples of PPAs] are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." In my last post, I showed how this

summation was not accurate, but I failed to note that it also deliberately ignored Winer's citation of Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:15 as PPAs comparable to John 8:58 (which you noted but failed to include in your summation).

3. Finally, we have Proverbs 8:25, which you also wish to see as an "eternal present." But here again the present tense main verb "he begets" is modified by a PRO TOU clause referring to past time in such a way that the main verb must have a past tense value. Our disinclination to read this as a PPA is based solely on the CONTENT of the verb, not the grammar or syntax of the sentence. We think of the action of begetting as punctiliar, happening at one particular moment, and so we are inclined, as you note, to read this as a historical present. I agree with you that this is possible, but weak (although I don't understand your reasoning that "the odds of an historical present in a translation of a bit of Hebrew poetry would seem to be extremely minute"; this is a narrative section of the poem, surrounded by past tense verbs). You leap to the "eternal present" as better. But the PPA is more ready to hand: "He has begotten me." Note the full context:

22-23a The Lord created me . . . before . . . ; he appointed me . . . before . . .

23b-25 In the beginning, before . . . , before . . . , before . . . , before . . . , he has begotten me.

The reason why the present is used as a PPA here is that the existence of the speaker is ongoing. I alluded to this special existential/identity function of the PPA before. This is why in the Testament of Job a present tense verb as a PPA is used to say Job "was" Jobab before he was renamed Job. He continues to be the person he was, he is still in existence. Jobab was not another person or a previous incarnation, it is the same, still alive person. It is not easy to convey this in English, but the Greek form was apparently well understood. In Proverbs 8:25, as you acknowledge, the use of the verb EKTISE (clearly a punctiliar past) in the context conflicts with an "eternal" reading of the verb GENNAi. The two verbs are in parallel, and here again the use of different verbal tenses suggests a nuance of difference, for while the act of creating Wisdom is handled as occurring at one point of past time, the act of begetting or generating Wisdom is construed as having an ongoing element. This may either be, as I have suggested, the implicit continued existence of Wisdom or else some nuance of meaning having to do with the manner in which God (continually) generates Wisdom.

So at least two and possibly three of your eleven examples are PPAs, and these are also the two or three that most closely resemble John 8:58, in that the aorist infinitive of the dependent adverbial clause is used of past time (as noted by Winer), rather than general or future time. Therefore your survey supports the identification of John 8:58 as a PPA, and the translation "I have been" or "I have existed." This is further supported by the examples of PPAs from your previous post, among which were a couple similar to John 8:58, in that they involved adverbial clauses of past time.

(Let me reply very briefly to your analysis of the two non-biblical examples I offered as examples of PPAs that used the be-verb with a "before" clause. Of the Menander quote, you say, "I agree that EIMI is a PPA here. However what qualifies it is a PPA is not the



subordinate clause PRIN IDEIN but the adverb of time PALAI." This is a deduction from your (disproved) claim that adverbial clauses are not part of the PPA construction. If you remove the adverb PALAI from the sentence, you still have a sentence that would still be translated as a PPA: "I have been a friend of yours since before I saw you." It could not be a simple present, "I am a friend of yours since before I saw you," for that would be a non-sequiter. And if the statement was meant as a simple past, "I was a friend of yours before I saw you," a past tense verb would be used. Hence your fixation on PALAI is beside the point. On the Testament of Job quote, you note the shift of tense in the next line to an imperfect: "I used to be called Jobab." But in the line I quoted a present tense verb is used with a "before" clause: "I have been (EIMI) Jobab since before the Lord named me Job." Admittedly, we would tend to render this in English as a simple past "I was Jobab." But it seems the PPA is employed because it is a matter of existential identity. The next line uses an imperfect because he is no longer CALLED Jobab, and yet the PPA present is used just before because in some sense he still IS Jobab. This is an unexplored aspect of the PPA that maybe I should write up someday. Of these two examples, you make the final point that "in neither of these texts is the verb EIMI absolute. That is, in both texts a complement follows EIMI," and go on to say that in John 8:58 EIMI is absolute. No, it is not. It has an adverbial expression as part of the predicate. So the difference between the two examples I gave and John 8:58 is in the type of complement (nominal versus adverbial) rather than the presence or absence of a complement.)

Although you have yet to directly answer my question regarding what it is that you wish to defend in the traditional translation of John 8:58, and what you regard as threatened by (a) rendering the sentence in typical English word order and (b) rendering the verb in a tense complementary to its adverbial modifier, I can see by your line of argument that you wish the verb EIMI to convey eternal existence. To read it the way you wish, you do not need to hold on to (a) above. If the verb is going to convey eternal existence, it does not need to be awkwardly at the end of the sentence to do so. Nor does it need to be "am" rather than "exist" to do so. Perhaps you have already recognized that, and that is why we have moved beyond that issue and focused on the proper tense rendering of the verb. So, moving on to (b) above, I have demonstrated in my last two posts why John 8:58 should be construed as a PPA, how it most closely resembles other sentences that we would translate as PPAs, and that the novel suggestion of an "eternal" present is a confusion of theological interpretation with literal translation. Your goal in this latter part of your argument would appear to be to exclude non-eternal interpretations of John 8:58. As I stated in the beginning of this discussion, you will not be able to exclude such non-eternal interpretations, just as your eternal interpretation cannot be excluded. Both are possible on the basis of the Greek of this verse. In your post #7, you pull back to the position that, "at the very least, one can no longer argue that texts following this grammatical pattern \*must\* be assigned the category PPA." Since I acknowledge that there is considerable range in how the PPA category is defined, we are in substantial agreement on this point. It all depends on what you mean by "this grammatical pattern." I have shown that three of your examples in this post are closer to John 8:58 than the others, and that all three are translated as PPAs in several Bibles, while two happen to be cited as PPAs closely parallel to John 8:58 in Greek grammars. In my previous post, I

identified two other examples of "this grammatical pattern" that were also PPAs as you yourself acknowledged, although you did not recognize their clausal form. In all these cases, how the Greek functions is clear: it indicates past action continuing up to the present. So in that sense these examples MUST be assigned to the PPA category. In this post you have included several other examples that are not PPAs, and I have never and would never argue that they are PPAs. Of these, you are quite right that there is nothing about them that says we MUST assign them to the PPA category. It is only a PPA if the modifying element refers to past time, not when it refers to customary or future time. So as in your previous post you argue here in a circular manner. You expand your examples to include non-PPAs and then dramatically announce that not all of your examples MUST be construed as PPAs(!). Nonetheless, the two or three examples that are PPAs are those that most closely resemble John 8:58.

All of this brings us, I think, full circle. As I pointed out in the very beginning of our discussion, I am concerned with translation, and you with interpretation. Your desire to have only one possible interpretation of this verse has driven you into the realm of translation, because only by arguing for a particular translation can you close off interpretations you do not care for. You have been unsuccessful in this effort, despite very careful research. Translation will not provide you with the narrowing of possible meaning you desire. The translation should be "I have been" or "I have been in existence" or "I have existed." In the realm of interpretation, you can take that as "always, eternally in existence" or "for a time in existence." All that the sentence says is existence at least since "before Abraham was born." To argue out which interpretation is better, one needs to pull in other passages and construct a Christology from them. The grammar and syntax of John 8:58 alone will not settle the question. I have yet to see any evidence or argument that supports narrowing the meaning of the grammar of the verse, or anything to persuade me that there was such a thing as an "eternal present" in the Greek language. Since we seem to have exhausted the biblical data on the grammar and syntax of John 8:58, since the closest parallels among that data all support the reading of the verse I have been defending, and since broader interpretation and Christology is not what this discussion is about, I am inclined to see this exchange as nearing its finish. Of course, if you have anything new to introduce, I would be happy to consider it.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.

**JASON #9 – 9/8 – #15585:**

**ROB #8: THE PPA AND ADVERBIAL PHRASES (CONT.)**

Rob,

Your post #8 can be summed up as a clarification of your post#6 in light of my criticisms, to the end of defending your argument that the "burden of proof" rests with the position that includes adverbial clauses as one of the possible modifiers of the verb to make it a PPA. Since in the course of your clarification here you state repeatedly that you are not claiming that there is no example of such a construction, since I have identified examples of such a construction from the material provided in your posts #6 and #7, and since, as I have said, the existence of any example of such a construction in this very limited set of material demonstrates its existence in the Greek of the time, and reduces any comment on its relative rarity to nothing more than a statistical datum, and not anything approaching a definitive rule of grammar, the point is settled: adverbial clauses are one of the possible modifiers of the PPA verb.

On the one hand, you want me and our readers to "read [your] four points together" in order to "understand their logical sequence and relationship," and on the other hand you seek to dodge my criticism of any one point by saying that the issue properly belongs to a different one of your points. You can't have it both ways. Indeed, one cannot ignore the overall tendency of your argument, which is to build up a claim that burdens against, if not excludes, a PPA reading of John 8:58. This is done by step-by-step artificial reduction of what the grammars say to where you want to end up. At each step, I pointed out how you were distorting your sources. If at step two I note that you have illegitimately reduced a whole range of broad characterizations of the modifying element to the simple phrase "adverbial expression," and then at step four have illegitimately reduced this further to "adverb or adverbial phrase," I have in fact invalidated the steps that lead you to the conclusions you wish to draw, namely, that John 8:58 has no PPA parallels among the biblical material. I further invalidated the argument by showing that your elimination of some of the examples given by the grammars as "contested" was also a misrepresentation of the case, since you call it "contested" when even on grammar out of fifteen uses the passage as an example of another kind of verbal sense than the PPA. In most instances the supposedly "contesting" grammars do not actually dispute the verse's status as a PPA in the section where PPAs are discussed, but cite it in another section where a different verbal sense is being discussed, without comment on its relation to the PPA construction. John 15:27; 2 Peter 3:4; and 1 John 3:8 are all cited by Dana & Mantey 186, in their discussion of "static presents"; the first of these they also cite under PPAs, and in no case do they actually reject or dispute construing the others as PPAs. They simply do not cite them as such, which is hardly "contesting." It is interesting that Dana & Mantey is the culprit in all these cases, since it is one of the weaker grammars.

You "miscounted" in POINT 2 given that you stated in an unqualified way that 12 of 15 grammars "state that an adverbial expression modifies the present-tense verb." This is stated as if it is a rule, otherwise you should have written "an adverbial expression CAN modify" or "OFTEN modifies," or "is ONE KIND OF POSSIBLE modifier." Unless you stated it this way, you cannot legitimately include Brooks & Winbery. On your choice of "adverbial expression" to sum up the many different descriptions of the modifier in the grammars, I expressly said that this in and of itself can be allowed, in that any word, phrase, or clause that modifies a verb is in some sense "adverbial"; but that when viewed in terms of all four points and the tendency of your argument, it was clearly the beginning of a slippery slope towards a further arbitrary narrowing of what these grammarians meant.

I missed nothing in your POINT 3, and in fact expressly addressed the sentence you say I missed, where you said: "We can investigate whether the PPA ever occurs without such an adverbial." To which I replied "I am not sure of the value of investigating PPAs without adverbial expressions since the case we are trying to settle, John 8:58, has such an adverbial expression." You also concluded in this point that "clear-cut examples of the PPA will have such an adverbial," which I left without comment, but which is not a valid conclusion based on a survey that finds that roughly half of the grammars would agree with you, while many of the others say only that the PPA "often" or "usually" or "generally" has such an adverbial. How do you make the jump of identifying the those who say so as the "clear-cut" case while the rest implicitly provide something not "clear-cut"? If you mean only that your chosen grammarians are more decisive compared to the more cautious ones, I would say you have picked the weaker batch (since as you yourself admit, it is dangerous to talk of "always" and "never" in grammar). In your post # 8 you clarify:

> Please notice that I did NOT claim here that the PPA must be accompanied by an adverbial but that the "clear-cut examples of the PPA will have such an adverbial."

Honestly, there is no practical semantic difference between "the PPA must be accompanied by an adverbial" and "the PPA will have such an adverbial," is there? And if you do mean something different than I understood you to mean, where does that leave your argument? Your nice touch-ups and qualifications of your earlier statements break up the progression of argument you attempted to use them for. And if you really mean only "most," or "usually," or only wish to establish "burden of proof" rather than any absolute rule of inclusion and exclusion, why do you refer to

>the importance you and other advocates of the PPA interpretation of John 8:58 have attached to the alleged exceptions.

Again, you can't have it both ways. Do you mean to claim an absolute exclusion of adverbial clauses from the PPA, or not? Are there actual exceptions, or only "alleged exceptions" that you wish to dispute? Do you wish to make an argument or only pretend to make an argument?

In your POINT 4, you claim

> By an 'adverbial expression' of past time most of these grammars evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase."

To which I replied, "This is a wholly unwarranted conclusion."

To which you now object

> Your claim that my conclusion is "wholly unwarranted" is \*at best\* an overstatement, at worst simply wrong . . . The fourth point here has to do with what the grammars mean by "adverbial expression" or whatever term they use, not with how regularly the grammars say that such an expression occurs with a PPA."

I know that's what the point is about, and it is a false one. "These grammars" amount to fifteen. Of these fifteen, "adverbial expression" is used by only two (Jannaris, Burton). If we add "adverb" (Robertson, Dana & Mantey, Brooks & Winbery) and "adverbial phrase" (Fanning, Wallace) to this set, that makes seven. Seven of fifteen is not "most." Now, whom do you mean to include in "these grammars" for which you presume to say what they mean? If you mean just these seven, then you are not informing us of anything definitive that will help us decide to treat John 8:58 as a normal part of this construction, or as an "alleged exception." And even if you limit yourself to what these seven say, you are still misstating the case. Do Fanning and Wallace "evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase"? No, because they include Acts 27:33 as an example, which involves an adverbial clause. You presume that the clause as a whole does not make this sentence a PPA, but do Fanning and Wallace agree with you? Do they specify what makes it a PPA? If not, then two of your seven cannot be counted. Does Robertson "evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase"? No, because he cites 2 Peter 3:4 (Fanning does, too), which involves an adverbial clause. Does Robertson specify that it is not the clause but the phrase that makes it a PPA? If not, then a third of your seven cannot be counted. So now we are down to four of fifteen grammarians who "evidently mean an adverb or adverbial phrase." I agree that that is what these four of fifteen had in mind when they wrote the section on PPAs in their grammars, because they use terms that suggest that and cite examples only of that sort. Does that mean that even these four of fifteen excluded adverbial clauses from functioning in the same way in making PPAs? You have not statement from them expressly stating so. So your point 4, in and of itself, is invalid. So it is also invalid to read it as informing your point 2, that is, as "Most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression [read: adverb or adverbial phrase] modifies the present-tense verb" to make a PPA. The terms "usually," "generally," "often," "such as" noted in your point 3 are relevant to both points 2 and 4, not because of information they provide on how regularly such an expression occurs with a PPA, but because they are indicative of what the grammarians mean when they talk about the modifying element of PPAs: not necessarily adverbs or adverbial phrases, but including other kinds of grammatical (and even contextual) modifiers.

In your post #8 you show why your interpretation of these grammarians was so off-base. You say:

>the term "adverbial expression" is nicely suited to refer to both adverbs and adverbial phrases, and this is precisely what Jannaris and Burton appear to mean by the term. On the other hand, CLAUSES, which you want to include, are not plausibly included under the rubric of "expressions." One cannot plausibly argue that the clause "Before Abraham came into being" constitutes an "expression."

I beg your pardon, but you presume what you must prove. For a grammarian, "expression" is about as broad as you get, when you have ready to hand such more narrowly defined terms as "adverbs," "phrases," "clauses," not to mention "nouns," "adjectives," and so on. Grammarians do not choose their words lightly or carelessly, and there is nothing in the word "expression" to limit it in the way you propose to do. You are reduced to two grammarians out of fifteen who say "expression" and cite only adverbs and adverbial phrases, while not expressly excluding clauses. And note how many use the term "expression" while avoiding even the limitation of "adverbial." I don't feel that burden of proof shifting over to my shoulders, Rob.

In your post #8, then, you clarify that

> my interpretation rests on three "legs":

>

> (1) the more specific terms "adverb" and "adverbial phrase" that several of the grammars use

So now it's "several," before it was "most." This is no leg at all.

> (2) the fact that the term "expression" easily fits single adverbs and adverbial phrases but not whole clauses

An arbitrary presumption on your part, so not a leg to stand on.

> (3) the fact that most of the grammars that use these vaguer terms do not apply them to whole clauses

Winer, BDF, Turner, McKay, Fanning, Wallace do so explicitly. The others, as I pointed out before, cite only a handful of examples and in such a sample the preponderance of simple adverbs and adverbial phrases over clauses is wholly predictable and insignificant.

You next quote me as saying:

<< Second, you say only BDF and McKay cite the clausal example of John 8:58, when in fact Winer and Turner also do. >>

To which you reply:

> Your objection here subtly yet significantly misunderstands my argument. Winer and Turner say nothing at all about expressions of past time accompanying the PPA verb. (This is one of the weaknesses of their treatment.)

This is pure smoke, Rob. Your statement in context was "By an 'adverbial expression' of past time most of these grammars evidently mean . . . Most of the examples that the grammars cite, as we shall see, have such adjuncts or adverbial phrases. The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." If you won't even admit such a simple misstatement, but must defend it and never retract anything, then we are truly at a dead end in this discussion. There is no qualification in your point 4 that you mean to speak only of those who specifically discuss expressions of past time in their definitions. And as I have shown, you cannot even legitimately talk about "most of these grammars" as talking about "adverbial expressions," since only two use that phrase, and the enumeration of who cites what denies you your "most" even if we give you the benefit of the doubt and throw in a number of other characterizations of the modifying element as, for all intents and purposes, "adverbial expressions." You then refer to "THE grammars" -- which? All of them? your "most" of them? Then you say, "The only grammars" -- of all of them? of some of them? You may not have meant to say what you said, but you said what you said, and it was trivially inaccurate. The problem is that all of your trivial inaccuracies of counting and of interpretation tend the same way. They all tend to support your arbitrary narrowing of the PPA category. Now why is that? And while you can clarify what you meant to say, removing the objection to what you did say, you do not answer my substantive criticism: that these grammarians cannot be presumed to exclude or consider exceptional the use of a clause to form a PPA, that several of them expressly include such clausal PPAs, and that none of them says anything explicitly against construing clausally modified verbs as PPAs.

You add:

>My statement that BDF and McKay include whole clauses "only because they count John 8:58" was a comment about those two grammars only. It simply meant that the only clausal examples either one of them gave was John 8:58.

But in context you said: "The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses . . . (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." Now I scarcely want to get diverted from debating the meaning of John 8:58 to the meaning of your sentences, Rob, but to me this sentence seemed to suggest that "The only grammars that include adverbial clauses in the PPA are those that cite the case in question, and so must be set aside." To which I responded by citing FROM YOUR OWN NOTES six cases of grammars citing other clausal PPAs. And in all fairness I should have also cited against you Winer and Turner as well who, regardless of not explicitly characterizing the modifying element, include John 8:58 as one of their examples of what a PPA looks like. YOU keep skimming off the sample of grammars for one reason or another all those that go against your position. Whereas I don't dismiss any of them, but take all of them as part of the overall picture of the discussion of the PPA in the literature. Several of these expressly cite PPAs

involving adverbial clauses, and none of these expressly exclude adverbial clauses from constituting PPAs. That pretty clearly puts the "burden of proof" on you.

You again clarify:

>Remember, all I claimed was that the clear-cut examples of the PPA in the grammars are those with adverbs and adverbial phrases, putting the burden of proof on those who would argue that verbs not having such modifiers are also examples of the PPA.

Adverbial clauses are "such modifiers," and that is what is involved in John 8:58. So, as I said before, we don't even have to bother with cases where there is no "adverbial expression," since several of these grammars expressly cite John 8:58 as a PPA, others cite other clausal PPAs, and so it is only a statistical datum, not a burden of proof, that confronts us in this construction.

You duly note:

> I would remind you that in my 1989 book I did allow that by a broader definition of the PPA one might plausibly categorize EIMI in John 8:58 as a PPA (Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John, 111-12). In the fifteen years since I published that book, not one critic of my position on the PPA has given any attention to that observation. They have uniformly criticized my position as though I were maintaining that by no plausible definition of the PPA could John 8:58 be classified as an example.

Great, then it's settled. Why are we still arguing about this? I suppose because in that same book (12) you say that the JW interpretation of John 8:58 is "in error," and you go on in the book to argue against the PPA translation of the verse as part of the proof that the JW interpretation is in error, because you rightly see that the verse, construed as a PPA, not not exclude their interpretation, and so does not prove it to be in error. You are perfectly free to go on to arguments of interpretation with the JWs, but this "leg" of your argument, the one rooted in the translation of the verse, will not work. I want to remind you of what you say on page 104 of your book:

"[I]t is entirely possible to identify eimi in John 8:58 as a PPA without implying that Jesus' words are not an assertion of eternal preexistence." And you go on in this passage to raise some doubts, but at the same time defend the identification of the verse as a PPA. I agree with what you say here. Your interpretive options are left open by a PPA reading of John 8:58. So why do you need to now reject the PPA reading of the verse? Only because it leaves open not only your interpretive option, but also that of the JWs. On other words, the PPA reading would be perfectly fine with you if it not only permitted your interpretation but also excluded any other. Since it doesn't, you must reject the PPA reading. But let's cut to the chase, shall we? If you set aside the PPA reading, how are you going to translate John 8:58 in a way that holds together the whole sentence as a set of mutually informing and modifying grammatical units, one that coherently relates the significance of the main verb to what you yourself recognize as its dependent clause?



We can probably leave aside the boundary issues between historical presents, descriptive presents, gnomic presents, customary presents, various forms of indirect discourse, and the PPA as not directly relevant to the issues of John 8:58 (and anyway a muddled mess in grammars). The only points of relevance is when we have, as in John 8:58, a present tense verb modified by an adverbial clause expressing past time. We are not trying to write a grammar here, Rob, but settle a single verse of translation. I have already explained my issue with your use of "contested" to narrow the examples cited in the grammars. These typically do not involve any direct contest, but only the introduction of subcategories of the present tense verb that a particular grammarian construes that others do not. You yourself say:

>If Dana & Mantey classify John 15:27 under two headings . . . they are not contesting either one.

The same can be said of any grammarian who uses a verse for an example of one sort of reading while choosing other examples for another sort of reading. We do not know for a fact that that grammarian would exclude either reading as possible. You add:

>By "contested" I meant classifying the text under a different category INSTEAD of as a PPA.

This may be no more than happenstance, what springs to mind, or dependence on other grammars. Unless the grammarian says, "this is an x, NOT a PPA," you are just guessing at what they were thinking. It is a more objective approach to include every single example of the PPA included by any grammarian, and use this information to define the range of possible forms it is seen to take. We can argue into the next decade on how wide or how narrow to make the PPA category, and to me it would be a waste of time. Call it what you want, define it how you want: all that is relevant is the small set of closely parallel constructions, all of which entail a modification of the sense of the verb from simple present to a complex tense reference involving both past and present elements. Actually, we agree that this is going on in John 8:58, and it is only your extrapolation from this function of the verb to a broader theological interpretation that is holding us up.

I pointed out how you find reason to set aside the supposed "contesting" in some cases but not in others, and that your willingness to do so coincides precisely with whether the case supports your argument or goes against it. To this criticism, you reply:

>I did not dismiss the "static present" as a separate category, and certainly not because it "serves my purposes." What Dana and Mantey call the "static present" is what grammarians today usually call the \*gnomic\* present (e.g., Moule, Wallace). My disagreement with Dana and Mantey was regarding their choices of examples for this usage, not their distinguishing it from the PPA.

If they are "gnomic," why did you include them among your count of PPAs? You always seem to bend the rules and categories to your own advantage, Rob. On the contrary, the

three examples that Dana & Mantey cite as "static presents" are in every case passages that other grammarians take as PPAs. They are not in any obvious sense "gnomic," and I, in fact, supported your decision to set aside Dana & Mantey's silly classification of them as "static."

I agreed also to set aside 2 Cor. 12:9, to which you responded:

> This means that you have now acknowledged that the one example that Brooks/Winbery give is invalid. It also means that your complaint above about the grammarians "splitting hairs" only goes so far, since it doesn't help retain 2 Corinthians 12:9 as a valid example of the PPA.

Well, it doesn't extend to taking a gnomic statement as a PPA, as you apparently wanted to do with Dana & Mantey's static presents. The latter are not gnomic because they are not statements of abstracted truths that apply at any time, whereas 2 Cor. 12:9 is. As for the fact that I have "acknowledged that the one example that Brooks/Winbery give is invalid," I suppose you mean the one example out of five (the others are Luke 13:7; 15:29; John 5:6; 15:27) that involves a clause rather than a simple adverb or adverbial phrase. Of course I acknowledge it, because it's not a PPA; I don't need to score points by misrepresenting the facts.

In my post, I argued that Acts 27:33 actually involved an adverbial clause, whereas you count it as employing an adverbial phrase. Your response is muddled in several ways:

> The sentence literally reads, "A fourteenth today day watching without food you are going nothing having eaten."

This is not a literal translation, it is a lexical ("interlinear") rendering of each of the Greek words in the sentence. You should know the difference.

>The first participle is present tense (as you noted). Translators usually treat the adverbial expression "a fourteenth day today" as if it were denoting a period beginning in the past and continuing up to the moment of speaking.

Ahem, an "adverbial expression"? Formally "a fourteenth day" is a direct object phrase. They were observing what? A fourteenth day. So much for your limited definition of "adverbial expression." "Today" is an adverb, independent of the object phrase, and certainly not influencing anything into a past tense. So the formal grammar offers nothing to make the participle a PPA here although, as you note, several translations take it as one anyway, which means, they see a PPA as possible even without an adverb or adverbial phrase of past time.

> The adjective "without food" is the adjectival complement of the main verb "going." Translators translate the main verb as a past tense to agree with the temporal aspect they have assigned to the participle.

Yes, "without food" is an adjectival adjunct or supplement to the main verb. But the more immediate complement is the whole clause "observing a fourteenth day today." It is not the adverb "today," nor the formal tense of the participle that makes this clause past tense, but rather the content of the clause, the meaning of the direct object phrase in the context of the whole sentence, that makes the main verb a PPA. Do you now see why so many of your grammarians cautiously used very broad terms such as "expressions of past time," "time indication," "temporal indicator," and so forth? Acts 27:33 is a classic example of a PPA, "uncontested" I might add, that does not involve an adverb or adverbial phrase of past time.

Oh, but now this example has embarrassed you, so you must reverse yourself and reject it:

> However, it is my opinion that identifying the present participle or the main verb as a PPA is a mistake. . . it is a misclassification of the way the present-tense verbs function in the sentence.

Funny, you didn't see any reason to say that before, and even included it in your count of valid PPAs, "all" of which were supposedly cases involving adverbs or adverbial phrases of past tense.

You go on to say:

> There are only two ways to turn the verbs into PPAs, and both require ignoring the actual grammar of the sentence.

Right, this is what we mean by "idiomatic," and this why the PPA is defined so broadly and loosely in the grammars.

>One way is . . . The other way to turn the verbs into PPAs would be to turn "a fourteenth day today" into "for fourteen days" (the NIV and NLT take this approach).

In other words, to take what is a direct object phrase in Greek into an adverbial phrase in English. We shouldn't allow that, should we?

My other example of a clausal PPA from your set was 2 Peter 3:4, of which I said:

<< 2 Peter 3:4, actually involves an adverbial clause. "From the beginning of creation" is not the direct temporal modifier of the main verb, but a complement of hOUTWS, "the same since the beginning of creation." The verbal modifier is the clause "since the ancestors fell asleep," using an aorist indicative. >>

To which you said:

> I disagree. The main clause literally reads, "all things thusly continue since the beginning of creation" (PANTA hOUTWS DIAMENEI AP' ARCHS KTISEWS).

This is grammatically incorrect. The main clause is "All things continue thusly." There are then two subordinate elements, a clause and a phrase, that in each case must be linked to what they complement.

> Given the choice between a prepositional phrase that immediately follows the main verb or a subordinate clause that precedes the verb and is separated from it by the subject and another adverb, I think we should take the prepositional phrase as the direct temporal modifier.

You might think so, but you have no basis to so think in the Greek grammar. You are applying English, not Greek principles to the relation of the sentence's elements. Your choice is arbitrary, and mistranslates the sentence.

> the sentence structure appears to require us to translate something like this: "For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have been continuing in this way from the beginning of creation."

Now what on earth does this mean? This is exactly the sort of weird non-sequiter you make of John 8:58. If "all things have been continuing this way from the beginning of creation," then what is the clause "ever since the fathers fell asleep" doing in the sentence? What does it modify? How does it complement or supplement what you take for the main clause? You leave it dangling off over the abyss. Go back and read the sentence in context. The complaint of the speakers is not that "all things have been continuing in this way from the beginning of creation" but that "all things have been continuing the same since the fathers fell asleep," that the promise of change made to the fathers has not come to pass. To this statement is added a complement of "the same," namely, "since the beginning of creation."

>This is how most translations construe the text, by the way.

So now you want to cite the support of other translators, whereas in the previous example you proudly defied them. Any way, you are wrong to say this, too. You presume they construe the sentence as you do, but they don't.

KJV, NRSV "as they were from the beginning of creation"

NASB, NAB "(just) as it was from the beginning of creation"

NIV "as it has since the beginning of creation"

AB "as they did", and so forth. The addition in English of an additional verb (were, was, has, did) signals that the phrase modifies "as," not the main verb.

Now you can dispute the translations. But in order to make your case, you have to explain the function of the clause if it is not the direct modifier of the verb. I diagram the sentence as follows:

S: All things	V: continue	ADV: thus
	Adv. Cl.	Adv. Phr.
	since the	since the
	fathers	beginning
	fell asleep	of creation

I said,

> << Of course because you see these two contested examples as employing adverbial phrases, you think we "probably should" include them with the uncontested examples, while you do not extend the same tolerance to Luke 2:48 and Acts 26:31, evidently because they do not involve the adverbial phrases you want >>

To which you replied:

> I gave additional reasons beyond the absence of a temporal adverbial word or phrase for disputing the classification of these texts as PPAs.

You go on to allude to four distinct reasons for setting aside Luke 2:48, but going back to your post #6, I can only see one: you note a textual variant for the form of the verb. In the case of Acts 26:31 you provided no additional reasons.

You conclude post #8 with:

> My post #7 proves that adverbial clauses in conjunction with present-tense verbs of the kind closely paralleling John 8:58 in grammatical form usually if not always function differently than the adverbs and adverbial phrases in undisputed examples of the PPA. Such sentences rarely if ever use the present-tense main verb as a PPA.

Yes, because in post #7 you have padded your sample with examples that do not employ adverbial clauses of PAST TIME. It is once again circular to constitute a set of mostly non-past-time clauses and then declare as a conclusion that many of the members of the set do not modify the verb in the direction of a past-time reference.

>The two posts need to be studied together to appreciate the force of my argument. When you do so, you will find that none of the clear examples of the PPA in biblical Greek uses temporal subordinate clauses to mark the present-tense main verb as a PPA,

False, I have identified two from your post #6 and three from your post #7, a statistically significant number given the small size of the samples

> while few or none of the nearly dozen texts that do parallel John 8:58 in this grammatical construction can possibly be a PPA.

actually, it's five of thirteen (counting the two clausal examples from post #6 with the eleven from post #7), which I don't think amounts to "few or none" in this size of a sample, but is actually nearly 40%.

>Put these two halves of the argument together, and the conclusion is irresistible:

sorry, no

>at the very least, it is quite possible that John 8:58 is not a PPA, and indeed the evidence strongly tilts in favor of concluding that it is not.

I have run through the data with you, and made my own argument of how your conclusion is based on misconstrual and misinterpretation of the grammarians and of the examples. I suppose we can go around and around on this. But without any expectation of progress, I think we have both had our say.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #9 – 9/8 – #15586:**

**ROB #9: SHALL WE CONTINUE?**

Jason,

Although I am prepared to continue our discussion, it seems prudent to pause and ask you if you wish to do so. I ask for two reasons.

First, you have lost the respectful tone that characterized your earlier posts, suggesting that you are losing patience with me. I am thinking of comments like these from your most recent post:

<< Do you wish to make an argument or only pretend to make an argument? >>

<< This is pure smoke, Rob.... If you won't even admit such a simple misstatement, but must defend it and never retract anything, then we are truly at a dead end in this discussion.... You may not have meant to say what you said, but you said what you said, and it was trivially inaccurate.... And while you can clarify what you meant to say, removing the objection to what you did say, you do not answer my substantive criticism.... >>

<< You always seem to bend the rules and categories to your own advantage, Rob. >>

<< Oh, but now this example has embarrassed you, so you must reverse yourself and reject it. >>

I must say that rude comments like these discourage me from continuing. I have tried to be as fair to you as possible and to accept your clarifications and explanations in good faith. For example, consider our discussion of the argument in your book with regard to the placing of the main clause in the English translation of John 8:58. I critiqued that argument, showing that as stated the argument was unsound (and would even mean that several of your own sentences were “not English at all!”). In response, you thanked me for helping you to “clarify” what you knew you meant, and then proceeded to set forth what looked to me like a rather different argument. However, I did not accuse you of being unwilling to admit “a simple misstatement.” I accepted your “newly clarified argument” (as I put it) as you presented it and proceeded from there.

My second reason for asking if you wish to continue this discussion is that in your most recent posts you appear to be pushing me to drop my line of argument. At the end of post #8 you wrote:

<< Since we seem to have exhausted the biblical data on the grammar and syntax of John 8:58, since the closest parallels among that data all support the reading of the verse I have

been defending, and since broader interpretation and Christology is not what this discussion is about, I am inclined to see this exchange as nearing its finish. Of course, if you have anything new to introduce, I would be happy to consider it. >>

The last sentence expresses openness to “anything new,” but this apparently means material on something other than the PPA.

In post #9, you seem downright impatient for this part of the discussion to end:

<< Great, then it's settled. Why are we still arguing about this? >>

<< But let's cut to the chase, shall we? >>

<< I have run through the data with you, and made my own argument of how your conclusion is based on misconstrual and misinterpretation of the grammarians and of the examples. I suppose we can go around and around on this. But without any expectation of progress, I think we have both had our say. >>

As I said, I am willing to continue our discussion. I would like to explore the grammatical issues further. I would like to discuss with you the matter of how best to define the PPA, the proper exegesis of such texts as Acts 27:33 and 2 Peter 3:4, and so forth. In this discussion, I have tried to rethink these questions with an open mind. I am quite prepared to acknowledge where my thinking has changed and where my earlier statements were incorrect, imprecise, or unclear. However, I would rather stop than subject myself further to increased belittling.

It seems to me that you wish to allow yourself the freedom to “clarify” your position, express criticisms of what the grammarians say, and espouse your own opinions on these matters, but you are not prepared to extend the same courtesies to me. Here’s a particularly telling example. In your post #8, you wrote:

<< But, you argue, they should be reinterpreted as examples of a previously unheard of grammatical classification, the "eternal present." Now, Rob, if you would like to propose a brand new category of verbal tense in the Greek language, please write an academic argument and submit it to a peer reviewed journal dealing with such matters. In the meantime, I think it best that we stick to generally recognized grammatical categories as the level playing field on which we discuss the meaning of John 8:58. >>

Apparently, though, you exempt yourself from this rule. Thus, later in your post, you argue that we may identify a verb as a PPA even in cases where it does not refer to an ongoing action or state in progress. You describe this usage as one of “existential identity.” Such a claim represents a departure from what ALL of the grammars say about the PPA. You even make the following comment:

<< This is an unexplored aspect of the PPA that maybe I should write up someday. >>



Well, perhaps you should write an academic argument for it and submit it to a peer-reviewed journal dealing with such matters. In the meantime, perhaps we should stick to generally recognized functions of the PPA as the level playing field on which we discuss the meaning of John 8:58.

Or, we could just agree to consider each other's arguments without resorting to arguments *\_ad verecundiam\_*. In order to do so, though, we will need to agree to allow each other the same freedoms of exploration, clarification, and revision that we wish to exercise.

Frankly, we would need to agree to such a "level playing field" before continuing any sort of discussion, whether or not we move beyond the question of the classification of John 8:58 as a PPA. We would also need to agree to avoid rude, condescending remarks toward each other. Otherwise, this discussion indeed will be over. That would be a shame, in my opinion.

Regardless of what you decide in this regard, I plan to continue thinking through and writing about the issues. If you wish to continue our discussion, please let me know.

**JASON #10 – 9/14 – #15636:  
JASON #10: SHALL WE CONTINUE?**

Dear Rob,

I sincerely apologize for causing you personal offense. I assure you that such was not my intention. I wrote in what I regarded as the spirit of frank criticism. If there was also a "tone" of impatience with you (always an iffy thing to indentify in the written medium), it was only my intention to sum up where the many words of our respective posts led by way of conclusions that could be very briefly stated, and to wonder aloud how any further repetition could change those quite clear conclusions. While I greatly valued the detail into which your posts 6 and 7 went, I felt that your post 8 mixed clarification with obfuscation (a word which you use in your posts on this site), and I thought that needed to be pointed out. If my choice of expression fell short of what you consider respectful in an exchange of this sort, I deeply regret it, not only for the hurt to your feelings, but also for creating an obstacle to hearing your response to my substantive criticisms.

I admit that when my words are extracted from their context, they do appear brusque. Obviously, they stood out from their context in that way in your reading, and again I apologize for any anxiety that caused you. I do think, however, that when read in context they are part of specific critiques, not just throw away rhetoric, and that their expression is shaped in part by the character of material to which I was responding. I was under the (apparently mistaken) impression that my word were within the parameters of typical exchanges on this site.

You take offense at the following:

1. << Do you wish to make an argument or only pretend to make an argument? >>

May I compare this to you remark in post 15513, "Come on, gentlemen, think."

2. << This is pure smoke, Rob.... If you won't even admit such a simple misstatement, but must defend it and never retract anything, then we are truly at a dead end in this discussion.... You may not have meant to say what you said, but you said what you said, and it was trivially inaccurate.... And while you can clarify what you meant to say, removing the objection to what you did say, you do not answer my substantive criticism.... >>

May I take the liberty of comparing this to your use of the term "smoke" to refer to a specious form of argumentation in post 15572, and to the following statement of yours in post 15384, under the subject line "Martin, get it right!": "If you can't or won't get something this simple right, I don't know how to help you."

3. << You always seem to bend the rules and categories to your own advantage, Rob. >>
4. << Oh, but now this example has embarrassed you, so you must reverse yourself and reject it. >>

May I compare these statements to remarks from your post 15583 that referred to someone else's argument as "shameless in its misrepresentation," and your flat out comment, "The above statement is a lie."

I certainly agree that if statements such as mine and yours are taken with anything less than a generous spirit of the give-and-take of lively debate, they appear rude. My language reflected a settling-in and degree of comfort in our exchange that decreased its level of formality. But you are perfectly correct that we should endeavor to maintain the formal level of civility with which we started, and I will do this studiously from now on.

So accepting the spirit you maintain of allowing each other to clarify past statements, allow me to restate each of the offending remarks.

1. << Do you wish to make an argument or only pretend to make an argument? >>

In your post 8 you insisted quite forcefully that you did not claim that a PPA could not be formed by an adverbial clause, and did not claim that it could be formed even without an adverbial of some sort, and therefore I had no grounds for criticizing you as if you had done so. To this I responded that, (1) on the one hand, this clarification of yours pretty much drew the question to a close, since it put us in agreement on the array of forms of the PPA and, (2) on the other hand, that what you appeared to give in this statement was undermined in your position by other statements that claimed that there were NO examples of the forms you hypothetically accepted as possible, that this absence of examples placed a burden of proof on anyone who offered these hypothetical forms (to which you referred as "alleged exceptions" to your preferred forms) as explanation of John 8:58. This apparent contradiction in your position confused me, and it was in this context that I asked, "Do you mean to claim an absolute exclusion of adverbial clauses from the PPA, or not? Are there actual exceptions, or only 'alleged' exceptions' that you wish to dispute?" The offending remark was meant only as a highlighting, an underlining, if you will, of the apparent contradiction in your position. If you truly do not mean to insist on excluding adverbial clauses from the PPA construct, I am not clear what we are still debating about the PPA. Can you please clarify?

2. << This is pure smoke, Rob.... If you won't even admit such a simple misstatement, but must defend it and never retract anything, then we are truly at a dead end in this discussion.... You may not have meant to say what you said, but you said what you said, and it was trivially inaccurate.... And while you can clarify what you meant to say, removing the objection to what you did say, you do not answer my substantive criticism.... >>

I objected to your miscounting of witnesses among the grammarians to an acceptance of clausal forms of the adverb in PPAs. You yourself made use of two sorts of evidence to the "apparent" meaning of the grammarians in their definition of the PPA and its recognized range of forms: (1) their explicit characterization, and (2) their citation of examples. You put great stock in this combined evidence for supporting your summation of positions on this question. In cases where (1) was not sufficiently explicit (as I showed, in most cases the grammarians spoke quite broadly), you accepted (2) as decisive. In reply, I pointed out that by your own measures, Winer and Turner need to be included with BDF and McKay as supporting the clausal form since, although their remarks were not sufficiently explicit about what sort of grammatical context made a verb a PPA, they cited clausal examples. Your reply to this criticism was that they did not offer a sufficiently detailed (1) to be counted among the other grammarians. This is hardly a consistent and even-handed handling of the grammarians (and remember, this is YOUR set of grammarians), and I found your reply to be little more than argument by sleight-of-hand, since it seizes upon a completely arbitrary reason to exclude these two grammars at this point of your argument, precisely where they work against you. I do not consider this a forthright manner of handling the evidence.

3. << You always seem to bend the rules and categories to your own advantage, Rob. >>

In your quantification of the evidence of the grammars, you found reasons to accept and count as evidence in support of you examples that by your own admission were thought by grammarians to belong to other categories of verbal sense. I cited as an example the Dana & Mantey category of "static presents" employed by Dana & Mantey 2 Peter 3:4, 1 John 3:8, and John 15:27 (the latter of which they ALSO categorize as a PPA). Even though in other cases where DIFFERENT grammarians cited a particular passage under different categories you considered the passage "contested," you accepted John 15:27 as "uncontested" as to its proper categorization, when it is cited under two different categories by the same grammarians. You then proceeded to ignore the "contested" status of the other two "static presents" for the reason, which you explicitly gave, that they "also have such an adverbial phrase," in other words, were of a type to support the conclusion you wished to draw, which is circular argumentation, and with no more remark about their supposed "contested" status than that it is "difficult to see why" Dana & Mantey classified them not as PPAs but as "static presents." So you added them to your count of examples supporting your interpretation of the PPA, while continuing to reject other examples that were no more or less "contested" than these, for the simple reason that they did not "also have such an adverbial phrase," and therefore including them would weaken your argument. When I objected to this completely unacceptable procedure, you responded by saying the "static present" is what other grammarians call the "gnomic present." But since you excluded 2 Cor. 12:9 as contested because Fanning identifies it as a "gnomic present," your response does nothing to answer my criticism that how you use your grammars and examples falls well short of a forthright manner. If this is inadvertent, then one would expect my criticism to point out to you that of which you were unaware, and for you to respond by admitting the inconsistency and correcting your analysis. Will you now do so?

4. << Oh, but now this example has embarrassed you, so you must reverse yourself and reject it. >>

You had included Acts 27:33 without comment in your count of examples that supported your interpretation of the forms taken by PPAs. I replied by showing how Acts 27:33 actually involved an adverbial clause, and so could not be fairly counted the way you had. To this, you replied "it is my opinion that identifying (it) as a PPA is a mistake . . . it is a misclassification." You did not say you had changed your mind or were clarifying your previous post. You simply turned about and wanted to drop it from consideration in response to my observation of its clausal construction. What else prompted your change of heart? And wasn't it originally included, as all of the other examples were, because your selection of grammarians "uncontestedly" included it as a PPA? You have not argued for dropping any other "uncontested" example of a PPA. Why contradict your whole procedure here?

I hope that this more careful stating of my objections will help to erase the bad memory of the flippant manner of expression I employed previously.

In your most recent post 9, you go on to say:

> My second reason for asking if you wish to continue this discussion is that in your most recent posts you appear to be pushing me to drop my line of argument.

I do not understand why you find this objectionable. I have demonstrated that your line of argument is flawed, that is mishandles its sources, that is employs unjustified leaps between the steps of argumentation, and that the evidence it employs refutes what you set out to argue (that is, that the "burden of proof" is on recognition of the clausal form of PPA). So if what we have here is a discussion and exchange, rather than two interlaced monologues, there is nowhere for this particular line of your argument to go. You would need to either retrace your steps and build a more sound foundation on which to continue, or accept that this line has not worked out and move on to other aspects of your analysis of the verse in question. I am puzzled why you think you should proceed as if I have never raised fundamental problems in your line of argument to this point.

You go on to say:

> As I said, I am willing to continue our discussion. I would like to explore the grammatical issues further. I would like to discuss with you the matter of how best to define the PPA, the proper exegesis of such texts as Acts 27:33 and 2 Peter 3:4, and so forth.

I think the grammarians have defined the PPA quite well for our immediate purpose here. We both have expressed frustration with the other concocting novel grammatical categories, and we should stick to what is generally accepted. I also think "exegesis" of the comparable verses is not as germane as grammatical and syntactical analysis. It is not so crucial what they mean as it how they are to be diagrammed and the relationship of their grammatical parts elucidated. Perhaps that's what you mean by exegesis.

You go on:

>In this discussion, I have tried to rethink these questions with an open mind. I am quite prepared to acknowledge where my thinking has changed and where my earlier statements were incorrect, imprecise, or unclear.

My critical comments have only been intended to point out where you were not doing so. Again, I am sorry if they were unnecessarily harsh.

You go on to complain about my dismissal of your "eternal present," which I pointed out is unheard of in Greek grammars. I suggested that we avoid the appearance of special pleading by not introducing new grammatical categories custom fitted to support our positions. You accuse me of not following the same standards I want to hold you to:

> Apparently, though, you exempt yourself from this rule. Thus, later in your post, you argue that we may identify a verb as a PPA even in cases where it does not refer to an ongoing action or state in progress. You describe this usage as one of "existential identity." Such a claim represents a departure from what ALL of the grammars say about the PPA. You even make the following comment:

>

> << This is an unexplored aspect of the PPA that maybe I should write up someday. >>

> Well, perhaps you should write an academic argument for it and submit it to a peer-reviewed journal dealing with such matters. In the meantime, perhaps we should stick to generally recognized functions of the PPA as the level playing field on which we discuss the meaning of John 8:58.

We agree that we should do so. That said, I think it only fair to say that there is no comparison at all between my side comment about an observable aspect of what is formally a PPA in Greek, regarding a minor comparative example not essential to our discussion, and your invention of a whole new category of verbal sense for the express purpose of creating a grammatical home for John 8:58 outside of PPAs. I will refrain from further comment on the "existential identity" factor to which I referred henceforth; and I expect you likewise to drop references to an "eternal present."

So let us please continue, as you expressed a wish to do so. I hope you will accept my apology for any offense, and turn to addressing the substance of my criticisms while overlooking any infelicity of expression. I do think we are in a position to consider the PPA duly clarified as a distinct form in Greek grammar, and to have established its range of possible constructions. So perhaps you would care to move on to what a sentence means in employing this form?

as always, best wishes  
Jason B.

**ROB #10 – 9/26 – #15705:**

**ROB #10: LOOKING FORWARD TO MORE**

Jason,

Thank you for your last post. I confess to finding it rather amusing that you went through some of my posts on this list outside of our discussion and found remarks that sounded similarly “rude” to the ones from your post to which I had objected. Because this life is short, I will resist the temptation to dwell on these matters further and move ahead with our discussion. I am glad that you are agreeable to doing just that.

Due to my other responsibilities, I have not had as much time recently to devote to this discussion as I would have liked. I have chipped away at a new post that I hope will redirect the discussion in a more fruitful direction. My plan is to post it to the list sometime this week.

**ROB #11 – 10/4 – #15716:**

**ROB #11: NARROW AND BROAD DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PPA**

Jason,

I apologize for the delay in continuing our discussion. Thank you for your patience.

I. PRELIMINARY COMMENTS: TOWARD A “LEVEL PLAYING FIELD”

I had appealed for a “level playing field” with regard to both of us having the freedom to make whatever argument we choose, whether it has precedent in published Greek grammars or not. In response, you stated that you would drop all reference in the future to an “existential identity” function for the PPA, and that you expected me to drop all reference in the future to an “eternal present.” Well, this is not exactly what I had in mind; I had proposed we both feel free to make our case as we saw fit. Perhaps you see more polemical gain to be made by excluding from consideration the possibility of an “eternal present” even if you have to give up the “existential identity” function of the PPA. But as it turns out, I think I can accommodate you and make the same points using recognized categories of Greek grammar.

Rather than respond *ad seriatim* to your recent posts, I would like to restate my position regarding the PPA in such a way as to put the matter in a broader context. At the same time, I will respond to specific comments from your posts of relevance. If what I say here is in any way different from what I have stated previously, feel free to consider it a corrective. However, I think the basic position I articulate here is essentially the same as the one I presented in my book *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* fifteen years ago (though hopefully I have learned something in the meantime!).

At one point in your post #9, you criticized me for “skimming off the sample of grammars for one reason or another all those that go against [my] position,” and you then stated, “Whereas I don’t dismiss any of them, but take all of them as part of the overall picture of the discussion of the PPA in the literature.” Yet you have agreed with me that at least some of the grammars occasionally misclassify a particular text (e.g., the Brooks/Winbery grammar’s citation of 2 Corinthians 12:9 as a PPA). You also feel free to criticize the grammars, as in your comments regarding Dana and Mantey’s “static present” classification of what others classify as PPAs: “It is interesting that Dana & Mantey is the culprit in all these cases, since it is one of the weaker grammars.” I don’t fault you for doing so (though I would appreciate a level playing field, as you know). The grammars are not all of the same quality, one grammar may be stronger in one area than in another, grammars contain mistakes, and recent grammars can perpetuate mistakes or improve on earlier analyses or both. There is nothing unreasonable about weighing what



the grammars say rather than merely counting them—a point I should have made from the beginning. I fear that my statistical analysis of the grammars gave the misleading impression of basing an argument on consensus rather than evidence.

## II. NARROW AND BROAD DEFINITIONS OF THE PPA

In your post #7, you observed that

<< what is involved in "contesting" classification of specific examples as PPAs is how many different subdivisions a grammarian trots out to categorize present tense verbs. In other words, it is not so much a matter of contesting as it is of how finely the grammarian is splitting hairs. Many of these subdivisions are questionable as distinct grammatical functions, and are multiplied somewhat arbitrarily. So the fact that some grammarians prefer to put forward categories such as "descriptive present" or "static present" only raises the question whether they have subdivided the PPA in a way that other grammarians don't see as valuable (and you yourself dismiss the "static present" as a separate category when it serves your purposes). >>

I responded (in my post #8):

\*\*\*I did not dismiss the "static present" as a separate category, and certainly not because it "serves my purposes." What Dana and Mantey call the "static present" is what grammarians today usually call the \*gnomic\* present (e.g., Moule, Wallace). My disagreement with Dana and Mantey was regarding their choices of examples for this usage, not their distinguishing it from the PPA.\*\*\*

In your post #9, you replied:

<< If they are "gnomic," why did you include them among your count of PPAs? You always seem to bend the rules and categories to your own advantage, Rob. On the contrary, the three examples that Dana & Mantey cite as "static presents" are in every case passages that other grammarians take as PPAs. They are not in any obvious sense "gnomic," and I, in fact, supported your decision to set aside Dana & Mantey's silly classification of them as "static." >>

This question turns out to be of direct relevance to our discussion, and I will be offering some further thoughts on it below and in my next post. First, though, I wish to make a more general observation. You rightly note that the grammars offer a variety of divisions and subdivisions of classifications; this is true pretty much across the board and not just in their handling of the different uses of the present tense. You characterize some of these fine-grained subdivisions as hair-splitting, questionable, or somewhat arbitrary. (I cannot resist noting that here again you are not simply accepting at face value what all of the grammars say about the PPA or the use of the present tense. Nor do I think you should. But if anything, you are more critical of the grammars than I am in my posts.) Regardless

of how we characterize these differences, clearly the grammars do not analyze the uses of the present tense in precisely the same way.

In light of these differences, I wish to propose a heuristic principle for consideration. The narrower the classification, the fewer texts to which it will be relevant, but the more definite one's statements about those texts can be; while the broader the classification, the more texts to which it will be relevant, but the less definite one's statements about those texts can be. I am here elaborating on a point that Wallace, for example, makes when he observes, "The problem in terminology is that the more descriptive we are, the more we exclude in our definition" (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 500). I think this is a very important observation of direct relevance to our disagreement.

Specifically, we could define the PPA more or less narrowly. As Wallace says, "Depending on how tightly one defines this category, it is either relatively rare or fairly common" (Wallace, 519). Wallace indicates in a footnote that a key issue in how narrowly one defines the PPA is how one relates the PPA to qualifying indications of past time (Wallace, 519 n. 17). Narrowly, we might define the PPA as a usage of the Greek present in which the sentence contains wording that directly qualifies the present-tense verb and indicates that the verb denotes a state or action that continued from the past up to the present. However, this definition will not include all instances in which a Greek present verb denotes a state or action that occurred in the past and that continues to occur in the present. If we want to define the PPA to cover *\*all\** such occurrences of the Greek present, of course, we can do so. Such a definition would represent the broadest possible definition. This broad definition of the PPA would not refer to a past-time qualifying word, phrase, or clause of any sort, because none would be necessary to the "PPA" in this broad sense.

Now, if we define the PPA most broadly to include all occurrences of the Greek present denoting a state or action that occurred in the past and continues in the present, our definition would overlap some other standard classifications of the uses of the present. To use Wallace's categories, such a broadly defined PPA category would overlap the "customary (habitual or general) present" (521-22) and the "gnomic present" (523-25).

For example, in the sentence, "I fast twice a week" (Luke 18:12), "fast" (NHSTEUW) denotes an action that occurred in the past and continues in the present. Yet Wallace classifies it as a "customary" present rather than a PPA (Wallace, 522). One might suppose that the difference is that in the customary present the action is discontinuous or interrupted, but if that is the case then the grammarians (including Wallace, 520) have misclassified Luke 13:7 as a PPA. When the owner in Jesus' parable says, "Look, for three years I have been coming searching for fruit" (Luke 13:7), he clearly does not mean that the owner has been continuously coming in the past and is still coming at the time of speaking. What he means is that the owner periodically has come looking for fruit—presumably once a year. Yet 9 of the 17 grammars in my survey cite Luke 13:7 as an example of the PPA, and none of the 17 grammars classifies it as anything else (Burton, 10; Robertson, 879; BDF, 168; Turner, 62; Moule, 8; Dana & Mantey, 183; Brooks and Winbery, 77; Fanning, 217; McKay, 41). The grammars cite no text as an example of the

PPA more often than Luke 13:7. What is the difference between Luke 13:7 and Luke 18:12? Apparently, the difference that these grammars recognize is that Luke 13:7 contains the temporal phrase “for three years” that explicitly qualifies the present-tense verb ERCOMAI (“I come”) to denote an action occurring during that period of time up to the present. You agree with this conclusion, since you wrote, “I do agree that customary, procedural, or iterative statements are not PPAs, since they lack any contextual modification that would indicate past time.” Other examples that Wallace gives of the customary present that could fit the “broad” definition of the PPA are John 1:38 (“Where are you staying?”) and 1 John 2:8 (“the true Light already is shining”).

The broad definition of the PPA would also include examples of the gnomic present as grammarians usually define that classification. Wallace distinguishes “two predominant semantic situations in which the gnomic present occurs”: texts in which the verb expresses something that is “true\_all\_the\_time” and those in which the verb expresses something that “is true\_any\_time” (Wallace, 523). The former subcategory of the gnomic present overlaps the broad definition of the PPA, since statements that are true at all times were true in the past and continue to be true up to the present. For example, the verb “loves” (AGAPA) in the statement, “God \*loves\* a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7), which Wallace classifies as a gnomic present, expresses an action that occurred in the past and continues up to the present. (God loved cheerful givers in the past, and has continued to love them right up to the present.) Yet the gnomic present-tense verb “loves” clearly says something MORE: it says that God \*always\* loves a cheerful giver—he always has and he always will. The problem with classifying “loves” in 2 Corinthians 9:7 as a PPA in the broad sense, then, is not that it doesn’t fit that broad definition, but that it doesn’t accurately pinpoint how the verb is being used in that text.

In your post #7, you wrote:

<< On Luke 2:48, you indicate that Robertson calls this a "descriptive present," which he defines as entailing "durative action" in "present time." Since several grammars define the PPA the same way, and two even call the PPA the "durative present," it should be obvious that Robertson has subdivided the broader PPA category recognized by other grammarians. >>

Please note that you defended the classification of Luke 2:48 as a PPA despite its lack of any reference whatsoever to past time (whether with an adverb, phrase, or clause). You did so by arguing that Robertson’s “descriptive present” should really be lumped in with the PPA, or seen as a subdivision of the PPA. Following the principle I have set forth here, I would say that Luke 2:48 may be classified as a PPA \*if\* one uses a broad definition of the PPA as applying to any and every verb that denotes a state or action that occurred in the past and continued up to the present. If that is all one means by a PPA, then of course Luke 2:48 is an instance of it. Yet this is not the whole story. Recall my response to you regarding Luke 2:48 in post #8:

\*\*\*What is obvious to one is not always obvious to another. You are confounding the term “durative present” as a designation for the PPA with Robertson’s description of the

descriptive present as “durative.” As I have noted, the descriptive present is not a subdivision of the PPA. One does not translate the present-tense verbs with past-tense English forms in such instances as “we are perishing” (Mark 4:38), “our lamps are going out” (Matt. 25:8), “how can you be turning back” (Gal. 4:9), and “the light is already shining” (1 John 2:8). Robertson describes these as “durative” to contrast them to “aoristic” presents such as “I say to you” (John 3:3, etc.) or “Jesus Christ heals you” (Acts 9:34) or “your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). If you wish to maintain that the “durative present” category is a subdivision of the PPA, then you will have to give up your claim that we should not translate the PPA using the English present tense.\*\*\*

That last sentence makes a key point. If you want to employ a broad definition of the PPA to include texts such as Luke 2:48, you can, but then you cannot consistently maintain that we *must* always translate the PPA using an English past tense. Clearly, on the broad definition that overlaps the customary, gnomic, and descriptive presents, the PPA need not and even *should not* always be rendered using a form of the past tense.

### III. THE PRINCIPLE EXHIBITED IN THE GRAMMARS

I now turn to the grammars again to illustrate or exhibit the heuristic principle I have set forth. For ease of reference, I will again quote from all 15 of the grammars that give some description of the PPA beyond a mere designation. In some cases, I have quoted the grammar more fully in order to make note of certain salient features. Instead of quoting them in chronological order, I will quote them from the broadest to the narrowest in their definitions and descriptions of the PPA. I will then explain the basis for this order. Keep in mind that I am attaching no value judgment to this order.

#### A. What the Grammars Say about the PPA

Winer (334): “Sometimes the present tense includes a preterite..., viz., when the verb indicates a state which commenced at an earlier period but still continues,—a state in its continuance.”

Turner (62): “The Present which indicates the continuance of an action during the past and up to the moment of speaking is virtually the same as Perfective, the only difference being that the action is conceived as still in progress (Burton, [sect.] 17).”

BDF (168): “The pres[ent] is not perfective in those cases where the duration or repetition of an act up to and including the present is to be designated (a temporal expression indicates the intended period of the past).”

Brooks and Winbery (77): “Durative Present. Some grammarians call this the progressive present. An action or a state of being which began in the past is described as continuing until the present. The past and the present are gathered up in a single affirmation. An adverb of time is often used with this kind of present, but a verb alone is sometimes sufficient as in the final example given below [2 Cor. 12:9]. This use of the Greek present

is usually translated by the English present perfect. Although impractical to bring out in English translation, the full meaning is that something has been and still is.”

Young (111): “A present tense form is called durative when the context conveys an action that began in the past and continues into the present. The time element is often explicit in the context.... English translations will therefore employ the present perfect.”

Smyth (422): “\*Present of Past and Present Combined.\*--The present, when accompanied by a definite or indefinite expression of past time, is used to express an action begun in the past and continued in the present. The ‘progressive perfect’ is often used in translation.”

Goodwin (9): “The present is often used with expressions denoting past time, especially PALAI, in the sense of a perfect and a present combined.”

McKay (41, 42): “Extension from Past. When used with an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications (but not in past narrative, for which see 4.2.5), the present tense signals an activity begun in the past and continuing to the present time:... This is a form of the continual realization of the imperfective aspect, and similar uses are found with the imperfect tense and with imperfective participles....”

Greenlee (49): “Past action continuing into the present (requires a specific phrase expressing the past aspect).”

Robertson (879): “\_The Progressive Present\_. This is a poor name in lieu of a better one for the present of past action still in progress. Usually an adverb of time (or adjunct) accompanies the verb.... Often it has to be translated into English by a sort of ‘progressive perfect’ (‘have been’), though, of course, that is the fault of the English.”

Jannaris (434): “It often stands with adverbial expressions denoting past time, such as PALAI ‘long since,’ ARTI or ARTIWS ‘just (now),’ where in English the progressive present would seem to be required (\_I have long been looking\_).”

Wallace (519, 520): “Extending-from-Past Present (Present of Past Action Still in Progress). 1. Definition. The present tense may be used to describe an action which, begun in the past, continues in the present. The emphasis is on the present time.... It is different from the progressive present in that it reaches back in time and usually has some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase, to show this past-referring element. Depending on how tightly one defines this category, it is either relatively rare or fairly common.... The key to this usage is normally to translate the present tense as an English present perfect. Some examples might not fit such a gloss, however.”

Dana and Mantey (183): “Sometimes the progressive present is retroactive in its application, denoting that which has begun in the past and continues into the present. For the want of a better name, we may call it the present of \_duration\_. This use is generally associated with an adverb of time, and may best be rendered by the English perfect.”

Burton (10): “\*The Present of past Action still in Progress.\* The Present Indicative, accompanied by an adverbial expression denoting duration and referring to past time, is sometimes used in Greek, as in German, to describe an action which, beginning in past time, is still in progress at the time of speaking. English idiom requires the use of the Perfect in such cases.... This Present is almost always incorrectly rendered in the R. V.”

Fanning (217-18): “Far more specialized than the customary or gnomic presents but sharing the same broad frame of reference is the use of the present indicative to denote a situation which began in the past and continues in the present. This is more specialized because it always includes an adverbial phrase or other time-indication with the present verb to signal the past-time meaning. However, it is otherwise like the customary or gnomic in sense.... It is unlike the other uses in that it explicitly includes a period of the past during which the situation continued as well.... Because of the past-time indication, the idiomatic translation is an English present perfect, and not a simple or progressive present.”

#### B. Analyzing the Descriptions of the PPA: From Broad to Narrow

I weigh five factors or considerations in determining how broad or narrow a description of the PPA is. In each of these factors, I assign a numerical “score” to assess narrowness or broadness of definition. These scores are not value judgments; a “high” score is neither good nor bad, but merely narrow.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PAST-TIME INDICATOR. The broadest definition is one that says nothing at all about a past-time expression, word, phrase, or clause as indicating or marking the verb as a PPA. The narrowest definition is one that specifies that this marker of the PPA is an adverb or adverbial phrase. Between these two extremes are less precise descriptions of the PPA marker. I assign 6 points if the grammar specifies that the marker is an adverb or phrase, 5 points if it so specifies but allows for other types of temporal expressions, 4 points if it describes the marker as an adverbial expression, 2 points if it simply refers to the marker as an expression, and 0 points if it does not mention the marker at all. Thus, a “high” score indicates narrowness and a “low” score indicates broadness. The result is that Goodwin, Greenlee, Dana/Mantey, and Brooks/Winbery score 6; Wallace, Jannaris, and Fanning score 5; Burton scores 4; BDF, Young, Smyth, and McKay score 2; and Winer and Turner score 0.

A few of these scores merit some comments. Greenlee calls the temporal marker “a specific phrase.” Arguably, Greenlee is *\*too\** specific or narrow here, since clearly a one-word adverb like PALAI can also do the job. In any case, in this post I am surveying, not criticizing, the grammars.

Jannaris and Burton both use the term “adverbial expression,” and Burton adds that it denotes “duration.” Fanning describes the marker as “an adverbial phrase or other time-indication.” The emphasis on “adverbial phrase” is Fanning’s, and indicates that such a phrase is the normal or most common marker. He adds, “or other time-indication,”

though, so as to allow other sorts of adverbials. That Fanning is referring specifically to other kinds of adverbials is evident from a footnote to this sentence, in which Fanning takes issue with the suggestion of Brooks and Winbery “that an adverbial expression is not needed to constitute this sense” (Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 217 n. 30). Fanning concludes that footnote by asserting that “the customary or gnomic categories serve quite well for any categories which, without adverbial addition, refer to actions which include a portion of past occurrence along with the present” (ibid.). So, Jannaris, Burton, and Fanning all explicitly use the term “adverbial expression” to refer to the past-time marker of the PPA. (As time permits, I will discuss in a separate post how Fanning’s description of the past-time marker as an adverbial relates to his example of Acts 27:33.)

We may infer (as you have argued) that BDF and McKay are treating the subordinate clause “before Abraham came to be” as performing that function in John 8:58. McKay’s description of the past-time marker is especially broad: “an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications.”

2. FREQUENCY OF PAST-TIME MARKER. This factor is partially independent of the first factor, because both those whose descriptions of the past-time marker are very specific and those whose descriptions are not may state that it occurs often, usually, or always. I assign 6 points if the grammar specifies that the marker always occurs or is required, 5 points if this is unstated but clearly implied, 4 points if it says that the marker usually occurs, 3 points if it says that it often occurs, and 2 points if no frequency is stated or implied. (I assign 2 points in that case, since a score of zero in category 2 assures the lowest score here as well.) The result is that Greenlee and Fanning score 6; Smyth, McKay, Goodwin, Jannaris, and Burton score 5; BDF, Robertson, Wallace, and Dana/Mantey score 4; Brooks/Winbery and Young score 3; and Winer and Turner score 2.

These scores do not reflect every nuance of the grammars. For example, Young’s statement that the past-time indicator “is often explicit” moves toward the broader definition by implying that such an indicator might not always appear in the sentence. However, all of Young’s examples (Luke 15:29; John 14:9; 15:27; 1 John 3:8) fit the narrow definition.

3. HOW TO TRANSLATE THE VERB IN ENGLISH. The broadest definition of the PPA will not specify how to translate it into English, since on a broad definition the PPA overlaps categories where the English present tense works fine. The narrowest definition will specify that the PPA should always be translated using a form of the English past tense. Since a third of the 15 grammars surveyed say nothing about this question, I do not put as much weight on it as the preceding two considerations. I assign 3 points if the grammar says the PPA should always be translated using the English perfect (or equivalent), 2 points if it says that is usually or normally the case, 1 point if it says that is often the case, and 0 points if it says nothing about it. The result is that Young, Jannaris, Dana/Mantey, Burton, and Fanning score 3 points; Brooks/Winbery and McKay score 2; Smyth and Robertson score 1; and Winer, Turner, BDF, Goodwin, and Greenlee score 0.

4. STATE OR ACTION. The broadest definition of the PPA would not limit it to actions but would include states of being as well. Since 8 grammars say “action” without even considering the use of the PPA with verbs expressing states, and 4 grammars say nothing about the matter at all, I think we should put little weight on this factor. As Daniel B. Wallace has observed, “grammars tend to speak of verbs as describing actions rather than states even when they mean to include both” (Daniel B. Wallace, “John 8:58, my Grammar, and my character,” B-Greek, 11 Jan. 1997, <http://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/archives/96-12/0624.html>). Thus, I assign just 1 point to those grammars that specify “action” alone. The result is that Winer, Brooks/Winbery, Fanning, Goodwin, Greenlee, Jannaris, and Dana/Mantey score 0 points; Turner, BDF, Young, Smyth, McKay, Robertson, Wallace, and Burton score 1 point.

5. BEGINNING IN THE PAST. Nine of the 15 grammars in the survey state that the PPA expresses an action (or a state) that began in the past:

Winer (334): “a state which commenced at an earlier period but still continues”  
Brooks/Winbery (77): “An action or a state of being which began in the past is described as continuing until the present”  
Young (111): “an action that began in the past and continues into the present”  
Smyth (422): “an action begun in the past and continued in the present”  
McKay (41): “an activity begun in the past and continuing to the present time”  
Wallace (519): “an action which, begun in the past, continues in the present”  
Dana/Mantey (183): “that which has begun in the past and continues into the present”  
Fanning (217): “a situation which began in the past and continues in the present”  
Burton (10): “an action which, beginning in past time, is still in progress at the time of speaking”

This is a crucial issue for the exegesis of John 8:58, because if one decides that any PPA verb denotes a state or action that had a beginning and then identifies EIMI in John 8:58 as a PPA, the conclusion is inescapable that Jesus’ existence had a beginning. I am not interested in prejudging that issue in this analysis, but only noting its importance for the larger discussion and its relevance in classifying a description of the PPA as narrow or broad. It is arguable that the grammars use the word “began” (or “commenced”) not because they are asserting that all PPA verbs must convey a beginning but simply because most states or actions do in fact have a beginning. (It also appears that the later grammars to a significant extent simply copied what the earlier ones said.) Again, without prejudging the issue, I wish to make note of this factor. I assign 1 point if the grammar specifically mentions a beginning and 0 points if it does not. The result is that all of the grammars receive 1 point for this category except Turner, BDF, Goodwin, Greenlee, Robertson, and Jannaris.

If we add up the points for each of the grammars, the totals are as follows:

Winer and Turner—3 points

BDF—7 points



Young and Smyth—10 points  
McKay and Goodwin—11 points  
Brooks/Winbery, Greenlee, and Robertson—12 points  
Wallace and Jannaris—13 points  
Dana/Mantey and Burton—14 points  
Fanning—15 points

I do not attach any importance to the precise numbers or order; there are different ways of weighing the various factors relating to the narrowness or broadness of the descriptions of the PPA. I am simply using these numerical comparisons as a way of graphically representing the spectrum of those descriptions from the very broad (Turner, Winer, BDF) to the very narrow (Wallace, Dana/Mantey, Burton, Fanning).

## V. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE NEW SURVEY OF THE GRAMMARS

In general, the preceding survey of the grammars tends to support the heuristic principle proposed earlier in this post: the narrower the definition of the PPA, the more circumscribed or limited its application. Those grammars that offer the broadest definitions of the PPA (with no reference at all to past-time expressions as marking the PPA) say nothing about how to translate the PPA into English.

It is striking that three of the four grammars that list John 8:58 as an example of the PPA also happen to be the three grammars giving the broadest descriptions of the PPA. McKay's grammar is the other work that cites John 8:58 as a PPA. His description of the PPA is somewhere in the middle range. Those grammars that specify adverbial past-time expressions as required markers of the PPA characteristically also state that the PPA verb is properly translated using an English past-tense form. These grammars do not cite John 8:58 as an example of the PPA. Of course, their not doing so is not a proof that it is not a PPA. There are different ways of defining the PPA, and these grammars do not claim to give an exhaustive list of all occurrences matching their narrow definition. What we can say is that their omission of John 8:58 is consistent with their narrow definition of the PPA as a present-tense verb that is accompanied by an adverbial expression that denotes duration or continuation from some past time and that must be translated into English using a past-tense form.

As one would expect, grammars that do not fit neatly into the "narrow" or "broad" categories exhibit considerable variety in their handling of the PPA. In a general way, they run a gamut from mostly narrow to mostly broad. For example, their descriptions of past-time expressions marking the PPA vary, some quite specific and some vague, and the grammars describe these past-time indicators as "usually," "generally," or "often" accompanying the PPA verb. Likewise, grammars that are neither simply narrow nor simply broad in their definitions of the PPA vary in their comments regarding how to translate a PPA verb into English. Those that say anything about it may say that the translation "normally," "usually," or "often" uses, or will use, an English past tense. In several instances, a particular grammar is narrow in one respect but broad in another.

This should not be surprising, especially in the more recent grammars, since later grammars tend to draw from earlier ones and “mixed” treatments can be the result.

Overall, then, the grammars tend to reflect the heuristic principle I have proposed, that the more specific or narrow one’s description of the PPA the fewer texts to which it will apply, while the broader the description, the more texts to which it will apply but the less that can be said with certainty about the PPA. The more broadly we define the PPA, the more likely John 8:58 is to be seen as a PPA, but then the less we can say with certainty about how John 8:58 should be translated or interpreted. In particular, if we define the PPA broadly and then classify EIMI in John 8:58 as a PPA, evidently we cannot say with certainty that we should translate EIMI using the English perfect. Moreover, if we define the PPA broadly, to be consistent we should not assume that the state or action denoted by the PPA verb had a beginning at some point in the past.

In my next post, I will propose a way of classifying EIMI in John 8:58 using categories from the recognized Greek grammars.

**JASON #11 – 10/8 – #15736:**

**ROB #11: NARROW AND BROAD DEFINITIONS OF THE PPA**

Dear Rob,

Welcome back to the discussion. We agree that we should base our arguments on established Greek grammar, and not introduce novel grammatical categories that are untested in the academic forum. That's the level playing field. We also agree that grammarians use different degrees of specificity and "hair-splitting" in their writing, that individual categories are defined more or less narrowly as the case may be. That is why it is a good idea to use, as you have, a spectrum of grammars to get an overview of the field. Now, where do we go from here? I think your comparison of Luke 18:12 with Luke 13:7 nicely demonstrates that there is a bit of overlap between sub-categories of the present Greek verb. The use of the Greek verb will not break exactly along the lines of the English verb. You are quite right to point out that the action in Luke 13:7 is customary and punctiliar, not continuous, and in this regard is close in meaning to Luke 18:12, even though in English we translate the two verbs differently: "I fast" vs. "I have been coming." We cannot translate the latter as "I am coming" in English, because the time indications in the rest of the sentence make it a PPA, as you say. Of course, in 18:12 one could translate "I have been fasting twice a week," because the statement does refer to practice in the past and continuing up to the present. But while this is possible, I agree that normally we would translate such a statement as "I fast" as a customary present. So you are interested in this contextual expression of past time that determines in the minds of most grammarians, the use of a PPA. You wish to establish a rule of thumb for the relation of a more or less broad understanding of the PPA to the inclusion of John 8:58 within that category.

As I read your attempt to do so, the words of the Great Communicator came to mind: "There you go again!"

First of all, there is the problem of assigning arbitrary point scales to each factor of comparison: factors 1 and 2 get 6-point scales, factor 3 gets a 3-point scale, factors 4 and 5 get 1-point scales. Second, you introduce as factors things that some grammarians are not interested, such as commenting on how a Greek grammatical form is to be translated. Otherwise, the general problem is taking a quantitative approach to things that may be no more than a given grammarian's habits of expression, such as including "state" with "action" when talking about verbs, or being in the habit of using the cautionary "usually, often, etc." But the latter I suppose cannot be helped, since your goal is to identify (quantitatively or not) which grammars are more specific, more specifying in their treatment, and which are less. The further problem you run into, however, is that some of these grammars are huge and expansive in their treatment of every matter, and others quite thin and terse. So this is an editorial factor that, if not taken into consideration, skews any measure of specificity.

But even if somehow we hurdle all these arbitrary and subjective factors in your analysis, we still run smack up against a repetition of past mistakes of characterizing your material. Under factor 1 you say: "I assign 6 points if the grammar specifies that the marker is an adverb or phrase . . . The result is that Goodwin, Greenlee, Dana/Mantey, and Brooks/Winbery score 6." Oh really? Let's see:

Goodwin: "often used with expressions denoting past time."

Greenlee: "requires a specific phrase expressing the past aspect"

Dana/Mantey: "generally associated with an adverb of time"

Brooks/Winbery: "an adverb of time is often used . . . but a verb alone is sometimes sufficient"

So you are wrong to give Goodwin a 6 -- it should be a 2. Greenlee says "a specific phrase," pretty clearly in the broadest possible sense, but I will give this one to you. Brooks/Winbery should be a 5 at most by your point system Dana/Mantey are the only clearly legitimate 6 here.

And so forth, throughout your quantifying exercise. Now, we've been over this ground before, and things got a little testy between us on things such as this. So do you expect me to say nothing about this? Maybe just 'oops'? Rob, I've labored over this paragraph of my response much longer than the rest of it. Let me ask you, how do you account for these "mistakes"? As you know, I have pointed out before how your tally of the evidence has repeatedly been, not in my opinion, but objectively inaccurate, as is the case above. I don't want to go backward, but how do we go forward if you are going to keep doing things like this? I don't want to go through all your quantifications checking for this kind of inaccuracy. That's not the level of discussion I was hoping for. This repeated problem raises questions about your arguments being made in good faith. I can't help it, but it does. You obviously are a person of great passion for your beliefs, but should I then assume that you just get "carried away" in defending what you consider crucial to those beliefs (even though I have said from the beginning that the best way to translate John 8:58 does not in itself mean that the belief you connect to it must be abandoned)? This may just be a case where the twain cannot meet on a "level playing field," because you are an apologist whose single purpose is to win arguments by any means, to defend your faith at any cost. I am an academic, whose single purpose is to get to the truth a matter, however much I like or dislike that truth, however much or little it serves me personally. So, naturally, you "build arguments," and everything is raw material for and in service of those arguments. I analyze data, and put a premium on identifying, characterizing, and incorporating it into accurate representations of history, of texts, of what-have-you. So I don't know how we're going to get past this, because I can respect what you do as part of the phenomenon of religion, but I can't as part of the field on which I play (to keep using this metaphor), where people hold each other to a level of integrity in the use of evidence. I've said enough; let's move on to the conclusions you seek to reach.

1. "The narrower the definition of the PPA, the more circumscribed or limited its application." This is a tautology, and we can agree on it.

2. "Those grammars that offer the broadest definitions of the PPA (with no reference at all to past-time expressions as marking the PPA) say nothing about how to translate the PPA into English." I do not find this significant, but merely an editorial characteristic of their interest and brevity of treatment.

3. "Three of the four grammars that list John 8:58 as an example of the PPA also happen to be the three grammars giving the broadest descriptions of the PPA." Okay.

4. "Those grammars that specify adverbial past-time expressions as required markers of the PPA characteristically also state that the PPA verb is properly translated using an English past-tense form." The only grammars that say that such expressions are "required" are Greenlee and Fanning (as you yourself note under factor 2). Of these two, only Fanning discusses proper translation. You think that the requirement is "unstated but clearly implied" in Smyth, McKay, Goodwin, Jannaris, & Burton. I concur. Of these five grammars, only three (Smyth, Jannaris, and Burton) comment on how to translate the verb. Several other grammars that do not specify adverbial past-time markers as required, and so are counted as less specific in defining the PPA by you, also remark on using past-tense forms in translating the verb. So the connection you try to make in this conclusion between greater specificity of definition and greater specificity of translation does not hold up. Some of the grammars that more narrowly define the PPA say nothing about how to translate it; some of those with broader definitions do; and overall I think to comment or not on translation is an editorial decision independent of the definition of the PPA.

5. "These grammars (the same set as listed under 4 above) do not cite John 8:58 as an example of the PPA. . . . What we can say is that their omission of John 8:58 is consistent with their narrow definition of PPA as a present-tense verb that is accompanied by an adverbial expression that denotes duration or continuation from some past time and that must be translated into English using a past-tense form." But McKay, one of the set above, does cite it as an example. Furthermore, when it comes to what these grammars specify as the determining factor, we get some pretty broad characterizations (Greenlee: "a specific phrase"; Fanning: "an adverbial phrase or other time-indication"; Smyth: "a definite or indefinite expression of past time"; McKay: "an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implication"; Goodwin: "expressions denoting past time"). Moreover, indication that a PPA should be translated using a past-tense form is common even among those with what you consider broader definitions of the PPA, e.g., Brooks/Winbery, Young, Wallace. So you have not established any direct correlation between narrow definition of the PPA, specificity of how to translate, and omission of John 8:58 as an example. These three things are all independent variables in your source grammars.

6. "The more broadly we define the PPA, the more likely John 8:58 is to be seen as a PPA, but then the less we can say with certainty about how John 8:58 should be translated, etc." As pointed out above, you have not demonstrated these connections. Your use of broad and narrow does not correspond to what these grammars actually do.

The inclusion of grammars that have no interest in commenting on translation is a methodological flaw. Grammars that use quite broad language in referring to the modifying element are just as likely to be specific about translating the verb with a past-tense form as are grammars that give more narrow characterizations of the modifying element.

So I do not see the discussion advanced by this failed effort to establish some sort of significant correlation between what are distinct and independent variables in what the grammars choose to discuss and how they discuss it. What we do have in all these grammars is a very well defined use of the Greek present that well fits the case of John 8:58, to my satisfaction better than any alternative usage. But you promise to introduce a new suggestion in your next post, and I look forward to that.

Let me conclude by agreeing with you that we probably should not put too much weight on grammarians referring to action "beginning" or "commencing" in the past in the PPA. They are necessarily speaking in the broadest terms of what verbs generally do. This is clear in the fact that Greek EIMI is the verb in question in several examples of the PPA they cite (John 8:58; John 14:9; John 15:27; 1 John 2:9), and the be-verb is by definition stative rather than active -- it does not refer to action at all, does not indicate anything specific about the beginning or commencement of the state of being, but at most may specify when (in the past, present, or future) one could be said to be in a state of existence. This of course allows you to say that the use of the be-verb in John 8:58 does not include or envision anything about beginning to be or commencing to be. That is certainly true. One cannot claim that, even translated as a PPA, John 8:58 describes or refers to a beginning or commencement of being. That is why I have been saying all along that you can interpret this verse as you do without denying the verbal quality at work here. So that returns us to the question of what you are laboring to prove here, and the answer must be that the verse itself, by not referring to commencement of being, necessarily refers to an eternal non-commencement of being. You can't get that from the grammar. Because to do so you would have to make the case that either the be-verb itself consistently implies eternal existence (which, of course, would be nonsense), or that some other modifying element in the verse indicates such an eternal non-commencement of being. Unfortunately, all you have to work with is the adverbial clause, "before Abraham was born." So you will need to focus your argument on something in that clause that establishes your reading.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #12 -- 10/11 -- #15754:**

**ROB #12: NARROW AND BROAD DEFINITIONS OF THE PPA  
(CONT.)**

Jason,

I wish I could thank you for your reply, but regrettably, I cannot.

Your critique of my point scales takes no notice whatsoever of either the reasons I gave for them or the cautions I noted about pressing the numbers in any precise way. I specifically made note of the kinds of difficulties you mentioned (e.g., the fact that grammarians may not mean to exclude “states” when they say “actions,” or the fact that some grammars go into matters in more detail than others). I also cautioned that the numbers were only illustrative.

You found fault with two of the scores I gave in the first category, specifically for Goodwin and Brooks/Winbery. You are only somewhat right about Goodwin. He says “expressions denoting past time, especially PALAI,” and the last two words (which you omitted in your critique), though very specific, do not exclude other “expressions” besides words and phrases. So I should not have assigned Goodwin 6 points. However, I stated that I assigned “5 points if it so specifies (i.e., adverbs or phrases) but allows for other types of temporal expressions.” Therefore, since Goodwin specified the adverb PALAI as “especially” what he had in mind, I should have assigned 5 points rather than 6 to Goodwin in this category. So Goodwin’s total score should have been 10, not 11. Your claim that by my system Goodwin should have received 2 points in the first category is simply mistaken.

You claimed, “Brooks/Winbery should be a 5 at most by your point system,” because, you note, they say that “a verb alone is sometimes sufficient.” However, this qualification pertains to my second category (the frequency with which they associate the temporal indicator with the PPA), not the first category (how they describe the temporal indicator). Brooks/Winbery, who describe the temporal indicator as “an adverb of time,” use the same expression as Dana/Mantey, and therefore should have a score of 6 points.

You go on to imply that my entire analysis is flawed by commenting, “And so forth, throughout your quantifying exercise.” But all I have seen is a tempest in a teapot. My analysis involved assigning 75 distinct scores (to 15 grammars in 5 categories), and as far as I can tell you have exposed a mistake of 1 point out of 6 in 1 of those 75 scores. (If we take your figures at face value, we are still talking about mistakes in only 2 of those 75 scores.) You asked, “So do you expect me to say nothing about this? Maybe just ‘oops’?” Yes. That’s about all it deserves. You claim, “This repeated problem raises questions

about your arguments being made in good faith. I can't help it, but it does." Well, I can't help but disagree. I doubt it would do any good for me to argue for my integrity or good faith. I'll tell you what, though: I will not stoop to this level and claim that your mistakes suggest a lack of good faith on your part. I must also reject your insulting claim that as an apologist (as opposed to objective, truth-seeking academics like you) my "single purpose is to win arguments by any means." As if an academic could not possibly have any interest in reaching certain conclusions or in defending those conclusions once he has put them in print! The fact is that as an apologist, I want to be held "to a level of integrity in the use of evidence." For you to assert otherwise is both insulting and unjustified. In this case, \*your\* "use of evidence" (to justify these offensive comments) is seriously in question.

You commented, regarding the paragraph in which you make these personal judgments about my intent and method: "Rob, I've labored over this paragraph of my response much longer than the rest of it." I'm afraid I think you should have labored longer over trying to understand my arguments fairly and accurately.

Next, you went through my conclusions and discussed them under six points. You agreed that (1) "the narrower the definition of the PPA, the more circumscribed or limited its application," though trivializing it as "a tautology." You also acknowledged the accuracy of my statement that (3) "three of the four grammars that list John 8:58 as an example of the PPA also happen to be the three grammars giving the broadest descriptions of the PPA."

I had also stated that (5) grammars using the narrowest definitions of the PPA "do not cite John 8:58 as an example of the PPA." Further, I commented, "their omission of John 8:58 is consistent with their narrow definition of the PPA as a present-tense verb that is accompanied by an adverbial expression that denotes duration or continuation from some past time and that must be translated into English using a past-tense form." You disagreed, stating that McKay's definition fits that description. However, McKay does not specify that the temporal indicator must be "adverbial" (his description of the temporal indicator is one of the broadest) and does not say that we "must" translate a PPA with a past-tense form. His definition, as I explained, is in the middle range, not at the narrow end of the spectrum. In any case, I acknowledged that his grammar is anomalous with regard to my observation that classifications of John 8:58 as a PPA tend to be linked to broad definitions of the PPA.

Your main claim in responding to the remaining points (2, 4, and 6) is that I failed to show that the narrowness or broadness of the various definitions of the PPA had any connection to what the grammars say about translating the PPA. Your objections amount, in my estimation, to saying that there is no hard and fast, necessary correlation between the broadness or narrowness of the definitions and the comments (if any) about how we should translate the PPA. I really think that, here again, your objections simply do not take into account the qualifications I carefully made. My claim was not that a necessary, inexorable correlation exists between narrowness of definition and definiteness about how to translate the PPA. My claim was that narrow definitions are consistent with



definite assertions about using past-tense English forms to translate the PPA, and that the grammars reflect this claim to a significant extent but not perfectly. Note, for example, the following comments:

“Likewise, grammars that are neither simply narrow nor simply broad in their definitions of the PPA vary in their comments regarding how to translate a PPA verb into English. Those that say anything about it may say that the translation ‘normally,’ ‘usually,’ or ‘often’ uses, or will use, an English past tense. In several instances, a particular grammar is narrow in one respect but broad in another. This should not be surprising, especially in the more recent grammars, since later grammars tend to draw from earlier ones and “mixed” treatments can be the result.”

If we keep these cautions and qualifications in mind, I think my comments about a “characteristic” correlation are justified. Of the five grammars that state or imply that we should always render a PPA using an English past-tense verb, four are at the narrow end of the spectrum of definitions (Jannaris, Dana/Mantey, Burton, and Fanning; Young is the only exception). In fact, these four grammars have four of the five narrowest definitions. (The other grammar, Wallace, says that we should “normally” so translate a PPA.) This is an impressive correlation; and in this light, the fact that all three of the grammars giving the broadest definitions fail to say anything about how to translate the PPA merits at least some significance as well.

What is beyond controversy is that the grammars do not all agree that the proper English translation of a PPA is always a past-tense verb. Of the ten that say anything about it, five do say or imply that the proper translation is always in the past tense, but the other five say that the past tense is normally, usually, or often the right translation. We can say either that there is only one correct definition of the PPA and that at least five of these ten grammars are wrong on this particular issue, or we can say that they may all be right depending on how broadly or narrowly we define the PPA.

Finally, you are mistaken in thinking that my argument with regard to John 8:58 is that “the verse itself, by not referring to commencement of being, necessarily refers to an eternal non-commencement of being.” That simply is not my argument.

So, I am disappointed in your response—not because you disagreed with me, but because you maligned me based on a rather poor understanding my arguments.

Nevertheless, I will press on and continue the discussion as time and energy permit. I have already done a lot of work on my next installment and hope to post it in the next day or two.

**JASON #12 – 10/13 – #15758:**  
**JASON #12**

I must agree with those on this site who have intervened to say we have reached the completion of a cycle of this discussion. With all due respect, this discussion is quickly descending into one of those schoolyard arguments about the rules that disrupts the game. In tennis, when a linesman calls a foot-fault, it is not "maligning" the player. It is indicating that one of the players is not abiding by the rules and standards of the game. When the player commits the foot-fault repeatedly, as you have repeatedly misrepresented the data of the grammars in our discussion, this can be attributed to one of three causes: (1) the player does not understand the rules, (2) the player lacks the skill to avoid committing the fault, or (3) the player is trying to get away with something to give him an unfair advantage. I will avoid the mistake I made in my last post of trying to find the most generous explanation to excuse your conduct. Your vociferous objection to that effort showed that it was futile. You may choose any of the above reasons that best suits you, as can our readers. But it is pointless to continue in this climate of recrimination against me for doing what I am here to do, which is engage in constructive debate of the issues while holding you, as you would no doubt hold me, to standards of accuracy and fairness.

You said, "I had proposed we both feel free to make our case as we saw fit." It would seem you have in mind two side-by-side monologues without either being interrupted by the other. I'm sorry, but that's a total waste of my time, and you certainly don't need me present for you to "press on" with your own theories. In the academic forum, or even in public debate, one's arguments and evidence are subject to review, testing, and challenge. You are wrong when you suggest that an academic like myself has as much at stake in defending a published position no matter what as you do as an apologist. There is nothing dishonorable in an academic saying, "I once thought x, but I have since been persuaded that y is a better understanding of the case." Academics modify, reverse, and correct their positions all the time, as I would on this issue if any persuasive evidence and argument to be set before me, either of a new and better understanding of the grammar, or of flaws in my own current grasp of it. Needless to say, neither has occurred. But although a person can be discomfited by demonstrations that he has used evidence in a faulty way, he has no grounds to blame the critic for finding the fault. I have patiently analyzed your arguments, and found them to be arbitrary and contrived. But that's not really the problem. The problem is that I have also found, since the discussion turned specifically to the PPA with your post 6, that you repeatedly misrepresent the material you are using from the grammars, and fail to accurately report its congruence or lack of congruence with criteria you yourself set for counting the grammars in favor or against the various positions you have maintained. This is no longer a matter simply of refuting your arguments, but of being forced to question your willingness or ability to use the evidence fairly.

When I agreed to come on to your site and discuss/debate John 8:58, I naturally assumed that there would come a time when we would have probed and tested each other's arguments thoroughly, when each of us would have learned all there was to know about the strengths and weaknesses of our respective positions, and -- most importantly -- when the air would have been cleared of erroneous arguments and the issues would be reduced to the few bare debatable facts. That time seems to have come. We have gone over all of the salient points raised in our respective books; we have clarified our positions and noted points of agreement; we have brought into sharp relief where we disagree and the basis on which we each rest our position. Most importantly, I think I have thoroughly demonstrated the baselessness of your positions on the grammar and syntax of this sentence. It is possible that your argument got bogged down in the PPA issue, and that you intended to advance to some new feature of the question. But since we have gone over the full extent of the argument offered in your book, substantially amplified with lots of new evidence and argument on your part, I must agree that we have reached a stopping point.

I won't pretend to tell you what you should feel obliged to do, but from my perspective no further argument can be made on your side without some sort of accounting of the errors in what you have offered to date, and with a much more forthright declaration of your position. Despite repeated restatements, your position has not gotten any clearer. You have avoided flat out denying the existence of the clausally-modified PPA, because to do so would be untenable in light of the grammars, many of which acknowledge and note its inclusion in the form under discussion. Yet in some way or another, you seek to discount this variety of the form in order to exclude John 8:58 from it. You have failed to do so. You have also failed to identify any valid and recognized alternative. Perhaps you intended eventually to do so. You had an opportunity following my post 10 to acknowledge that you had failed to dislodge the argument in favor of construing John 8:58 as a PPA, but would instead endeavor to offer a more compelling alternative. Instead, while ignoring my criticism of your past arguments, you returned to the same ground to try another desperate bid to push the PPA out of consideration, and committed the same faults of argument as before. I showed in my next post that this new argument of yours is as fallacious as the previous one, and that your efforts to correlate relative breadth of definition, degree of specificity of translation, and inclusion or exclusion of John 8:58 as an example to be hopelessly muddled and contrived. But more disappointingly, this argument involved the same sort of misrepresentation of the grammars that I had pointed out in my responses to your posts 6-8, and asked you to explain in my post 10. I must remind you that these involved cases where YOU established the criteria by which you would count a grammar for one position or another, and then failed to accurately report how the grammars met your criteria, simply misascribing grammars to a position in some cases, finding exceptional reasons not in your basic criteria to assign a grammar to a position when it favored you, finding exceptional reasons not in your criteria to exclude and not count a grammar to a position that did not favor you, counting an example as a PPA when you thought it favored you, and then rejecting it as a PPA when I pointed out that it in fact favored my position. It is not personal when I point these out, it is not insulting or rude or maligning. It is what is necessarily involved in a debate over something that is to be settled by the facts. If facts

are misreported, the issue cannot be settled on valid grounds. You now, belatedly, call one such instance a "mistake." Once or twice is a mistake, but a dozen times is not, especially when every single "mistake" has been to your advantage. You have never, even once, made a "mistake" that did not favor your position. How do you account for that? Nor have you, in light of me pointing out miscounts and things of that sort, gone back and withdrawn an argument based on what I have demonstrated to be faulty use of the evidence. That is why I lamely attempted in my last post to posit a fundamental difference of attitude and approach between us, trying to imagine what an apologist has at stake that would keep him from acknowledging error or the successful point of the other side, compared to an academic such as myself for whom the issue is simply the accurate rendering of five Greek words. If I make a mistake, or someone else makes a valid point I have not previously considered, what I want to do is take that into account in reaching a better understanding and rendering of those five Greek words, setting aside (or "bracketing") any bias of preference or belief that would cloud my judgement or prevent me from accepting what is validly argued and supported.

So we are stuck and it would probably be good to hear from our audience if they see any point in continuing this line of the debate, and to allow a review and response to questions that have occurred to them about the ground we have covered. We had promised to those who wished to see this discussion/debate on this site that there would be an opportunity for anyone who wished to comment or raise questions. Our readers have now called for this promise to be fulfilled, and for that purpose, I will remain on the site for two weeks. After that, I am afraid that the pressing demands of my sabbatical research project must be attended to. We can leave open a possible resumption in the future, or perhaps a debate of John 1:1 on which we also have both taken strong public positions, provided we can resolve our differences over fair debate.

**ROB #13 – 10/14 – #15761:**  
**ROB #13: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE**

Jason,

You wrote:

<< I must agree with those on this site who have intervened to say we have reached the completion of a cycle of this discussion. >>

As I shall explain later in this post, this is simply not correct.

You wrote:

<< With all due respect, this discussion is quickly descending into one of those schoolyard arguments about the rules that disrupts the game. In tennis, when a linesman calls a foot-fault, it is not "maligning" the player. It is indicating that one of the players is not abiding by the rules and standards of the game. >>

The reason this discussion is “descending” into an argument about fair play is that instead of simply stating where you disagreed with my arguments and why, you chose to make insulting personal comments about me. We had agreed not to do this. It would not be “maligning” for you to say (rightly or wrongly) that I had misreported something in a Greek grammar. It most definitely *is* “maligning” for you to question that I am making my arguments “in good faith” and to assert that because I am an “apologist” my “single purpose is to win arguments by any means, to defend [my] faith at any cost,” in contrast to your self-proclaimed interest solely in the pursuit of truth.

You wrote:

<< I will avoid the mistake I made in my last post of trying to find the most generous explanation to excuse your conduct. >>

Perhaps you think it was generous to question my good faith, integrity, and interest in the truth and to charge that I am simply trying to win the argument “by any means” and “at any cost.” I did not find that generous in the slightest.

You seem to be confused as to who has been attacking whom. Thus, you wrote:

<< But it is pointless to continue in this climate of recrimination against me for doing what I am here to do, which is engage in constructive debate of the issues while holding you, as you would no doubt hold me, to standards of accuracy and fairness. >>

There is no “climate of recrimination against” you, Jason. I simply pointed out that your personal comments about me were “insulting and unjustified.” In fact, I made of point of saying that I would not return insult in kind by questioning your integrity or good faith. As has often been said, no good deed goes unpunished.

You wrote:

<< You said, "I had proposed we both feel free to make our case as we saw fit." It would seem you have in mind two side-by-side monologues without either being interrupted by the other. I'm sorry, but that's a total waste of my time, and you certainly don't need me present for you to "press on" with your own theories. >>

It is difficult to know how to respond to such wildly off-base characterizations of what I have said. The sentence that you quoted is not even from the post to which you are supposedly responding, but from an earlier post (post #11). You have lifted it out of context from that post, transplanted it into the context of my objection in my post #12 to your personal insults against me, and then somehow come up with the idea that I was objecting to “being interrupted.” I cannot even imagine how in your mind this mishandling of what I wrote can be justified. For the record, what I meant by us both being “free to make our case as we saw fit” was that we could “make whatever argument we choose, whether it has precedent in published Greek grammars or not.” Here is the context from my post #11:

“I had appealed for a ‘level playing field’ with regard to both of us having the freedom to make whatever argument we choose, whether it has precedent in published Greek grammars or not. In response, you stated that you would drop all reference in the future to an ‘existential identity’ function for the PPA, and that you expected me to drop all reference in the future to an ‘eternal present.’ Well, this is not exactly what I had in mind; I had proposed we both feel free to make our case as we saw fit.”

And far from objecting to your suggestion as an “interruption,” I agreed to your suggestion! Here is the rest of that paragraph:

“Perhaps you see more polemical gain to be made by excluding from consideration the possibility of an ‘eternal present’ even if you have to give up the ‘existential identity’ function of the PPA. But as it turns out, I think I can accommodate you and make the same points using recognized categories of Greek grammar.”

You continue to miss the point (for whatever reason) when you write:

<< You are wrong when you suggest that an academic like myself has as much at stake in defending a published position no matter what as you do as an apologist. There is nothing dishonorable in an academic saying, "I once thought x, but I have since been persuaded that y is a better understanding of the case." Academics modify, reverse, and correct their positions all the time, as I would on this issue if any persuasive evidence and

argument to be set before me, either of a new and better understanding of the grammar, or of flaws in my own current grasp of it. Needless to say, neither has occurred. >>

I agree, of course, that academics \*often\* “modify, reverse, and correct their positions.” However, to suggest that this is the norm for academics, while insinuating that one cannot expect “apologists” to do the same, is simply wrong. Apologetics and scholarship are not mutually exclusive categories, and one can be an apologist and a scholar. Some apologists are conscientious and correct their positions as they learn more. Some scholars are academic hacks pushing an agenda. I make no judgment about what sort of scholar you are. I simply disagree with your positions on some matters. You, on the other hand, have made the offensive judgment that my values and purposes are antithetical to scholarship. That is the context in which I pointed out that scholars can and sometimes do exhibit the same kind of intransigence in the face of contrary evidence that you attribute to me and to all “apologists.”

You wrote:

<< But although a person can be discomfited by demonstrations that he has used evidence in a faulty way, he has no grounds to blame the critic for finding the fault. >>

I did not blame you for claiming that I had used evidence in a faulty way (though I did \*refute\* that claim). I blamed you for your insulting insinuation that I used evidence to win the argument with no regard for the truth.

You wrote:

<< I have patiently analyzed your arguments, and found them to be arbitrary and contrived. But that's not really the problem. The problem is that I have also found, since the discussion turned specifically to the PPA with your post 6, that you repeatedly misrepresent the material you are using from the grammars, and fail to accurately report its congruence or lack of congruence with criteria you yourself set for counting the grammars in favor or against the various positions you have maintained. This is no longer a matter simply of refuting your arguments, but of being forced to question your willingness or ability to use the evidence fairly. >>

What is noticeable in these comments, and throughout your most recent post, is that you offered no response to my substantive reply to your contention that I misused the evidence in my last post on the issues (my post #11). The substantive material in my post #12, about which you said nothing except for one off-base remark (see below), was roughly five-sixths of the post. The one-sixth to which you did respond, you misconstrued repeatedly, as I have been explaining here.

I responded in my post #8 to your claim that I “repeatedly misrepresent[ed]” the grammars in my post #6. In my post #11, I began recasting the issue pertaining to the PPA to meet your demand that the question be addressed solely in the categories already given in the grammars. You found, in my opinion, one minor mistake in a large pool of

data, which I immediately acknowledged. I have shown considerable willingness to rethink my claims and acknowledge legitimate criticisms—far more than you have, in fact, as I shall document below.

You wrote:

<< We have gone over all of the salient points raised in our respective books; we have clarified our positions and noted points of agreement; we have brought into sharp relief where we disagree and the basis on which we each rest our position. Most importantly, I think I have thoroughly demonstrated the baselessness of your positions on the grammar and syntax of this sentence. It is possible that your argument got bogged down in the PPA issue, and that you intended to advance to some new feature of the question. But since we have gone over the full extent of the argument offered in your book, substantially amplified with lots of new evidence and argument on your part, I must agree that we have reached a stopping point. >>

It is simply factually incorrect that “we have gone over the full extent of the argument offered in [my] book.” I have not yet even attempted to address a number of criticisms you expressed of the argumentation in my book from your very first post. For example, I have yet to respond to your criticisms of my argument concerning the antecedent orientation of the PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI clause. I have yet to respond to your claim that I (and A. T. Robertson!) are woefully mistaken in thinking that EIMI in John 8:58 is a predicate absolute. Nor have I replied to your criticism of my argument that the words EGW EIMI in John 8:58 should be translated “I am” to establish continuity with the other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus. I have also not yet said anything in response to your arguments against translating John 8:58 to reflect a connection with the “I am” sayings of God in Isaiah. So you are quite mistaken in thinking we have “gone over all of the salient points raised in our respective books.” We are just getting started! However, I am sensitive to the desire to conclude this discussion more quickly, and I agree to do so. I will offer a specific plan at the end of this post.

You wrote:

<< I won't pretend to tell you what you should feel obliged to do, but from my perspective no further argument can be made on your side without some sort of accounting of the errors in what you have offered to date, and with a much more forthright declaration of your position. >>

Since I responded in my last post (#12) to your allegation of errors needing “some sort of accounting,” and you have chosen to ignore that response, I have to differ with your “perspective.”

You wrote:

<< You have avoided flat out denying the existence of the clausally-modified PPA, because to do so would be untenable in light of the grammars, many of which



acknowledge and note its inclusion in the form under discussion. Yet in some way or another, you seek to discount this variety of the form in order to exclude John 8:58 from it. You have failed to do so. You have also failed to identify any valid and recognized alternative. Perhaps you intended eventually to do so. >>

There is no “perhaps” about it. In my post #11, in the very last sentence of that post, I stated:

“In my next post, I will propose a way of classifying EIMI in John 8:58 using categories from the recognized Greek grammars.”

Again, you are simply ignoring most of the argumentation I have been presenting, in both #11 and #12 of my posts. I make no judgment as to *\*why\** you are doing so, but that you are doing so is an irrefutable fact.

You wrote:

<< You had an opportunity following my post 10 to acknowledge that you had failed to dislodge the argument in favor of construing John 8:58 as a PPA, but would instead endeavor to offer a more compelling alternative. Instead, while ignoring my criticism of your past arguments, you returned to the same ground to try another desperate bid to push the PPA out of consideration, and committed the same faults of argument as before. I showed in my next post that this new argument of yours is as fallacious as the previous one, and that your efforts to correlate relative breadth of definition, degree of specificity of translation, and inclusion or exclusion of John 8:58 as an example to be hopelessly muddled and contrived. >>

This is all factually erroneous. I did not ignore your criticism of my past arguments. I quoted from several of your criticisms and explained that I was responding to them by approaching the PPA issue from a fresh angle. Instead of trying to “push the PPA out of consideration,” as you allege, I suggested that one could keep the PPA in consideration with respect to John 8:58 depending on how one defines the PPA. This is exactly the point I made in my book 15 years ago, though I have sought to articulate the case for that conclusion in a fresh and more rigorous way. Your claim to have shown “that this new argument of [mine] is as fallacious as the previous one” is vacuous. The truth is that you ignored most of the data I marshaled and the careful qualifications I made, got wrong some of the points you did address, and in this latest post of yours blatantly ignored my refutation of your criticisms.

You wrote:

<< You now, belatedly, call one such instance a "mistake." >>

There was nothing “belated” about it. I immediately acknowledged that in one case I had made a mistake. I also corrected you on several mistakes that *\*you\** made, *\*none of which you have acknowledged\** (see below).

You wrote:

<< You have never, even once, made a "mistake" that did not favor your position. How do you account for that? >>

Naturally, all the mistakes that you claim to have found in my analyses were mistakes that you thought hurt my position. But in truth, I have not made as many mistakes as you allege, and I can actually think of at least one mistake that I made that did hurt my position—one that I corrected later, only to have you criticize me for doing so! That was the mistake of accepting uncritically the classification of Acts 27:33 as a PPA. I should have thought that through more carefully before agreeing to that classification.

Again, I have clearly and forthrightly acknowledged mistakes in my argumentation and made a good faith effort to correct them. You, on the other hand, have *\*not\** acknowledged your mistakes. Here are some of the more notable ones (excluding your many misrepresentations of my own views and arguments):

\* You claimed that John 2:9 and similar texts are examples of the PPA, when various grammarians have clearly explained that these texts exhibit a separate usage of the present in indirect discourse. After I refuted your claim, you refused to acknowledge that you were incorrect, though you agreed to leave these texts aside because none of the grammars supported your view on them.

\* You cited Brooks and Winbery in support of the claim that a PPA does not need a temporal expression or indicator to mark it as such. However, as I showed, their one example of a PPA without such a marker (2 Cor. 12:9) is not a PPA. You acknowledged that it was not a PPA but did not acknowledge the point I made that without this example Brooks and Winbery failed to support their statement.

\* You falsely characterized the distinction made in some grammars between the PPA and the descriptive present as hair-splitting, when the two usages are distinct in a meaningful way and when as a rule we translate them differently in English. You specifically confounded the term “durative present” as a designation for the PPA with Robertson’s description of the descriptive present as “durative.”

\* You incorrectly claimed that I should have assigned a score of only 2 to Goodwin on the specificity of the grammar’s description of the temporal marker of the PPA. I had mistakenly assigned it a score of 6, and after reading your criticism showed that the proper score was 5.

\* You erroneously claimed that I should have assigned Brooks/Winbery a score of “5 at most” in the same category. I showed that the score of 6 was correct.

In addition to these mistakes—which I have already demonstrated were mistakes, and which you have chosen so far not to acknowledge—you have made other mistakes that I

planned to point out in my next post. The clearest one pertains to Psalm 89:2 LXX, about which you asserted, in response to my translation of that verse, “there is nothing at all in the Greek behind ‘even.’” However, the word “even” in my translation renders the Greek word KAI, which, as any first-year Greek student knows, frequently means “even.”

Now, once again, I refuse to make the argument that these mistakes call into question your integrity, your status as a scholar, your good faith, or your commitment to the pursuit of truth. I will not even claim that your refusal to acknowledge the mistakes previously pointed out to you proves that you are lacking in these areas. I simply point them out as evidence that everyone makes mistakes, we all have trouble admitting them, and if we cannot always agree about what really are mistakes this is just part of the reality of human discourse, even in scholarship.

You wrote:

<< That is why I lamely attempted in my last post to posit a fundamental difference of attitude and approach between us, trying to imagine what an apologist has at stake that would keep him from acknowledging error or the successful point of the other side, compared to an academic such as myself for whom the issue is simply the accurate rendering of five Greek words. >>

Jason, I have to tell you, I just don't buy this. Your book has a clear agenda, and that is to show that the English translations that most English-speaking Christians use are theologically biased, particularly in texts relating to the doctrine of the Trinity. There is a reason why your book has chapters taking issue with most English versions in their rendering of texts using PROSKUNEW as “worship” (chapter 4), of Philippians 2:6-7 (chapter 5), Colossians 1:16-20 (chapter 7), Titus 2:13 (chapter 8), Hebrews 1:8 (chapter 9), John 8:58 (chapter 10), John 1:1 (chapter 11), and texts referring to the Holy Spirit (chapter 12). It is not likely to be an accident that your book sides with the New World Translation (and other antitrinitarian versions) in *every* one of these cases. Even in your appendix, where you criticize the NWT for its use of “Jehovah” in the New Testament, you split the difference by criticizing conventional versions for *not* using it in the Old Testament. So it is not credible for you to tell us that the issue in John 8:58 for you is the trivial-sounding issue of “the accurate rendering of five Greek words.” Of course, you are entitled to make your case, and any critique of your case should engage your arguments rather than resorting to *ad hominem*. But don't expect those of us who have actually read your book to believe that you do not to have a larger point you are trying to defend.

You wrote:

<< We had promised to those who wished to see this discussion/debate on this site that there would be an opportunity for anyone who wished to comment or raise questions. Our readers have now called for this promise to be fulfilled, and for that purpose, I will remain on the site for two weeks. After that, I am afraid that the pressing demands of my sabbatical research project must be attended to. >>

I certainly don't wish to keep you longer than is convenient for you. I will post on the issues I mentioned earlier in this post that I have yet to address in our discussion as quickly as I can. Let us say that I will do so by the end of this weekend. Then, beginning on Monday, we will open the discussion to list members for a week. If you would like, we can then offer closing comments in a single post each and wrap this up.

**JASON #13 – 10/14 – #15763:**

**JASON #13: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

Rob,

I find your response utterly unacceptable. Given the call from our readers now for an opportunity to make comments and questions, and the constraints of my timetable, which require me to be away most of next month, there is no place for you to introduce a set of new arguments in such a fashion that I would be excluded from responding to them. You list at length criticisms I have made of your position very early in our exchange three months ago, and pointed out that you have not yet responded to them. You have had every opportunity to do so, but have failed to avail yourself of it. After my challenges to your misrepresentation of the grammars in the first half of September, there was a three week hiatus before you responded, during which you obviously were deciding your priorities for proceeding. At that time, you neither responded to my demonstration of past misuse of the evidence, nor progressed to these other issues you now seem to find so important, but tried to yet another scheme to set aside the PPA that involved the same sort of misrepresentation. This one more example was quite frankly the straw that broke the camel's back for me, and since you refused to accept correction on this problem in the past, I could scarcely see the point in drawing up yet another long list of faults in your presentation when I had no confidence that we were playing by the same rules.

You write:

> There is no "climate of recrimination against" you, Jason. I simply pointed out that your personal comments about me were "insulting and unjustified." In fact, I made of point of saying that I would not return insult in kind by questioning your integrity or good faith.

The latter was simply a rhetorical ploy, as we both know. In fact by claiming that I was engaged in "ad hominem" argument, which I was not, and describing my remarks as "insulting," you are attempting to establish this climate of recrimination, to somehow put the onus on me for spoiling the party by pointing out the misleading nature of your handling of the sources, and finally to avoid the issue of misconduct altogether. I must tell you that this bullying tactic won't work on me. The recrimination to which I referred is precisely your attempt to dismiss my valid and objective detection of misuse of evidence as "ad hominem." I have demonstrated a consistent pattern of abuse of the sources that leads to the conclusion that you are, for whatever reason, not abiding by recognizable standards of accurate representation. Perhaps I need a bigger thesaurus to find additional ways to convey this point about your conduct in this debate. But I doubt that any way of expressing it would avoid your misconstrual of it as "ad hominem." I have commented not on who you are, but what you have done, and criticized it, as indeed it is, as outrageous. I also find absurd your claim that by identifying you as an apologist I am engaging in "ad hominem." Rob, you self identify as an apologist. Your assertion

that an apologist shares the same values in scholarship as an academic historian is quite simply nonsense. An apologist, by definition, is a defender of truths he considers already established and irrefutable. All of an apologist's "scholarship" is shaped by the goal of finding new and better ways to defend what he already takes to be true. An apologist can abandon a line of argument as unsuccessful, but only to be replaced by a stronger argument for the same position.

I won't pretend that there aren't hundreds of scholars who claim to be academics who are really in their methods apologists. But that makes them bad academics. An academic must be prepared to follow the facts wherever they lead, as I do. You attempt to further cast aspersions on me by claiming that my book has "an agenda." I spell it all out in the book. The types of passages and terminological issues I selected for that book are precisely where there is theological investment and controversy, because that is where the pressure is greatest on translators to read the original in line with their beliefs, rather than what the Greek actually says. My "agenda" is historical accuracy; but that is not what you mean by the word. Once again, you misrepresent material in front of you to our readers. You say nothing of my high rating of the NAB, put out by Trinitarians. You say nothing of my criticism of the NWT on gender language. You dismiss as trivial the serious defect of most Old Testaments regarding the name of God in order to skew my equal criticism of them and the NWT on this issue.

You say:

> The reason this discussion is "descending" into an argument about fair play is that instead of simply stating where you disagreed with my arguments and why, you chose to make insulting personal comments about me.

You see it this way because you are wrongfully confusing my disagreements with your arguments with my protest that you are misrepresenting the evidence. Wait, let me get out my thesaurus to find the appropriate words for someone who tells people that Grammer x says y when it actually says z . . .

You say:

> It would not be "maligning" for you to say (rightly or wrongly) that I had misreported something in a Greek grammar. It most definitely *is* "maligning" for you to question that I am making my arguments "in good faith" and to assert that because I am an "apologist" my "single purpose is to win arguments by any means, to defend [my] faith at any cost," in contrast to your self-proclaimed interest solely in the pursuit of truth.

To question whether someone is making a presentation supposedly of the facts concerning what grammars say "in good faith" or not is not maligning, it is to express a complaint that the person has a consistent pattern of misrepresentation, for which the expression you find insulting is a perfectly acceptable way of stating the case. I have never, as you have on this site, referred to something as "a lie." So I find your taking offense to be disingenuous; either you are sensitive in a way that you clearly expect others not to be, or your objection is simply a way of avoiding the issue.

You say:

> Perhaps you think it was generous to question my good faith, integrity, and interest in the truth and to charge that I am simply trying to win the argument "by any means" and "at any cost." I did not find that generous in the slightest.

You are taking my comments far out of context, of course. I referred to my field as one where people "hold each other to a level of integrity in the use of evidence," and I said, in a very heartfelt manner, that I was having great difficulty in carrying on this discussion with you since I found I could not assume these same standards in your handling of the material. That this is the case is borne out by what has transpired. I very politely suggested that the enterprise of an apologist may provide the explanatory context in which to see your conduct as suited to its purpose, which is simply different from mine, and so creates a gap in our assumptions of how to carry out such a discussion. I don't believe it was necessary for you to respond so angrily to this. But you chose not to address my concerns constructively, which is why our discussion must now end.

You quote me as saying

<< You said, "I had proposed we both feel free to make our case as we saw fit." It would seem you have in mind two side-by-side monologues without either being interrupted by the other. I'm sorry, but that's a total waste of my time, and you certainly don't need me present for you to "press on" with your own theories. >>

To which you replied

> It is difficult to know how to respond to such wildly off-base characterizations of what I have said. The sentence that you quoted is not even from the post to which you are supposedly responding, but from an earlier post (post #11). You have lifted it out of context from that post, transplanted it into the context of my objection in my post #12 to your personal insults against me, and then somehow come up with the idea that I was objecting to "being interrupted." I cannot even imagine how in your mind this mishandling of what I wrote can be justified. For the record, what I meant by us both being "free to make our case as we saw fit" was that we could "make whatever argument we choose, whether it has precedent in published Greek grammars or not."

Now I have supposedly committed a misdeed by quoting from your post 11, rather than from your post 12 "to which [I was] supposedly responding." Get off it, Rob. Since when are we limited to only the most recent post, and when did I say I was only responding to your latest post? These kind of tactics on your part are low, indeed. Of course, anyone else reading my post can clearly see that I was reflecting on what you must have meant by your previous post given what had transpired in your most recent post, which is either to dismiss or ignore my invalidation of prior stages of your argument, and to get upset when I remind you that your argument to that point had been invalidated, or when I pointed out that your new arguments were guilty of the same flawed use of evidence. You respond with anger and recrimination when I do this, which I read in the most evident way.

You say:

> I did not blame you for claiming that I had used evidence in a faulty way (though I did \*refute\* that claim). I blamed you for your insulting insinuation that I used evidence to win the argument with no regard for the truth.

Of course, you have not refuted my charges at all. I suppose I will have to go back and collect all of these supposed "mistakes," my demonstration of them, and any responses you found fit to make, in order to demonstrate this once again. That will be my final posting. I beg to differ that I made any "insulting insinuation." I proffered the tentative suggestion that the purpose and methods of apologetic might have cultivated a certain overzealousness in you as regards counting things in your favor when they are factually not. You chose to make that a matter of personal insult, when it was actually offered in the spirit of excusing you for what by my standards is quite serious misconduct.

You say:

> What is noticeable in these comments, and throughout your most recent post, is that you offered no response to my substantive reply to your contention that I misused the evidence in my last post on the issues (my post #11). The substantive material in my post #12, about which you said nothing except for one off-base remark (see below), was roughly five-sixths of the post.

You offered no substantive (lengthy, for sure, but not substantial in merit) reply, and I quite properly chose not to engage further in a debate for which there is no evident ground rules of accurate representation of sources on which you are drawing for your (to this point utterly refuted) arguments.

You say:

> I responded in my post #8 to your claim that I "repeatedly misrepresent[ed]" the grammars in my post #6.

To which I replied in great detail and at length in my posts 9 and 10, now more than a month ago, to neither of which you have in any way responded. This is what led me to conclude that you regarded them as "interruptions" of an argument you were determined to make no matter how much I had shown your methods to be faulty.

You continue:

> In my post #11, I began recasting the issue pertaining to the PPA to meet your demand that the question be addressed solely in the categories already given in the grammars. You found, in my opinion, one minor mistake in a large pool of data, which I immediately acknowledged. I have shown considerable willingness to rethink my claims and acknowledge legitimate criticisms—far more than you have, in fact, as I shall document below.

No, this is not accurate. You had said you were going to find a grammatically valid way to defend the traditional translation, now that the ficitonal "eternal present" had been ruled out. Alternatively, you could have paused to correct the past mistakes I had pointed out in your previous argument. Instead, you chose to recommit the same faulty handling



of the sources, of which I corrected one instance in one paragraph in an act of supreme restraint, while spending the bulk of my message showing how the construction of your argument was not sound. I somehow have missed your acknowledgement of legitimate criticisms. Perhaps I will find one or two as I review our exchange for the many criticisms that have gone unanswered and unacknowledged.

You say:

> I did not ignore your criticism of my past arguments. I quoted from several of your criticisms and explained that I was responding to them by approaching the PPA issue from a fresh angle.

I leave it to our readers to judge if "approaching the PPA from a fresh angle" did or did not entail ignoring my previous criticisms. I certainly missed the sentence where you said, "Since Jason proved my previous arguments to be defective and in error, I am forced to adopt this fresh approach to the question." Can you point that out to me? And I certainly felt ignored when you blithely went on to commit the same faults of misrepresentation that I had detailed in previous posts.

You say:

> The truth is that you ignored most of the data I marshaled and the careful qualifications I made, got wrong some of the points you did address, and in this latest post of yours blatantly ignored my refutation of your criticisms.

I beg your pardon. I have consistently replied in great detail, showing how the steps of your argument do not follow from one another, how each step is constructed in an arbitrary and contrived manner to suit the conclusions you wish to reach, how your accounting of the evidence is usually erroneous, and how your "refutations" of my criticisms are often beside-the-point efforts to obscure the faults you committed.

You quote me as saying:

<< You now, belatedly, call one such instance a "mistake." >>

and comment:

> There was nothing "belated" about it. I immediately acknowledged that in one case I had made a mistake.

I said "belated" because you had avoided acknowledging any of your earlier errors a "mistake," but now tried this excuse in the face of my grave concern over a consistent pattern of misrepresenting your materials. I considered your resort to this excuse as too little, too late, after such a history of (one-sided!) inaccuracy.

I had written

<< You have never, even once, made a "mistake" that did not favor your position. How do you account for that? >>

To which you replied:

> I can actually think of at least one mistake that I made that did hurt my position—one that I corrected later, only to have you criticize me for doing so! That was the mistake of accepting uncritically the classification of Acts 27:33 as a PPA. I should have thought that through more carefully before agreeing to that classification.

You crack me up, Rob. How was classifying this as a PPA a mistake? Oh, I'll tell you how, because you thought it supported you and when I showed it to be a clausally-modified PPA, you then "corrected" yourself by excluding it as a PPA! This is quite obviously the opposite of what I mean by making a mistake that favors me when the fact of the matter favors you. I have yet to see one in your posts.

Then you say:

> Again, I have clearly and forthrightly acknowledged mistakes in my argumentation and made a good faith effort to correct them. You, on the other hand, have \*not\* acknowledged your mistakes. Here are some of the more notable ones (excluding your many misrepresentations of my own views and arguments):

>

> \* You claimed that John 2:9 and similar texts are examples of the PPA, when various grammarians have clearly explained that these texts exhibit a separate usage of the present in indirect discourse. After I refuted your claim, you refused to acknowledge that you were incorrect, though you agreed to leave these texts aside because none of the grammars supported your view on them.

I identified John 2:9 as carrying the defining features of a PPA. You argued that it was not cited as such by your selection of grammars, and suggested that in your opinion it fit a different identified idiom. I accepted your narrower definition of the PPA in this respect, since there are grounds for legitimate debate on it. What else were you looking for from me?

> \* You cited Brooks and Winbery in support of the claim that a PPA does not need a temporal expression or indicator to mark it as such. However, as I showed, their one example of a PPA without such a marker (2 Cor. 12:9) is not a PPA. You acknowledged that it was not a PPA but did not acknowledge the point I made that without this example Brooks and Winbery failed to support their statement.

Rob, you did not use "failing to support their statement with a specific example" as a criteria in counting the grammars on this point. You introduced it afterwards, after I showed that you had misrepresented their position, when you were specifically counting grammars by how they verbally defined the PPA, not by the examples they used. This is a classic example of how you have brought in exceptional reasons to include grammars in categories that favor you, but never to include them in categories that don't favor you, and to exclude grammars from categories that don't favor you, but never to exclude them from categories that do favor you. This is precisely what I mean by questioning your good faith in handling this material, and you have done nothing since to show my charge to be unfair to your conduct.

> \* You falsely characterized the distinction made in some grammars between the PPA and the descriptive present as hair-splitting, when the two usages are distinct in a meaningful way and when as a rule we translate them differently in English. You specifically confounded the term "durative present" as a designation for the PPA with Robertson's description of the descriptive present as "durative."

This is a gross oversimplification of our discussion on this point.

> \* You incorrectly claimed that I should have assigned a score of only 2 to Goodwin on the specificity of the grammar's description of the temporal marker of the PPA. I had mistakenly assigned it a score of 6, and after reading your criticism showed that the proper score was 5.

Rob, this involves your treatment of "description of the past-time indicator" in the grammars. Your own criterion was "6 points if the grammar specifies that the marker is an adverb or phrase, 5 points if it so specifies but allows for other types of temporal expressions, 4 points if it describes the marker as an adverbial expression, 2 points if it simply refers to the marker as an expression . . ." (there mysteriously is no 3 point score in your scale). Goodwin says, "The present is often used with expressions denoting past time, especially PALAI, in the sense of a perfect and a present combined." In the definitional part of the sentence, Goodwin "refers to the marker as an expression," hence 2 points. The fact that Goodwin gives an example is beside the definitional or descriptional point. Goodwin does not "specify that THE marker is an adverb or phrase," unless of course you take Goodwin to be saying that PALAI is the ONLY expression accepted within his definition, which would be absurd. I don't see the aptness of 5 at all for this. So I stand uncorrected.

> \* You erroneously claimed that I should have assigned Brooks/Winbery a score of "5 at most" in the same category. I showed that the score of 6 was correct.

What do the words "A verb alone is sometimes sufficient" mean to you, and how do they fit on your point scale above?

So how much more of this are we supposed to go through? Your friends on this site have wisely intervened in a situation that has become little more than a "yes you did, no I didn't" exchange that has lost its constructiveness. I don't intend to engage in this sort of thing. I have better things to do than this. Open the discussion to everyone now, and let us respond to their observations of the debate to this point. Naturally, in responding to their comments and questions, there will be opportunity to clarify or defend past remarks.

Jason B.

**JASON #14 – 10/16 – #15768:**  
**JASON #14**

Dear Rob,

In my post 10, I apologized for any inadvertent offense I may have caused you by the manner in which I expressed my criticism. I assured you then, as I do now, that any such thing is indeed "inadvertent" because, as I went on to demonstrate in that post, I had the impression that my remarks were decidedly milder than the norm of use on this site, and than the sort used by you personally. You found that use of your own remarks on this site to demonstrate the company I thought I was in "amusing." You did not, however, acknowledge that my manner of expression is indeed in line with the norms for this site, and you have a second time characterized my manner of expression as "insulting" and "maligning." Believe me, I live with daily consciousness of my many faults as a human being. But I do not believe your characterization of my remarks is at all fair. I find your repeated attention to the surface form of my criticisms, while ignoring their substance, to be just a bit too convenient to your predicament in this debate. You would go a long way in ridding me of these suspicions if you had chosen to respond to the substance of my criticisms at the same time that you faulted how I expressed them. I believe there is an inconsistent standard being applied to me by the person who, in his very first remark about me on this site (Message 12330, March 10th) characterized something I had said in print as "condescending and arrogant." Now I am sure you do not intend to place yourself in the company of those people to whom Jesus is quoted as applying a Greek term for an actor or poser because they criticize others for faults they themselves have. And since I am confident of that, I will use this example of yours to help clarify what I mean when I use critical words in reference to things you have said in our exchange.

What precisely did you mean to convey by calling my statement "condescending and arrogant"? Did you mean something about my words or about me personally? If I was as prone to feeling insulted as you evidently are, I would surely feel personally maligned by what you said, since the words "condescending" and "arrogant" refer not to features of text but to the personal attributes of a person. Now it is a very fine line indeed between making a characterization of what one sees as the overall tactic behind a set of sentences and drawing a conclusion about the intentions of the author of those sentences. To say that someone's statement is "condescending and arrogant" is to say, at least, that the person is performing in a condescending and arrogant manner, whether those adjectives reflect the person's personality generally or only in the moment of making statements. So a less than generous person would feel "insulted" and "maligned" by words such as you used in reference to me, about a person you did not know, concerning a statement whose full context you had not bothered to check. But of course, already aware of that remark of yours, I not only consented to come to this site and discuss these issues with you, but refrained from bringing up the issue of your choice of expression when you repeated your criticism of the same statement in slightly different language early in our discussion here.

So what I would like you to understand is that in the moment we go from talking about a problem in the text written by each other, to speaking of what the other is doing in composing a text or series of texts in a particular manner, it becomes impossible to avoid referring to something about the tactics, principles, and competence of the other as author of the texts. I know nothing about your state of mind other than what is expressed on the screen. Based on the latter, I can posit a number of hypotheses about what stands behind those textual products. Given the problematic nature of what I see there, any one of my conclusions will be seen as "insulting" in some way, whether it is a matter of suggesting a deliberate misreporting the evidence, a disability in reading or math, a muddled grasp of sound argument, and so forth. You will note that I initially refrained from any of these equally unhappy choices, and simply pointed out the many errors, asked you to withdraw conclusions based on such erroneous accounting, and warned against making similar miscitations in the future. All of this proved to be of no avail. There was no acknowledgment of fault, no correction of false accounting, no withdrawal of wrongfully drawn conclusions. That's frustrating, to be sure, and no doubt it induced me to raise the level of rhetoric to forcibly draw your attention to what I regard as a very serious matter indeed, one that was in fact making it impossible for the discussion to go forward. I think my statement that you were not representing the grammars "in good faith" is an accurate characterization of the pattern of misrepresentation in your postings. If you check the major dictionaries, I think you will find that this expression refers to making a presentation of things that is misleading or misrepresentative of them, and that is in fact precisely the case with how you are using the grammars in your argument. Would it be less insulting to suggest that you are handling the grammars incompetently? These are the usual two choices of interpretation when confronted with reports full of factual errors. Could I have somehow refrained from making either interpretation? I tried at first to simply say that these quantifications of the evidence were so inaccurate (as well as contrived, but that's a separate matter) as to be worthless for advancing the discussion. But when you continued to use them, continued to generate new ones as inaccurate and therefore useless as the ones before, my protest necessarily grew louder and harsher.

I have tolerated quite a lot in this exchange. I have tolerated arguments of astounding circularity with good humor and patient rebuttal. I have tolerated your habit of ignoring my criticisms and moving on to new topics, because I take this as tacit acknowledgments that you have been bested. I have tolerated certain limitations you have placed on the evidence without complaint. I have adopted your list of grammars, your list of parallels, all with the confidence that they were sufficient to make the case clear. But I will not tolerate misrepresentation of the evidence, because without honest reportage of facts we can never reach the truth of a matter, but only surrender to prejudice. And I will not tolerate tactics that make me, rather than the emerging facts of the discussion, to be the issue at hand. So because my criticisms have not been dealt with fairly, and because this aspersion has been cast on my criticisms as somehow personal *ad hominem*s rather than the substantive criticisms they are, I feel compelled to go back over the last three months' exchange and justify myself anew.

None of this should have been necessary in a fair and honest exchange on this site. I should not have to devote precious time on such a negative task. We were supposed to be clearing the air on the issues surrounding John 8:58. That this noble endeavor, in which we were not bound to agree but only to improve the caliber of argument on the subject, has been reduced to this sort of confrontation is as sad to me as I am sure it is to you. I am sure you feel the weight of disappointment as greatly as I do. So what do we do about it? I am conscious of the promise and commitment we made to those who requested this exchange. I hope I have made clear my view of the standards of conduct to which I feel we are committed, and why I feel the importance of the issues at hand is being shortchanged by the direction this exchange has taken. I ask you to refrain from "pressing on" and to bring this phase of our discussion to a point of summation. If you are willing to do so, I may be inclined to resume the discussion at some future date, after a hiatus. As it is, your refusal to acknowledge the wishes of our audience this last week has already cut into the time I will have available to answer their comments and questions. Surely that was not your intent. But this once again reflects a stubborn determination to proceed with a presentation of your own, rather than engage in the give-and-take that this forum was supposed to be. I have tried repeatedly to advance the discussion by seeking clarification from you on what you see yourself defending, so that perhaps we can skip over issues that are not that important to where we are trying to get to. Regrettably, you have found reason not to answer those questions, while taking the trouble to reject my attempts to imagine your answer. That, too, has been frustratingly rude of you, and has led me to conclude that you are following some predetermined course of presentation that will not be interrupted or redirected by my participation in the exchange. This is not what I was invited to as your guest on this site, however much you may think it serves your purposes. I will proceed to sum up the discussion to this point, and await an indication from you whether there is any prospect of coming to agreement about where things go from here.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #14 – 10/16 – #15772:**

**ROB #14: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE (CONT.)**

Jason,

This is in response to your last two posts (by my count, #13 and #14).

You complained in your post #13 that it is not legitimate for me to post “a new set of arguments” that you will not have the opportunity to rebut. The fact is that we had no timetable for completing this discussion and I am accommodating you by hurrying my response to your criticisms of my book. When I have finished posting that response, we will have completed a round of discussion on John 8:58. You will have posted your criticisms of my book; I will have posted my criticisms of your chapter; you will have responded to my criticisms of your chapter; and I will have responded to your criticisms of my book. I am sorry if you find this “utterly unacceptable,” but I honestly see no reason not to complete my response to your initial criticisms. If you wish to return to the list and resume our discussion at a later date, of course that would be fine.

In your post #13, you repeatedly stated that I had accused you of “ad hominem” argument against me:

<< In fact by claiming that I was engaged in "ad hominem" argument, which I was not.... The recrimination to which I referred is precisely your attempt to dismiss my valid and objective detection of misuse of evidence as "ad hominem." I have demonstrated a consistent pattern of abuse of the sources that leads to the conclusion that you are, for whatever reason, not abiding by recognizable standards of accurate representation. Perhaps I need a bigger thesaurus to find additional ways to convey this point about your conduct in this debate. But I doubt that any way of expressing it would avoid your misconstrual of it as "ad hominem." I have commented not on who you are, but what you have done, and criticized it, as indeed it is, as outrageous. I also find absurd your claim that by identifying you as an apologist I am engaging in "ad hominem." >>

This complaint puzzled me, as I had not recalled actually referring to anything you had written as ad hominem. So I did a search of our entire discussion and found this from my post #13:

“Your book has a clear agenda, and that is to show that the English translations that most English-speaking Christians use are theologically biased, particularly in texts relating to the doctrine of the Trinity.... So it is not credible for you to tell us that the issue in John 8:58 for you is the trivial-sounding issue of ‘the accurate rendering of five Greek words.’ Of course, you are entitled to make your case, and any critique of your case should engage your arguments rather than resorting to ad hominem. But don’t expect those of

us who have actually read your book to believe that you do not to have a larger point you are trying to defend.”

Please note that I did not refer to YOUR comments about my argumentation as *\_ad hominem\_*, nor did I imply any such thing. I was stating that although I think you do have an “agenda” or “larger point” that you were seeking to advance in your book, I also think your book needs to be answered by addressing your arguments rather than simply pointing out your agenda. In other words, I did not want MY comments about your book to be misread as *\_ad hominem\_* circumstantial (i.e., as if I were saying that your book is wrong because it has this agenda). My use of the term *\_ad hominem\_* had nothing whatsoever to do with my complaint about your remarks about me as an apologist.

Speaking of my status as an apologist, you wrote:

<< Your assertion that an apologist shares the same values in scholarship as an academic historian is quite simply nonsense. An apologist, by definition, is a defender of truths he considers already established and irrefutable. All of an apologist's "scholarship" is shaped by the goal of finding new and better ways to defend what he already takes to be true. An apologist can abandon a line of argument as unsuccessful, but only to be replaced by a stronger argument for the same position. >>

I don't use the term *\_apologist\_* in this sense. However, for the sake of clear communication, let me simply say that in your stated sense of the term, I do not consider myself an “apologist.” I consider truth-seeking an essential value of what I do, and this means not merely abandoning unsuccessful lines of argument but also abandoning untenable positions. If you had a broader perspective on my work, you would know that this is not mere lip service. I give considerable attention in my work to encouraging my fellow evangelicals to rethink cherished positions that the evidence shows are untenable. I myself have had to abandon views that earlier in my Christian years I argued were true. I have some college papers in my files that I wrote advocating positions relating to matters in the science-Bible controversies that I now consider wrong-headed, not just in their line of argument but also in the conclusions that they reached.

You wrote:

<< I very politely suggested that the enterprise of an apologist may provide the explanatory context in which to see your conduct as suited to its purpose, which is simply different from mine, and so creates a gap in our assumptions of how to carry out such a discussion.... I proffered the tentative suggestion that the purpose and methods of apologetic might have cultivated a certain overzealousness in you as regards counting things in your favor when they are factually not. You chose to make that a matter of personal insult, when it was actually offered in the spirit of excusing you for what by my standards is quite serious misconduct. >>

If I understand you correctly here, you are saying that your ‘polite suggestion’ was a value-free observation to the effect that we just happen to have different purposes



befitting our respective roles as “apologist” and “scholar.” Forgive me, but I still have difficulty taking it that way. Whether you meant it to be “insulting” (as I said) or not, I do not agree with your suggestion that as an apologist my “single purpose is to win arguments by any means, to defend [my] faith at any cost.” I do not accept any characterization of our differences that would bar me from saying with you, as I do say, “I am an academic, whose single purpose is to get to the truth a matter, however much I like or dislike that truth, however much or little it serves me personally.” If I thought this purpose was incompatible with what I do as a so-called “apologist,” I would quit being an “apologist” tonight. You say, “I can respect what you do as part of the phenomenon of religion, but I can’t as part of the field on which I play (to keep using this metaphor), where people hold each other to a level of integrity in the use of evidence.” Well, if I really was doing what you claim, then I would not respect what I do. I consider deliberate misuse of evidence, as well as reckless disregard for truth out of zeal, “serious misconduct,” and I would never excuse it because the person was an apologist. (I have a paper trail that shows I am in earnest when I say this, because I have published a number of articles taking such “apologists” to task.) If you wish to claim that I’m not doing a very good job, you are entitled to your opinion. If I have to choose between you judging me incompetent or judging me zealous to defend my chosen religious system regardless of the facts, please, call me incompetent.

You wrote:

<< You attempt to further cast aspersions on me by claiming that my book has "an agenda." >>

Perhaps both of us are having difficulty (as you claim that I have) separating criticism of our work from criticism of our persons. My comment that your book has “an agenda” was simply explaining that the issue in chapter 10 of your book was not merely “the accurate rendering of five Greek words.” Rather, that chapter is part of your attempt to make the case for viewing most English versions of the Bible as theologically biased. I was not casting aspersions on you. I was disagreeing with your claim that the issue has no significance to you beyond a purely historical interest in how to translate those five Greek words.

You wrote:

<< Now I have supposedly committed a misdeed by quoting from your post 11, rather than from your post 12 "to which [I was] supposedly responding." Get off it, Rob. Since when are we limited to only the most recent post, and when did I say I was only responding to your latest post? These kind of tactics on your part are low, indeed. >>

I don’t know what to make of this, Jason. I clearly was not criticizing you for commenting on an earlier post. I very clearly explained that the problem was that the statement you quoted had nothing to do with what you said it meant. The fact that it wasn’t even from the same post was mentioned to reinforce the out-of-context nature of your quotation, not to say that you had committed a foul by quoting an earlier post.

I had written:

“What is noticeable in these comments, and throughout your most recent post, is that you offered no response to my substantive reply to your contention that I misused the evidence in my last post on the issues (my post #11). The substantive material in my post #12, about which you said nothing except for one off-base remark (see below), was roughly five-sixths of the post.”

You replied:

<< You offered no substantive (lengthy, for sure, but not substantial in merit) reply, and I quite properly chose not to engage further in a debate for which there is no evident ground rules of accurate representation of sources on which you are drawing for your (to this point utterly refuted) arguments. >>

I can only say that my reply seemed, and seems, substantive to me. If you don't respond to it, none of us will learn what you think were the shortcomings “in merit” of my reply. If it is your sincere impression that I do not accept as “ground rules” the importance of representing sources accurately, then I can only reiterate that I consider it very important to do so and welcome any corrections to my use of sources. When one is reviewing over a dozen sources on a variety of issues and seeking to make fine-grained distinctions, perfection is the goal but not usually the result. We have both made mistakes, Jason. I genuinely \*want\* to have mine pointed out so that I can avoid them in the future.

You wrote:

<< You had said you were going to find a grammatically valid way to defend the traditional translation, now that the ficitonal "eternal present" had been ruled out. >>

No, I said that I would agree to make my case using previously established categories and descriptions in the grammars as long as we could both agree to a “level playing field” in which you would do the same (meaning, for example, that your “existential/identity function” of the PPA also had to go).

I had written:

“I responded in my post #8 to your claim that I ‘repeatedly misrepresent[ed]’ the grammars in my post #6.”

You replied:

<< To which I replied in great detail and at length in my posts 9 and 10, now more than a month ago, to neither of which you have in any way responded. This is what led me to conclude that you regarded them as "interruptions" of an argument you were determined to make no matter how much I had shown your methods to be faulty. >>

My post #11, posted 12 days ago (October 4), was the beginning of my response to those two posts (my records show they were posts #8 and #9, but I'm pretty sure we're talking about the same ones). In my post #11, I sought to step back a bit from the back-and-forth exchange to suggest a more fruitful way of approaching the subject. This doesn't mean I did not intend to interact further with your criticisms in your posts. One of the posts I have composed and plan to post tonight or tomorrow offers a fairly thorough response to your post #9. I'm taking your criticisms much more seriously than you realize. The fault may be mine in posting piecemeal instead of holding my responses until they are comprehensive. Given the sudden announcement that we have to finish more or less immediately, I'll do the best I can, but I recognize that some stones will go unturned.

You wrote:

<< I somehow have missed your acknowledgement of legitimate criticisms. Perhaps I will find one or two as I review our exchange for the many criticisms that have gone unanswered and unacknowledged. >>

Here are three examples:

\* I agreed that you had scored a good point in your observation that even a few examples in the grammars of adverbial clauses as PPA markers is significant because simple adverbs and adverbial phrases are much more common (my post #8).

\* I acknowledged your point that BDF and McKay are treating the subordinate clause "before Abraham came to be" as performing the function of a PPA temporal marker in John 8:58 (my post #11).

\* I agreed with you that one of the scores I assigned to Goodwin was inaccurate (my post #12).

Regarding your criticism of the scores I assigned to Goodwin and Brooks/Winbery in the first of five factors pertaining to the definition of the PPA, let's assume for the sake of argument that you are completely correct. Let's say Goodwin should have received a 2 instead of a 5 and Brooks/Winbery a 5 instead of a 6 for that first factor. I could debate these questions ad infinitum with you, but it is unnecessary (and we don't have time, since you need to bow out soon). Even if we could agree on these scores, the relevant results of the complete survey would be the same:

\* Definitions of the PPA range from very broad to very narrow, with some definitions exhibiting a mix of broad and narrow aspects.

\* The broadest definitions of the PPA appear in three of the four grammars that listed John 8:58 as an example.

\* The grammars do not all agree that the proper English translation of a PPA is always a past-tense verb. Some say nothing about it; some say or imply that the proper translation is always in the past tense; and others say that the past tense is normally, usually, or often the right translation.

\* Those three grammars that give the broadest definition of the PPA also say nothing about how to translate it into English, whereas four of the five grammars at the narrow end of the spectrums of definitions specify to translate the PPA using an English past tense.

\* We can say either that there is only one correct definition of the PPA and that some of the grammars are wrong in how they define it and in what they say about how to translate it, or we can say that what one says about how to translate the PPA will rightly depend on how one defines it.

Again, let me state emphatically that I take no offense at questions or challenges to the specific details of my argumentation, and indeed I welcome them. However, I do not believe you have refuted any of the above conclusions.

Turning to your post #14, you wrote:

<< I find your repeated attention to the surface form of my criticisms, while ignoring their substance, to be just a bit too convenient to your predicament in this debate. You would go a long way in ridding me of these suspicions if you had chosen to respond to the substance of my criticisms at the same time that you faulted how I expressed them. >>

Again, I think I did respond to the substance of your criticisms. In your post #13, you acknowledged that I did reply, and even said that my reply was “long,” but asserted that my reply was lacking in merit. In this post, I have attempted to explain why I disagree. That’s the best I can do, especially with the short amount of time left.

You wrote:

<< I believe there is an inconsistent standard being applied to me by the person who, in his very first remark about me on this site (Message 12330, March 10th) characterized something I had said in print as “condescending and arrogant.” >>

I apologize for that remark. It is entirely possible that I misunderstood the spirit in which you asserted in your book that “when translations are checked against the original Greek, as they should be,” that one can determine that most of the translations are wrong in their rendering of John 8:58 (Truth in Translation, 111). I took that to mean that anyone who accepts the conventional translation could not have “checked...the original Greek,” and in thinking that to be your meaning I may have been mistaken. So please accept my apology for that remark.

We can proceed in either of two ways. We can agree that regardless of any past remarks of a derogatory nature we may have made about each other or anyone else, we will both make every effort to refrain from them during our discussion (what little may remain in it). Alternatively, we can agree that both of us may say whatever we think appropriate. Then the issue will not be whether a remark was permissible according to the rules but whether the facts support it. I can go either way. In either case, I would like to focus on the issues as much as possible in the little time remaining.

**ROB #16 – 10/17 – #15775:**

**ROB #16 (READ BEFORE #15): JOHN 8:58 AND THE BROAD-BAND PRESENTS**

[Note: This message was actually posted after #15 but should be read before it.]

Jason,

Evidently, I was distracted yesterday and inadvertently failed to send this post. It is now #16, but I should have sent it before #15. You need to read this post in order for the argument in #15 to make much sense.

In this post, I wish to relate EIMI in John 8:58 to classifications of the Greek present attested in the standard grammars (per your request, and in response especially to your post #8). I will approach these classifications first through Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, referring to other grammars to illustrate certain points along the way.

#### I. BROAD-BAND PRESENTS

The relevant category of usage of the present tense in Wallace's analysis is that of "broad-band presents" (519), among which he includes the PPA (519-20), the iterative present (520-21), the customary or general present (521-22), and the gnomic present (523-25). As I shall explain below, we should also include the progressive or descriptive present (518-19), despite the fact that Wallace categorizes this usage as "narrow-band."

I think we both agree that grammarians can and do divide and subdivide the same pool of usages in various ways. I discussed this point at length specifically with regard to the PPA in my post #11. Some grammarians distinguish the descriptive present (which expresses a "narrower" band) from the progressive present, but Wallace chooses to "put both together for convenience' sake" (518 n. 14). We see here that even the distinction between narrow-band and broad-band uses of the present is more of a continuum than a dichotomy. Wallace defends one of his examples of the descriptive present, Acts 2:8 ("How is it that \*we are hearing\*"), against the suggestion that it is a PPA. He favors the descriptive over the PPA because of the lack of a past-time marker, while acknowledging that Brooks-Winbery dispute the necessity of such a marker (519 n. 15). Wallace notes that the PPA can be defined more or less "tightly," resulting in its being "relatively rare or fairly common" (519). Wallace includes the "distributive present" in the category of the "iterative present," and notes that one could classify "several passages" as either iterative or customary (520), since the difference between these two usages "is mild" (521). He lumps the stative present together with the customary present "for

convenience' sake" (521 n. 20). "The stative present is more pronounced in its temporal restrictions than the customary present or the gnomic present" (522). Here again, the differences between these usages can be matters of degree. Exegetes debate whether the present-tense verbs in certain texts are customary or gnomic presents (522, 524-25).

The bottom line is that a variety of usages of the Greek present tense can be formally similar to one another. These include the PPA, the descriptive or progressive present, the iterative, customary, and stative presents, and the gnomic present. As I argued previously, one can define the PPA more or less broadly. The more broadly it is defined, the more it will overlap the other broad-band categories. In pointing out ways in which a particular present-tense verb, such as EIMI in John 8:58, corresponds to other broad-band categories of usage, I am not attempting to "push the PPA out of consideration," as you have alleged more than once. I said in my 1989 book, and I have said again in this discussion, that if one defines the PPA in the broadest sense, EIMI in John 8:58 legitimately fits such a broad definition of the PPA. By the same token, though, EIMI in John 8:58 also fits some of the other broad-band categories of usage of the Greek present tense, depending on how \*they\* are defined.

## II. THE GNOMIC OR STATIC PRESENT

Here is Wallace's description of the gnomic present:

"The present tense may be used to make a statement of a general, TIMELESS fact. 'It does not state that something is happening, but that something does happen.' The action or state continues WITHOUT TIME LIMITS. The verb is used 'in proverbial statements or general maxims about what occurs AT ALL TIMES.' ... the gnomic present refers to a general, TIMELESS fact.... There are two predominant situations in which the gnomic present occurs. The first includes instances that depict deity or nature as the subject of the action. Statements such as 'the wind blows' or 'God loves' fit this category. SUCH GNOMIC PRESENTS ARE TRUE ALL THE TIME" (Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 521, 523, capitalized emphasis added).

Obviously, one must qualify this "timeless" usage as relatively timeless in the case of nature, though not in the case of deity (particularly in the biblical context). To put what Wallace says in other words, we can use the gnomic category to refer to present-tense verbs that express a general, "timeless" fact (the "proverbial" usage), or that express a state of affairs that obtains throughout the existence of the subject (from the beginning of creation where the subject is nature, and forever where the subject is deity). For the latter, the term "timeless" might be confusing, since actually what is meant is a state or action that obtains at \*all\* times. (Perhaps we might use the term "omnitemporal," which means pertaining at all times, to distinguish this subcategory from the "timeless" or proverbial subcategory.) Anyone who defines the gnomic present as referring only to proverbial expressions would not include occurrences where the verb expresses what is true at all times. Thus, some grammarians will operate with a narrower definition of the gnomic present than Wallace does.

I think this “at-all-times” gnomic usage is probably the usage that Dana and Mantey intended to denote as the “Static Present,” though their examples are open to dispute:

“\_The Static Present\_ . The present tense may be used to represent a condition which is assumed AS PERPETUALLY EXISTING, or to be ever taken for granted as a fact.... 2 Pt. 3:4...Jn. 15:27; 1 Jn. 3:8.... The idea of progress in a verb of action finds its natural counterpart in an idea of PERPETUAL STATE IN A VERB OF BEING. This use is practically THE PRESENT OF DURATION APPLIED TO A VERB OF BEING” (Dana and Mantey, 186, capitalized emphasis added).

I should have noticed this before when commenting on Dana and Mantey’s seemingly dubious classification of 2 Peter 3:4 and 1 John 3:8. They use this term “static present” to refer to a usage of the present that is formally similar or analogous to the PPA (which they call “the present of duration”) with a verb of being that expresses a “perpetual state.” Not all uses of EIMI or other forms of the being-verb would express such a state, of course. I still do not understand why Dana and Mantey listed John 15:27 as both a present of duration (PPA) and a static present. But I agree with them that the present tense can express a static, perpetual, or unchanging state of being. 1 John 3:8 also does not seem a particularly good example of a static present, even according to Dana and Mantey’s definition (“sins” is not a verb of being). So I think that two of the three examples Dana and Mantey give are misplaced. Still, the category is a valid one. Their example of 2 Peter 3:4 fits pretty well with Wallace’s reference to a usage of the gnomic present to denote a “timeless fact” of nature, though he applies the gnomic present to actions and not only states of being (note, “action or state”). The hypothetical objector in 2 Peter 3:4 is asserting that everything remains just as it has been from the beginning of creation. Whether we translate this as if it were a PPA (as some translations, such as the NLT, do) or as a static or gnomic present (as many translations do, such as the KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV), the meaning in this text is essentially the same.

So, the Greek present tense can denote a static, perpetual, or unchanging state. We might call this a type of the “gnomic present,” or a “static present,” or even a broad form of the “descriptive present.” It doesn’t matter. What matters is that we recognize that such a usage, attested in the grammars, does occur. This gnomic/static/broad-descriptive present can be formally similar to the PPA in some cases, and which category we apply will depend to some extent on how broadly or narrowly we define the PPA and on how the elements of the sentence work together with the verb in context.

With the preceding information and perspective in mind, in post #15, already sent, and in a subsequent post, I will discuss certain aspects of the exegesis of John 8:58 that give strong support for classifying EIMI in John 8:58 as a gnomic/static/broad-descriptive present that denotes a perpetual or unchanging state of existence. My argument in this respect is not that the PPA category is irrelevant or in no way applicable, but that these other categories also are relevant and show that classifying EIMI in John 8:58 *\*exclusively\** as a PPA *\*in the narrowest sense\** will result in a less than complete understanding of the text.



**ROB #15 – 10/17 – #15773:**

**ROB #15: THE PRIN (“BEFORE”) + AORIST INFINITIVE CLAUSE**

Jason,

In this long post, I will focus on the clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI in John 8:58. This post will respond to much of your criticism in your post #8. I will argue that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is an instance of the construction “infinitive of antecedent time” and as such indicates that the main verb EIMI expresses a state antecedent to the event that the infinitive denotes (without denying that the state continues to the time of speaking). Further, I will argue that the present tense main verb in such sentences often fits one of the categories of broad-band presents, especially the gnomic, customary, and descriptive presents.

#### I. INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME: DEFINITION AND DATA

Several grammars refer to the construction using PRIN followed by the aorist infinitive as the infinitive of antecedent time. For example, Young says:

“Antecedent time means that the action of the main verb takes place before the action expressed by the infinitive. To convey this idea, ‘before’ is used at the beginning of the adverbial clause. Antecedent time may be expressed with PRO TOU + infinitive (nine times in the New Testament), PRIN + infinitive (eight times), or PRIN H + infinitive (three times). Aorist infinitives are used despite the fact that the action of the infinitive follows that of the verb” (166).

Young mentions John 8:58 specifically as an example (166).

Wallace discusses the same construction, though he prefers to call it “the infinitive of subsequent time” because the action of the infinitive is subsequent to that of the main verb (Wallace, 596). As long as we are clear, it doesn’t matter which nomenclature we use. In this construction, the action or state expressed by the main verb is antecedent and that of the infinitive is subsequent in relation to each other.

In addition to the 20 occurrences of this construction in the NT, it occurs 92 times in the LXX (including Apocryphal books). These 112 occurrences in biblical Greek accompany controlling or main verbs in the present (16), imperfect (10), aorist (60), perfect (4), and future (19) tenses, and in 3 instances with no main verb expressed. About half of the occurrences use PRO TOU (55), and half use either PRIN (33) or PRIN H (24). Here is a complete table of these 112 occurrences. I have made a good-faith effort to compile this information as accurately as possible. However, given the large number of texts, I welcome corrections to any inadvertent mistakes here. Texts with an asterisk (\*) are the

only texts to my knowledge where the antecedent time significance might be under dispute.

\*\*\*\*\*

With Present Tense Main Verb (16): PRO TOU: Deut. 31:21; Job 8:12; Ps. 89:2 (Eng., 90:2)\*; Prov. 8:23-25 (4x)\*; Jer. 1:5a\*; Ps. of Sol. 14:8; Matt. 6:8; John 13:19; with PRIN (H): Ex. 1:19; Prov. 18:13; Is. 46:10; Mal. 3:22 (Eng., 4:5); Sirach 11:8; 14:13; 18:19; John 8:58\*

With Imperfect Main Verb (10): PRO TOU: Gen. 13:10; 24:15, 45; Ezek. 16:56-57 (note: the main verb might be the present-tense EI which follows); Hag. 2:15-16; John 17:5; Gal. 2:12; 3:23; with PRIN (H): 1 Sam. 2:15; Is. 23:7

With Aorist Main Verb (60): PRO TOU: Gen. 2:5 (2x); 11:4; 19:4; 27:10, 33; 36:31; 37:18; 41:50; 48:5; 50:16; Ex. 12:34; Lev. 14:36; Josh. 3:1; Judg. 14:18; Ruth 3:14; 2 Chron. 33:19; Judith 16:24; Tobit 10:11 (S); 11:7 (S); 14:15b; Ps. 38:14 (Eng., 39:13); 118:67 (Eng., 119:67); 128:6 (Eng., 129:6); Prov. 30:7; Job 10:20-21; Zeph. 2:1-2 (3x); Is. 42:9; 44:7; Jer. 13:16; Luke 2:21; 22:15; John 1:48; Acts 23:15; PRIN (H): Gen. 27:4; Num. 11:33; Josh. 2:8; 2 Kings 2:9; 6:32; Is. 48:5; 66:7; Ezek. 33:22; Tobit 2:4; 3:8; 4:2; 8:20; 14:15a; 1 Macc. 10:4; 2 Macc. 8:14; 13:13; 4 Macc. 5:6; 9:27; Wisdom 2:8; Sirach 18:21, 23; 19:17; 48:25; 51:13; John 4:49; Matt. 1:18; Acts 7:2

With Perfect Main Verb (4): PRO TOU: Jer. 1:5b; PRIN (H): Sirach 23:20; Sus. 1:35; John 14:29

With Future Main Verb (19): PRO TOU: Gen. 27:7; 45:28; 2 Macc. 7:7\*; Ps. 57:10 (Eng., 58:9); PRIN (H): 1 Sam. 9:13; Judith 7:14; Is. 7:15, 16; 8:4; 28:4, 24; 65:24; Joel 3:4 (Eng., 2:31); Matt. 26:34, 75; Mark 14:30, 72; Luke 22:61; Acts 2:20

With No Main Verb Expressed (3): PRO TOU: Ps. 26:1 (Eng., 27:1); PRIN: 1 Sam. 3:3, 7

\*\*\*\*\*

As best I can see, none of the 57 examples using PRIN or PRIN H is subject to any dispute as an instance of antecedent time unless John 8:58 is the lone exception. This includes seven examples from the LXX in which the main verb is in the present tense (Ex. 1:19; Prov. 18:13; Is. 46:10; Mal. 3:22 [Eng., 4:5]; Sirach 11:8; 14:13; 18:19). Of the 55 examples using PRO TOU, the only instances that might be subject to any significant dispute are three of the LXX occurrences accompanying a main verb in the present tense. We have already discussed these texts (Ps. 89:2 [Eng., 90:2]; Prov. 8:25; Jer. 1:5a). Five other examples of the construction with PRO TOU and a present-tense main verb indisputably fit the antecedent-time sense (Deut. 31:21; Job 8:12; Psalm of Solomon 14:8; Matt. 6:8; John 13:19).

(I am aware of only one other text where one might dispute the antecedent-time reading. In 2 Maccabees 7:7, a man's attackers "were asking 'if you will eat before [your] body is punished limb by limb.'" One could interpret the sense of this challenge as "will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb" [NRSV]. Still, the way the text expresses this idea uses antecedent time: the attackers are giving the man a chance to eat before they carry out their threat.)

Statistically, we are justified in presuming unless proven otherwise that in any biblical text with a clause of the form PRO TOU or PRIN (H) followed by an aorist infinitive, the main or controlling verb expresses a state or action antecedent to that denoted by the aorist infinitive. (The state or action may continue after the event or action denoted by the aorist infinitive, but the denotative meaning of the main verb pertains to a time prior to that event or action.) In 108 of the 112 occurrences (96%) of this construction in biblical Greek, this presumption appears to be beyond any reasonable dispute. Even when the main verb is in the present tense, 12 of the 16 occurrences (75%) indisputably fit the infinitive of antecedent time sense. Thus, the burden of proof rests on the view that in a particular text this construction does not have the antecedent-time sense.

## II. INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME WITH THE PRESENT TENSE: UNDISPUTED EXAMPLES

Before considering the disputable texts, I will review the undisputed examples occurring with a present-tense main verb. I will also review the classification of the present-tense verbs in these texts, using standard categories from the Greek grammars as discussed in the previous post.

Exodus 1:19 LXX: "...for they give birth [TIKTOUSIN] before [PRIN H] the midwives get [EISELQEIN, aorist infinitive] to them." As explained in a previous post, TIKTOUSIN here is an iterative (or customary) present, denoting that the Israelite women were repeatedly or regularly giving birth before the midwives could get to them.

Deut. 31:21 LXX: "...for I know [OIDA, perfect indicative used as present] their wickedness which they do [POIOUSIN, present indicative] here this day, before [PRO TOU] I have brought [EISAGAGEIN, aorist infinitive] them...." I would classify OIDA here as a descriptive or general present. The Lord was asserting that he already knew at that time what wicked things the Israelites were doing.

Job 8:12 LXX: "...does not any herb wither [XHPAINETAI, present passive indicative] before [PRO TOU] it has received moisture [PIEIN, aorist infinitive]?" We should probably classify XHPAINETAI as a customary present. The complaint is that things are going so badly that one could speak of herbs withering before getting their needed moisture as a typical occurrence.

Proverbs 18:13 LXX: "He who answers [APOKRINETAI, present indicative middle] a matter before [PRIN] hearing it [AKOUSAI, aorist infinitive]...." The verb

APOKRINETAI is without question a gnomic present. It is a timeless or general truth that responding in ignorance will result in one's embarrassment.

Isaiah 46:10 LXX: "...declaring [ANANGELLWN, present active participle] beforehand the last things before [PRIN] they come to be [GENESQAI, aorist infinitive]...." We may classify ANANGELLWN as an iterative or customary present. The sentence asserts that one of the things that the Lord does, that the false gods do not, is to declare what things will happen before they occur.

Malachi 3:22 LXX (3:23 MT; 4:5 Eng.): "And behold, I am sending [APOSTELLW, present indicative] to you Elijah the prophet before [PRIN] the great and terrible day of the Lord comes [ELQEIN, aorist infinitive]." APOSTELLW is actually a futuristic present (on this usage, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 535-36).

Sirach 11:8: "Do not answer before you listen" (PRIN H AKOUSAI [aorist infinitive] MH APOKRINOUSAI [present imperative]). As you pointed out in your very first post in this discussion, the use of a negation reverses the temporal order of the main verb and aorist infinitive. The meaning here is that one should answer after one listens rather than before. We may still call the construction the infinitive of antecedent time as long as we understand the semantics of the negation. The present-tense APOKRINOUSAI is, of course, a gnomic present.

Sirach 14:13: "Do (POIEI, present imperative) good to friends before you die (PRIN SE TELEUTHESAI, aorist infinitive)." POIEI is another gnomic present.

Sirach 18:19: "Before you speak (PRIN H LALHESAI, aorist infinitive), learn (MANQANE, present imperative)." MANQANE is yet another gnomic present.

Matthew 6:8: "...for your Father knows [OIDEN, perfect indicative with present meaning] what you need before [PRO TOU] you ask [AITHESAI, aorist infinitive] him." We may classify OIDEN as a general or descriptive present.

John 13:19: "From now on [AP' ARTI] I am telling [LEGW, present indicative] you before [PRO TOU] it comes to be [GENESQAI]...." We might classify LEGW as a tendential present, as I suggested in an earlier post: Jesus is saying that he is about to start telling them things ahead of time. On the other hand, in context it appears that Jesus is already starting to do just that, so perhaps we might classify LEGW as a "mostly futuristic" or "ingressive-futuristic" present, which describes "an event *\_begun\_* in the present time, but completed in the future" (Wallace, 537). Jesus is telling them things ahead of time, starting from right then.

Of these 11 occurrences of the infinitive of antecedent time construction, in 9 instances the main or controlling present-tense verb is a broad-band present. The only exceptions are the 2 futuristic uses (Mal. 3:22 LXX; John 13:19). Of the rest, 4 are gnomic, 3 are customary (or iterative/customary), and 2 are descriptive or general.

### III. Infinitive of Antecedent Time with the Present Tense: Disputed LXX Examples

I turn now to the three LXX occurrences of this construction where there might be some dispute about the antecedent-time sense.

#### A. Proverbs 8:23-25

In an earlier post I quoted verse 25 alone, but that was a mistake. We really should consider verses 23-25 together:

“Before the [PRO TOU] age he established [EQEMELIWSEN] me in the beginning,  
before [PRO TOU] he made [POIHSAI] the earth,  
and [KAI] before [PRO TOU] he made [POIHSAI] the depths,  
before [PRO TOU] the fountains of water went forth [PROELQEIN],  
before [PRO TOU] the mountains were settled [EDRASQHNAI],  
and [DE] before [PRO] all hills,  
he begets [GENNAI] me.”

The emphasis in this text is definitely on the temporal priority of wisdom to the physical world: the word PRO appears six times, four times in the antecedent-time construction PRO TOU followed by an aorist infinitive. The first line quoted above sets the temporal framework of antecedent time explicitly, with PRO TOU introducing a phrase, PRO TOU AIONWS, that places wisdom as established before the time of creation. The reader continuing from that first line can only understand lines 2-6 as expressing the idea of wisdom’s existence antecedent to the earth, the depths, the breaking forth of the waters and the settling of the mountains. Line 7 is the climax: before God established wisdom in the beginning, before he made the earth and brought it into its familiar form of depths and fountains, mountains and hills, God “begets” wisdom.

It is reasonable to look for some explanation for the use of the present-tense GENNAI where the same stanza earlier uses the aorist EQEMELIWSEN in the same context. However, the PPA (in its usual middle-of-the-road or narrow definition) would seem not to fit. One reason the PPA does not fit is the meaning of “begetting.” In reference to this point, you made the following comment:

<< Our disinclination to read this as a PPA is based solely on the CONTENT of the verb, not the grammar or syntax of the sentence. We think of the action of begetting as punctiliar, happening at one particular moment, and so we are inclined, as you note, to read this as a historical present. I agree with you that this is possible, but weak.... But the PPA is more ready to hand: "He has begotten me." ... The reason why the present is used as a PPA here is that the existence of the speaker is ongoing. I alluded to this special existential/identity function of the PPA before. >>

The “content” or sense of a verb can legitimately rule out certain usages, as the grammars repeatedly show. Thus, the term “begets” could be a sufficient reason to rule out construing the verb here as a PPA. The sense of other words in the sentence also tends to

direct our understanding toward one way of construing the verb rather than another. For example, we only know that “before Abraham came into being” refers to a past event because we know that Abraham lived and died in the past. (The fact that the very same kind of clause can refer to a \*future\* event, as in Malachi 3:22 LXX, proves that the content is relevant to classifying usage.)

However, I do not appeal to the semantics of the verb “begets” alone. I also would point out that read as part of their long sentence (which takes several lines), the PRO TOU clauses can hardly be understood any other way than as denoting events that wisdom antedated. To make the PPA classification fit, you had to invoke the notion of a “special existential/identity function of the PPA,” which in your post #10 you agreed to drop. Yet I see no way to make the PPA classification work here without it, \*unless\* one broadens the PPA so far that it would apply to virtually any broad-band present-tense verb. Again, in principle I do not object to using very broad definitions of the PPA as long as we do not then overreach by interpreting all such verbs as if we were really using a very narrow definition. Naturally, that which was begotten before a certain event in the past and is speaking about itself in the present existed from a time prior to that event and continued to exist up to the time of speaking. In that loose sense GENNAi could be classified as a PPA. But we should not overlook the fact that wisdom says something more than that in Proverbs 8:23-25. What it says is that God “begets” it before creation.

Moreover, for the existential/identity function to have any explanatory power with reference to the present-tense verb GENNAi, we must be able to explain why the other indicative verb in these lines is aorist rather than present. The same thing (wisdom) that God “begat” (if that is the right word) long ago and that still exists, God also “established” long ago and it still exists. Why would an existential/identity function be appropriate for “begets” but not for “establishes”?

The historical present explanation also does not seem to be workable. You agreed that it was weak, but commented parenthetically:

<< (although I don't understand your reasoning that "the odds of an historical present in a translation of a bit of Hebrew poetry would seem to be extremely minute"; this is a narrative section of the poem, surrounded by past tense verbs). >>

To the best of my knowledge, historical presents are normally found in \*prose\* narratives, not poetic “narratives.” Moreover, the historical present is a phenomenon associated with a fresh, original telling of a narrative; for that reason, I would not expect to find them in translations. I haven't researched the LXX to see if it uses historical presents in any significant number, so it is possible that I am mistaken here; I would welcome information either confirming or refuting my take on this matter.

If GENNAi is not a PPA or an historical present, what is it? Why does the text shift from the aorist “established” to the present “begets”? My own suggestion is that the verb tense shifts because the text is shifting metaphors and perspectives. The wisdom that the book exhorts people to pursue is intrinsic to the created order, in that God established wisdom

in the very beginning of creation as inherent in the structure or order of the world. To express this idea, the LXX translators employ aorist verbs for “created” (v. 22) and “established” (v. 23). Wisdom, we might put it, was created right into the warp and woof of the world. The metaphor of begetting or procreating, which emerges explicitly in the passage in verse 25, views wisdom in another way as (speaking still metaphorically) the offspring of God, as a kind of extension of his own nature. Paradoxically, God “begets” wisdom before the beginning, even before he established wisdom in its role in creation. The smoothest, paradox-free way of construing these lines is that God is always wise and everything he does is and always has been an expression of wisdom. But the LXX wording \*is\* paradoxical: it says that God \*does\* (not “did”) something (“begets”), which we naturally think of as a temporal act, “before” the very beginning of creation. I see no plausible way around the conclusion that the LXX translation of Proverbs 8:23-25 construes God’s “begetting” of wisdom as either (minimally) omnitemporal or (more likely) transtemporal (i.e., eternal). If I am correct, we should classify GENNAi as a gnomic/static/broad-descriptive present. The semantically odd assertion that God “begets” wisdom before the very beginning of creation is a way of saying that God is always wise, or that wisdom “issues” forth from God at all times and has done so even antecedent to creation.

#### B. Jeremiah 1:5a LXX

Before commenting on Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalm 90:2, I wish to respond to the following statement from your post #8:

<< You state at the beginning of your post #7 that "not one of these eleven biblical texts is a PPA," while several pages later conceding that two of them (Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:5) are usually "classified as a PPA." >>

Jason, here is what I said “several pages later”:

“The only ones ever classified as a PPA, to my knowledge, are Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:5.”

Please note, I did not say “usually.” Nor did I say anything that you could plausibly construe as the functional equivalent of “usually.” To the contrary, I said that these were the “only ones EVER classified as a PPA.” The word “ever” implies, if anything, that they are “usually” NOT so classified. To be specific, of the 17 grammars I surveyed, only ONE—Winer—mentions these two LXX texts in the context of the PPA, and then only as LXX parallels to our controversial John 8:58. Not only did I not say that grammarians usually classify these two texts as PPAs, had I said such a thing it would be false.

I must say that I am at a loss to understand how you came to misconstrue me in this way.

In your post #8, you wrote:

<< Jeremiah 1:5 is also quite clearly a PPA, and is usually translated that way in English Bibles. It should be, "I have known you since before I formed you in the womb, etc." >>

Of course, most English Bibles are translations based primarily on the Hebrew text, not on the Greek Septuagint. As for how English Bibles usually translate this line of Jeremiah 1:5, I am not aware of a single one that translates it as you say it "should be" translated. Compare the following translations:

"I have known you since before I formed you in the womb" (BeDuhn).

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb" (NLT).

"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (KJV).

"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (JPS).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (ESV).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (NASB).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (NIV).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (NKJV).

"Before I formed you in the belly I knew you" (NJB).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (NRSV).

"Before I was forming you in the belly I knew you" (NWT).

"Before I formed you in your mother's womb [Note: "\_Heb\_ 'I knew you'] I chose you" (NET Bible).

Only one of these eleven versions puts the clauses in what you consider the correct order, none of them translates the main verb as a PPA ("I have known"), and none of them construes "before" as "since before."

You wrote:

<< May I also point out that in your previous post you stated that of the 15 grammars you surveyed, "The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses [among examples of PPAs] are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." In my last post, I showed how this summation was not accurate, but I failed to note that it also deliberately ignored Winer's citation of Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:15 as PPAs comparable to John 8:58 (which you noted but failed to include in your summation). >>

The words you placed in brackets do not accurately represent my thought. No doubt I could have worded myself more clearly. If I were to put some words in brackets there to clarify my thought, the sentence would read as follows: "The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses [when they refer to expressions of past time] are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." In other words, I was referring in that sentence only to those grammars that actually say anything at all about a past-time expression as marking the PPA. Your statement that I "deliberately ignored Winer's citation," then, is false both in that Winer is irrelevant to the point I was making and in that I was not "deliberately" ignoring him. Why you would imagine that I would



acknowledge that two grammars include whole clauses but “deliberately ignore” a third is a mystery to me.

You wrote:

<< In the second part of the sentence, the perfect verbs "consecrated" and "appointed" refer to acts at one point of time. The perfect tense signifies completed action of the past. But the present tense is used in the first part of the sentence because the action of the verb (God's knowing) was not a punctiliar past event, but a familiarity that was in place "before" and continues to the present of God's speaking. Hence, a classic PPA. >>

I don't dispute that what you say is a possible, and plausible, reading of the text. I certainly agree that if one defines the PPA as broadly as Winer did, then there is no difficulty in tagging “know” in Jeremiah 1:5 as a PPA. It is true, as you say, that we may infer from the text that God knew Jeremiah in the past before his birth and continues to know Jeremiah in the present (at the time of speaking). The statement that God “knows” Jeremiah applies in the past and in the present. If this is all that we mean by the PPA, then we can label “know” in Jeremiah 1:5 a PPA. But the point in Jeremiah 1:5 is not \*limited\* to the observation that God has known Jeremiah since sometime prior to his birth and has continued to know him up to or at the moment of speaking. Rather, the statement expresses a startling assertion that derives its force from the fact that “before you were born” expresses \*antecedent time\*: God “knows” Jeremiah even before Jeremiah was born! God's knowledge of Jeremiah does not depend on Jeremiah's concrete existence but anticipates it. The sense is that God's knowledge of Jeremiah is unbounded by the necessary causal order of our own experience, in which something must happen before we can know it. No: Before Jeremiah is even born, God already knows him.

This usage of the present tense also seems to fit nicely the gnomic/static/broad-descriptive usage. God's knowing Jeremiah is a perpetual, temporally unbounded knowing, as starkly expressed by saying that God knows him even before he is born.

C. Psalm 89:2 LXX (90:2 Eng.):

The last time round that I discussed this verse, I pointed out that it exhibited a progression as follows:

Before the mountains were brought into existence,  
And the earth and the world were formed,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting,  
You are.

In your response, you took exception to the translation “even from everlasting to everlasting” for the third line:

<< The translation you use is not particularly close to the Greek; "even from everlasting to everlasting" is particularly tendentious. There is nothing at all in the Greek behind "even," which is added in this translation to heighten the supposed "progression" of the imagery. "Everlasting" is based on "the age," and I have discussed the ambiguity of this expression in my post on this passage. >>

I take the first sentence above to insinuate that there is more wrong with my translation beyond the line that you say "is particularly tendentious." So let's look at the whole verse:

PRO TOU (before the) ORH (mountains) GENHQHNAI (were brought into existence {aorist passive infinitive of GINOMAI, to become, to come into existence})  
"Before the mountains were brought into existence"

KAI (and) PLASQHNAI (were formed [aorist passive infinitive of PLASSW, to mold, to form]) THN GHN KAI THN OIKOUMENHN (the earth and the world [or, inhabited earth, mankind])  
"And the earth and the world were formed"

KAI (even [UBS dictionary: and, also, but, even]) APO TOU (from the) AIWNOS (everlasting [UBS dictionary: age, world, eternity]) hEWS TOU (to the) AIWNOS  
"Even from everlasting to everlasting"

SU (you [singular]) EI (are [2d person singular of EIMI]).  
"You are."

As best I can determine, my translation of lines 1 and 2 are unimpeachable. You don't agree with my translation of line 4 because you favor viewing it as a PPA. However, it would be absurd to claim that the translation "you are" for SU EI is "not particularly close to the Greek." Wouldn't it?

This leaves line 3. As I pointed out in my post #13, your claim that "there is nothing at all in the Greek behind 'even'" is an embarrassing mistake, since behind "even" is the Greek word KAI. Note my reference to the UBS Greek-English dictionary, which lists "even" as one of the translations of KAI. Since a progression is evident from lines 1 to 3 with or without KAI, the rendering "even" for KAI fits the context quite well.

The most elemental rendering of the word AIWNOS is "age," but translations often use "world" or "eternity" or (as I did) "everlasting" to render AIWNOS depending on context. Again, note that "eternity" is one of the translations listed in the UBS dictionary. (I would be happy to substitute "eternity" in place of "everlasting"!) Moreover, I gave contextual, exegetical evidence supporting the translation "everlasting" here:

"Each successive clause or phrase widens the temporal scope of God's existence, from the rise of the mountains to the antecedent formation of the earth and the world to the

omnitemporal passing of the ages. This progression eliminates any supposed ambiguity as to whether ‘from the age to the age’ expresses omnitemporal (everlasting) existence.”

I should add, though, that it would not overturn my interpretation of the verse to translate AIWNOS as “age” (as I did in the above-quoted comment). Even (!) with that translation, line 3 would express a more comprehensive temporal perspective on God’s existence than the first two lines, and that we can plausibly understand only as meaning that God’s existence has no beginning or end.

I conclude that your claim that my translation of Psalm 89:2 LXX is “not particularly close to the Greek” is false.

You wrote:

<< The addition of this phrase, "even from everlasting to everlasting" (or, "from age to age") is what suggests to you an "eternal" character to the present tense verb. Note that it is the CONTENT of this phrase, not the grammar employed in the sentence, that leads to your interpretation. >>

Actually, I appeal to both the content of that line and the grammar of the whole verse in support of my interpretation. You wrote:

<< As I pointed out in my post on this passage, there is no such additional phrase in John 8:58, and this verse is a closer parallel to John 8:58 if we remove this additional phrase, leaving only a PRO TOU/PRIN clause with a present tense main verb. When we do that, the action of the verb is a classic PPA, with existence predicated "before" certain other past events and continuing to the present time of the statement. >>

If we omit the third line, the verse predicates existence of God “before” certain past events, by saying not that God “existed” before creation but that he “exists” before creation. That God continued to exist after creation and up to the time of the statement is implied, of course, but that is not the precise denotation of the verb in this context. Rather, in its grammatical and semantic setting in this verse, EI denotes simple existence, an existence at all times, contrasted specifically with the origins of the ancient mountains, the earth and the world. The third line confirms this interpretation rather than being the sole basis for it. Thus, while the PPA classification can apply in a broad sense to Psalm 89:2, the gnomic/static/broad-descriptive classification more fully brings out the precise sense of the verb in this context.

You wrote:

<< I also pointed out that the presence of the PRO TOU/PRIN clause dominates the sentence and demands a PPA translation of it; otherwise, the clause is left awkwardly dangling. You can say either "You exist from age to age" or "You have existed from age to age." But while you can say "You existed before the mountains came to be" or "You have existed since before the mountains came to be," you cannot say "You exist before

the mountain came to be." To use a present tense in English as in the latter example, you have to change the sentence into something more closely resembling the gnomic/iterative/customary form: "You exist before the mountains COME to be." There you have something you might call an "eternal present." Otherwise, it's a PPA, like John 8:58. >>

I actually think that your suggestion as to how to use a present tense in the English translation has merit. I certainly would have no problem with translating Psalm 89:2 LXX as follows:

Before the mountains are brought into being,  
And the earth and the world are formed,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting,  
You are.

Likewise (to anticipate), I think it might be fine to translate John 8:58, "Before Abraham comes into being, I am." We don't normally translate verses like these in this way, because we generally render the aorist infinitives with past-time forms ("were formed," "came into being"). So there is a trade-off involved. (Trade-offs in translation are inevitable.) Perhaps we could use a perfect form in English to render the infinitives, for example: "Before Abraham has come into being, I am." In any case, supposing that we have difficulty agreeing on the best translation in English, I believe you have shown that it is possible to construe these present-tense Greek verbs as fitting broadly into the gnomic/static/broad-descriptive category of usage.

In Psalm 89:2 LXX, I prefer translating the lines of the text in the same order as they appear in the Greek, due to the progression they exhibit, and especially because the text is patently poetic. But in a freer, more idiomatic English translation that puts more weight on ease of reading in English than on retaining the full nuance of the original, I could live with a translation that reverses the order of the lines, like the following:

"You are [or, "exist"] from everlasting to everlasting [or, "from age to age"],  
[before] the earth and the world are formed,  
and before the mountains are brought into being."

This translation has the merit of retaining the progression, though in reverse order. I do think it is not as good as the usual translation, but it is acceptable.

#### IV. INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME WITH THE PRESENT TENSE: EXTRABIBLICAL EXAMPLES

##### A. Testament of Job 2:1

The same antecedent-time construction we have seen throughout the Bible is evident in the Testament of Job 2:1, which you quoted:

“For I was (EIMI) Jobab before (PRIN H) the Lord named (ONOMASAI) me Job.”

As I explained in a prior post, the meaning of the text is not that Job was and continued to be Jobab from before the Lord named him Job, as a middle-of-the-road or narrow definition of the PPA would indicate. Perhaps we could construe the text to mean something like this: “For I am the one who was called Jobab before the Lord named me Job.” The antecedent-time construction (PRIN H + infinitive) indicates that the state expressed by the present-tense EIMI here (the state of being Jobab) is a state that applied in the past, antecedent to the Lord’s action of naming him Job.

Again, I agree that the person called Job (and formerly called Jobab) existed in the past (before his name change) and continued to exist up to or at the time of speaking. In this broad sense I do not exclude the PPA classification from consideration here.

B. Menander, *\_Dyscolos\_* 615-16

We disagreed somewhat about the grammatical exegesis of the line in Menander *\_Dyscolos\_* (615-16). Sostratos says to Gorgias:

EIMI GAR AKRIBWS ISQI SOI PALAI FILOS PRIN IDEIN  
I am for fully be (imp.) to you a long time friend before to see (aor.)

I translated these lines as follows:

“For I have been—be fully [sure]—a friend of yours a long time, [even] before I saw you.”

I commented that what marks the present-tense verb as a PPA here is the adverb PALAI, not the clause PRIN IDEIN. You replied:

<< This is a deduction from your (disproved) claim that adverbial clauses are not part of the PPA construction. If you remove the adverb PALAI from the sentence, you still have a sentence that would still be translated as a PPA: "I have been a friend of yours since before I saw you." It could not be a simple present, "I am a friend of yours since before I saw you," for that would be a non-sequiter. And if the statement was meant as a simple past, "I was a friend of your before I saw you," a past tense verb would be used. Hence your fixation on PALAI is beside the point. >>

I hold no illusions about changing your mind, but let me try to explain my reasoning. We both *\*know\** that PALAI is a common marker for the PPA (as defined narrowly or in a middle-of-the-road way), especially in classical Greek (Goodwin, 268; Smyth, 423; cf. the note in Burton, 10). That a clause like the PRIN clauses of John 8:58 and this line in Menander functions as a marker of the PPA is something we do *\*not\** both know; it is, in fact, in dispute. In order to establish that such a clause, when expressing past time, would signal that the present-tense main verb is a PPA, we would need examples where that clause unambiguously performs that function. A sentence in which such a clause sits

alongside a word like PALAI simply does not qualify as such an example. You assert, “If you remove the adverb PALAI from the sentence, you still have a sentence that would still be translated as a PPA.” But this assertion begs the question; we cannot tell, from this example, that such a sentence would be written, or that if it were written the present-tense verb would be a PPA (in the narrow sense).

As it stands, the clause PRIN IDEIN does not flag the present-tense verb EIMI as a PPA because the adverb PALAI, which precedes the clause in question, has already done so. If we read the sentence linearly, PALAI qualifies EIMI as a PPA, and then PRIN IDEIN qualifies or expands on what PALAI means (A long time—before I saw you!).

#### V. INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME: CONCLUSION

In biblical Greek, we find well over a hundred occurrences of the construction PRO TOU or PRIN followed by the aorist infinitive. Nearly all of these (96%) indisputably use the construction to indicate that the state or action of the main verb obtained at a time antecedent to the event that the aorist infinitive expresses. Bracketing John 8:58 for the time being, the remaining three disputed examples are all LXX texts that speak of God’s existence (Ps. 89:2), wisdom (Prov. 8:25), and knowledge (Jer. 1:5a). In context, we can comfortably construe the present-tense verbs in each of these three texts as a broad-band present of the gnomic/static/broad-descriptive kind (which also applies to several of the other present-tense verbs where the construction is indisputable). In each text, the present tense expresses a state that \*is\* antecedent to a past event. The sense in these texts is that God always or perpetually exists or is wise or knows. Recognizing this sense in these texts does not mean excluding the PPA, broadly defined, from application to these texts. Rather, it means that if we classify these texts as PPAs, we should not view this classification as excluding the fact that the state or action of the present-tense verb is in their contexts perpetual or everlasting.

As for translating this construction, I am not aware of a single instance, in the 20 occurrences of the construction in New Testament Greek, in which any of the standard English Bibles translates PRIN or PRO TOU “since before.” Nor am I aware of any English translations of the Septuagint that render it that way in any of its 92 occurrences in the Septuagint. It is possible that there may be some examples out there, but I do not know of any. This goes for the four biblical Greek texts that you have argued are examples of the PPA (Ps. 89:2 LXX; Prov. 8:25; Jer. 1:5; John 8:58). I illustrated the point above in my list of English Bible translations of Jeremiah 1:5a. I know of only one biblical scholar (besides you) who has published on the subject who argues we should translate it that way in John 8:58 (McKay). It may be possible that all of the translators responsible for all of these English Bibles made a mistake in all of these texts. However, it is not possible that the translators deviated from their usual practice when they came to render the clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI in John 8:58 because of theological bias. The evidence shows that when they translated this clause, it was business as usual.

**ROB #17 – 10/17 – #15779:**

**ROB #17: THE RELATION OF THE TWO CLAUSES IN JOHN 8:58**

Jason,

In this post, I will argue that an accurate understanding of the relation between the two clauses in John 8:58 (PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI and EGW EIMI) support classifying EIMI as a gnomic/static/broad-descriptive present.

I. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO CLAUSES AND VERBS

In your first post, you agreed with me “that there is a contrast implied between the eimi used of Jesus and the genesthai used of Abraham.” This is an important point. My position is that this contrast sets John 8:58 apart from the class of PPA texts (as usually defined) and confirms that it belongs in the same category as the three controversial LXX texts discussed earlier. Let’s look at all four of these together:

“Before [PRO TOU] I formed [PLASAI, aorist infinitive] you in the womb, I know [EPISTAMAI, present indicative] you” (Jer. 1:5).

“Before the [PRO TOU] age he established [EQEMELIWSEN] me in the beginning, before [PRO TOU] he made [POIHSAI] the earth, and [KAI] before [PRO TOU] he made [POIHSAI] the depths, before [PRO TOU] the fountains of water went forth [PROELQEIN], before [PRO TOU] the mountains were settled [EDRASQHNAI], and [DE] before [PRO] all hills, he begets [GENNAI] me” (Prov. 8:23-25).

“Before [PRO TOU; in some mss., PRIN] the mountains were brought into being [GENHQHNAI, aorist infinitive] and the earth and the world were formed [PLASQHNAI, aorist infinitive], even from everlasting to everlasting [APO TOU AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS], you are [SU EI, the second-person equivalent of EGW EIMI]” (Ps. 89:2 [90:2 Eng.]).

“Before [PRIN] Abraham came into being [GENESQAI], I am [EGW EIMI]” (John 8:58).

In all four of these texts, there is a striking contrast expressed between the subordinate aorist infinitive clauses and the present-tense verb main clause. God “knows” Jeremiah before he formed him; God “begets” wisdom before making the earth; God “is” before the mountains were brought into existence and the earth was formed; Jesus “is” before Abraham came into existence. These contrasts are either paradoxical (How can God know Jeremiah before he was conceived? How can the first-century Jesus exist before the

patriarch Abraham? How can God “beget” wisdom before the beginning?) or they express an existence antecedent to creation itself, or both. There is also a verbal contrast between the aorist infinitives (made, etc.) and the present-tense GENNAi (begets) in Proverbs 8, a contrast underscoring the paradoxical statement that God “begets” wisdom before the beginning of creation.

The verbal contrasts are most pronounced in Psalm 89:2 and John 8:58; in both cases, the actual verbs themselves create a sharp contrast between brought or coming into being (GENHQHNAI or GENESQAI) and simply being (EI or EIMI). In short, the verbs in context express a contrast between \*becoming\* and \*being\*. Not every collocation of forms of GINOMAI and EINAI expresses such a contrast, of course. It is the way the two words are set off against each other in the sentence that produces the contrast. As I documented briefly in my book, biblical scholars across the theological spectrum have recognized this contrast in John 8:58; the list includes a virtual “who’s who” of New Testament Greek scholars who have written extensively on John, including Alford, Bultmann, Lenski, Robertson, and Westcott, to name but a few (\_Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John\_, 112-13).

In what grammarians usually list as PPA texts, on the other hand, the temporal indicator does not contrast with the present-tense verb at all, but rather gives it a context in which its meaning is clearer. The following examples are typical (not necessarily exhaustive):

- “for three years I have been coming searching” (Luke 13:7).
- “all these years I have been serving you” (Luke 15:29).
- “knowing that he had been that way a long time already” (John 5:6).
- “I have been with you so long a time” (John 14:9).
- “you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27).
- “For Moses has had from ancient generations” (Acts 15:21).
- “Have you been thinking all this time” (2 Cor. 12:19).
- “from childhood you have known the sacred writings” (2 Tim. 3:15).
- “the devil has been sinning from the beginning” (1 John 3:8).

To be fair, let’s expand this list to include some other texts that you have argued are PPAs in which another verb might, depending on how one analyzes the grammar, be considered part or all of the temporal marker:

- “You are going a fourteenth day today waiting without food” (Acts 27:33)
- “For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things remain the same” (2 Pet. 3:4).
- “For I was Jobab before the Lord named me Job” (TJob 2:1).
- “For I have been...a friend of yours a long time, before I saw you” (\_Dyscolos\_ 615-16).

The closest thing we get in any of these texts to a contrast at all similar to those considered above is the statement in \_Dyscolos\_, “For I have been a friend...before I saw you.” In this case, though, there is no semantic contrast between the two verbs, but rather the surprising affirmation of friendship prior to sight. As I explained earlier, the relevance of this text to our discussion is complicated by the presence of a common PPA



marker in the sentence prior to the subordinate clause. One could argue that this poetic line in Menander amounts to saying that the speaker has \*always\* been his friend—“always” in the relative sense appropriate to its context, of course.

The contrasts in the three LXX texts and in John 8:58 all tend to confirm the understanding that the present-tense verb expresses a state or action that is constant, perpetual, or simply always so:

Before Jeremiah has been born, God \*knows\* him.

Before God has made the earth and before the mountains have been settled, God \*begets\* wisdom.

Before the mountains have been brought into existence and before the earth and world have been formed, God \*is.\*

Before Abraham came into being, Christ \*is.\*

## II. EIMI IN JOHN 8:58 AS “ABSOLUTE”

In your first post, you wrote:

<< Rob goes on to maintain that eimi in John 8:58 is a “predicate absolute” (111). He bases himself on A. T. Robertson, whose remark that eimi in the verse as “really absolute,” that is, without a complement in the sentence, is one of the rare foolish assertions Robertson makes. If this were the case, then what does one do with the *prin* clause? This is the problem with most translations of this passage. If “I am” stands by itself as some absolute statement by Jesus, then “before Abraham came to be” is not a part of the same sentence. But it is not a complete sentence in itself, so it must be part of the “I am” sentence and, of course, it forms part of the predicate of that sentence, as the adverbial clause modifying the “am.” Thus it is simply false to call eimi in any sense a predicate absolute. I really can’t imagine anything more obvious on the page of the text in front of us than that. >>

When a relatively unknown scholar of ancient religion (sorry) opines that one of the greatest Greek grammarians in history has missed something in Greek grammar that could not be “more obvious,” the prudent thing to do is to \*be skeptical\*. I would have no problem whatsoever with you claiming to have noticed something that escaped Robertson’s attention. We all have the opportunity to build on the work of those who went before us. I do have a problem with you claiming that Robertson’s statement was “foolish” because it overlooks something that could not be “more obvious on the page of the text in front of us.”

### A. BIBLICAL SCHOLARS AND \_EIMI\_ AS ABSOLUTE

Let’s review what some biblical scholars have said about this question. I will begin by quoting just two short comments from the many recent scholarly studies on John.

Tom Thatcher, in a recent dissertation published by the Society of Biblical Literature, describes the EGW EIMI sayings at John 8:24, 28, 58 as “unpredicated.” See Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore*, SBLMS 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 241, 246.

Andrew T. Lincoln, a New Testament scholar with many years in the field, in a recent work on the Gospel of John, wrote: “This final saying [John 8:58] clearly contains an absolute use of ‘I am.’” See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in John’s Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000), 94.

I could multiply examples like these effortlessly and almost endlessly, but these illustrate the point that *bona fide* academic scholars writing rigorous works of scholarship describe EIMI in John 8:58 as “absolute” or “unpredicated.” It is difficult to believe that all of these scholars missed something that could not have been “more obvious on the page of the text in front of us.”

Let me move on to quote at more length from Johannine scholars who have given the specific matter more sustained attention. I begin with Raymond Brown, without a doubt the premier Roman Catholic New Testament scholar of the twentieth century (though not, in his biblical interpretation, particularly conservative). He stated, “Grammatically we may distinguish three types of use” of EGW EIMI:

“(1) The absolute use with no predicate.”

Brown cites John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19 as examples.

“(2) The use where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed.”

Brown cites John 6:20 and 18:5 as examples, while noting that in both cases John’s wording may have a double entendre, both implying a predicate (“It is I” or “I am he”) and as absolute.

“(3) The use with a predicate nominative.”

Here Brown cites the usual Johannine examples (John 6:35; 8:12; etc.). He also notes texts “on the borderline of this group” (e.g., John 8:18, 23). In these texts, the complement is an articular participle (8:18), which functionally is also a predicate nominative, and a prepositional phrase (“from those above,” 8:23).

[Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible Commentaries (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:533-534.]

Philip Harner takes a similar approach in his influential little study, *The “I Am” of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Usage and Thought*, Facet Books (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). Harner (37-48) distinguishes between unambiguously absolute EGW EIMI sayings that have no predicate expressed or implied (8:58; 13:19) and predicateless

EGW EIMI sayings that can be taken as having double meanings, one with a predicate implied and one that is absolute (4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28; 18:5, 8).

Next, let's consider David Mark Ball's doctoral dissertation, *"I Am" in John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*, JSNTSup 124 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). He distinguishes between "Predicated and Unpredicated 'I Am' Sayings" (162) and devotes considerable attention to analyzing these forms (162-76). He notes that the division of the EGW EIMI sayings into those with "an image" ("the bread of life," "the good shepherd," "the light of the world," etc.) and those without is too simplistic. Ball proposes to categorize the sayings "strictly in terms of their form" and then to consider "whether there is a correlation between function and form" (168). He divides the EGW EIMI sayings without an image "into three main categories of form":

"1. Those sayings combined with the definite article and a present participle" (4:26; 8:18) (168).

"2. Those sayings which are grammatically absolute and in which the words EGW EIMI stand alone" (8:58; 6:20; 18:4-8) (168).

"3. Those sayings which are grammatically absolute and which stand in a hOTI clause to express future fulfillment" (8:24, 28; 13:19) (169).

Ball notes that "the second and third categories of 'I am' are grammatically absolute (whether a predicate can be implied from the context or not)" (169). Lest one suppose that Ball somehow missed the subordinate clause in John 8:58 that precedes EGW EIMI, Ball writes: "In 8.58 EGW EIMI is in formal contrast to the verb GENESQAI, while in 6.20 and 18.5, 6, 8 the words stand as a phrase in their own right" (170).

The last scholarly study I will review briefly in this short survey is a Cambridge doctoral dissertation: Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: The Meaning and Interpretation of 'Anî Hû' in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, WUNT 2/113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). Williams distinguishes between "I am" sayings that are "bipartite" in form and those that are "tripartite" in form (i.e., of the form "I am such-and-such"), and clearly identifies John 8:58 and other Johannine texts (6:20; 8:24, 28; 13:19) as bipartite (255; see also 309).

It stretches credulity to the breaking point to believe that doctoral students working at institutions like Sheffield and Cambridge, whose dissertations were accepted for publication by the most reputable academic publishers, all could be so "foolish" and miss something in the text that could not have been "more obvious." If they missed something that you caught, it must have been subtle indeed. More likely, you are misunderstanding practically every New Testament scholar on the planet who has commented on the matter when they say that EIMI in John 8:58 is absolute or unpredicated.

B. Defining "Absolute" and Related Terms

At this point, then, it might be helpful to get some definitions of “absolute” as a technical term in grammar. For this purpose, I turn to some standard reference works regarding English language and grammar for technical definitions of “absolute” and related grammatical terms, although I am discussing the Greek verb, not the English translation (a point to which I will return below). The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed., 2000), gives the following definitions:

- a. Of, relating to, or being a word, phrase, or construction that is isolated syntactically from the rest of a sentence, as *the referee having finally arrived* in *The referee having finally arrived, the game began*.
- b. Of, relating to, or being a transitive verb when its object is implied but not stated. For example, *inspires* in *We have a teacher who inspires* is an absolute verb.
- c. Of, relating to, or being an adjective or pronoun that stands alone when the noun it modifies is being implied but not stated. For example, in *Theirs were the best*, *theirs* is an absolute pronoun and *best* is an absolute adjective.”

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=absolute>

Clearly, the applicable definition here is (b), according to which a verb is “absolute” if it is a transitive verb with no object expressed.

Similarly, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* by Sylvia Chalker and Edmund Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) gives the following definition for “absolute”:

“\*4\* (In older usage.) Designating an adjective or verb when standing outside certain usual constructions or syntactic relationships, as... (b) designating a normally transitive verb used intransitively (e.g., *Have you eaten?*)” (p. 4).

This definition is similar to the *American Heritage Dictionary* definition, but not exactly the same: any verb that is normally transitive but is used intransitively is “absolute,” whether an object is implied or not.

The “be” verb normally takes what are called “complements”—noun phrases, adjectives, or equivalent expressions that further identify or describe the subject of the verb: “I am Rob,” “She is a girl,” “You were right,” and the like. It appears that biblical scholars describe the “be” verb as “absolute” if it lacks such complements. Notice that Brown lists three categories: no “predicate” expressed or implied, no “predicate” expressed though one may be implied, and a “predicate nominative.” Ball adds articular participles, which function as substantives and therefore take the same place as nouns. When they refer to EIMI in John 8:58 (and other texts) as “absolute” or “unpredicated,” what they mean is that the verb does not have any predicate nominative word or expression functioning as a subject complement. In an absolute use of the verb, there is no complement answering the question “what?” in relation to the subject and verb: “I am (what)?”

It is possible, of course, to describe PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI as “predicative” and even (arguably) as a “complement.” *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*

observes: “In some older grammar, *\_predicate\_* rather than *\_predicative\_* is used to describe an adjective, noun, or pronoun when such a word is ‘predicated of the subject,’ i.e. is used in predicative position” (307). In keeping with this definition, biblical scholars often describe EIMI as “absolute” or more specifically as a “predicate absolute” because it lacks a “predicate” according to this older usage. The *\_Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar\_* adds, “In modern terminology such a word functioning after a linking verb is said to be a *\_subject complement\_* or possibly a *\_predicative complement\_*” (ibid.).

Likewise, the word “complement” has a narrower and a broader usage. The same reference work under “complement” gives two definitions:

“\*1\* One of the five elements of clause structure, along with Subject, Verb, Object, and Adverbial.

Typically complements of this type ‘complete’ the verb *\_be\_* or another linking verb, and are either adjective phrases or noun phrases....

\*2\* More widely, any element needed to ‘complete’ an adjective, preposition, verb, or noun....

The complement of a verb, in this wider sense, is a very unspecific term, and can include not only complements in sense (1), but also adverbials, objects, non-finite verbs, and entire sentence predicates apart from the verb itself” (76, 77).

Notice that adverbials are in a separate category from complements according to the narrower definition, though counted as complements in the wider sense.

Let’s get specific here. PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is clearly not a “predicate” or “complement” in the sense of a subject complement. It is neither an adjective phrase nor a noun phrase nor any equivalent (such as an articular participle). In this sense, EIMI is “unpredicated” or “absolute.” As Catrin Williams puts it, EGW EIMI in John 8:58 is bipartite rather than tripartite in form. Moreover, no predicate or subject complement is clearly implied in John 8:58 (as there would be, for example, if EGW EIMI were the answer to a question like “Are you Jesus?”). So, whether one understands “absolute” to mean simply unpredicated (no predicate expressed) or that no predicate is expressed or implied, EIMI in John 8:58 is “absolute” in the sense that biblical scholars conventionally mean by that term.

So, when you wrote, “Thus it is simply false to call eimi in any sense a predicate absolute,” the words “in any sense” turn out to be indefensible. There is a recognized sense, documented in academic reference works of the highest caliber, in which EIMI is a predicate absolute. It is true, of course, that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI “is not a complete sentence in itself” and is an “adverbial clause.” But this has nothing to do with the meaning of the term “predicate absolute” as biblical scholars use it. That the clause is not a complete sentence is especially irrelevant. In John 8:24, “unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins,” the words “unless you believe that” clearly are not a complete sentence, but that fact is irrelevant in determining whether “I am” is “absolute” in the grammatical sense that biblical scholars mean.

C. Is PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI a “Complement” to EIMI?

Let me go a bit further. One may construe the adverbial clause as a “complement” in the broader sense without negating the observation that the verb EIMI is “absolute” in the sense defined above. However, it is at least open to question whether PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is a complement even in that broader sense. Recall that *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* defines a complement in the wider sense as an “element needed to ‘complete’” the verb. If the adverbial clause is a complement in this sense, it is not, as I understand you to have said, because the adverbial clause needs the main clause, but because the main clause needs the adverbial clause. If the adverbial clause is not needed to complete the main clause, then the adverbial clause may be an “adjunct,” not a complement.

The *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (which we have had occasion to quote in earlier posts) offers an even more nuanced analysis of complements and adjuncts. It distinguishes obligatory complements (e.g., “She perused *the report*”) from optional complements (e.g., “She read *the report*”) and adjuncts (e.g., “She left *because she was ill*”) (221). In other words, if the predicative is obligatory (one cannot say “She perused”), it *must* be a complement; if the predicative is optional, it may be either a complement or an adjunct. The *Grammar* goes on to suggest that with optional predicatives, “there are grounds for saying that while resultatives are complements, the depictives are adjuncts” (262). A “resultative” is a predicative that specifies the result of the action of the verb, as in “The pond froze *solid*.” A “depictive” is a predicative that specifies a description of the conditions of the action of the verb, as in “He died *young*” (261).

At this point I need to return to some comments you made in your post #4.

<< The English be-verb does not, of course, take a direct object, but requires a predicate noun or adjective when it is used as a copula, or a DEPICTIVE COMPLEMENT such as an adverb when used existentially. This fact of English is stated, for example, in R. Huddleston & G. K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), on page 222: “Most obviously, the verb be almost always requires an internal complement.” For example, one can say “Jill is in her study” but not “Jill is.” One can say “The meeting was on Monday” but not “The meeting was.” For the apparently intended meaning of the two unacceptable statements just given, an English speaker resorts to some other existential verb: “Jill exists.” “The meeting occurred.” The verb “to be” is not employed in modern English in this uncomplemented existential function. The authors of the *Cambridge Grammar* state that “only a small number of verbs (or verbal idioms) take complements of temporal location; clear examples include: i. be . . .” (page 694). This is precisely the case with John 8:58, where the prin clause is, I think, an obligatory temporal complement to eimi. >>

In my reply (my post #5), I wrote:

“The second to last sentence is a quotation from a ‘grammar of the English language’; the last sentence, immediately following, is an assertion that ‘this is precisely the case’ in the \*Greek\* text of John 8:58. I think we need to distinguish two issues here: whether the PRIN clause is ‘an obligatory temporal complement’ to EIMI (and if so, what that means), and whether in English we should translate the sentence to reflect the same grammatical structure as in the Greek.”

You replied (in what in my accounting was your post #6A, since you had two posts labeled #6):

<< I have gotten so use to the shorthand of "the prin clause" and "eimi" that I simply reverted to these labels to refer to the two parts of the sentence. My point was about the English sentence. >>

I have gone through this in order to make something clear: When biblical scholars speak of John 8:58 as a “predicate absolute,” “absolute,” or “unpredicated,” they are referring to the Greek text, not necessarily to the English translation. It may be that in good idiomatic English “am” in an English Bible at John 8:58 would require an “obligatory complement.” On these grounds, you argue that in good idiomatic English “before Abraham came into being” needs to be treated as “an obligatory temporal complement” to “am” and should therefore follow “am” in the sentence. I am not addressing that argument at present. Rather, I am focusing on the Greek sentence and the role of the adverbial clause in that Greek sentence.

Now, there are two ways of construing John 8:58 in relation to these grammatical issues. First, we may construe EIMI “existentially” as expressing existence. In support of this exegesis, we may refer to the sharp contrast between GENESQAI and EIMI, already discussed. The meaning of EGW EIMI (however we translate it) would then be something like “I exist.” You favored this understanding (and assumed that I agreed) in your post #4:

<< We agree that in John 8:58 the be-verb is not a copula, but has an existential function. >>

Assuming this is correct, if EIMI in John 8:58 has an existential function, then the adverbial is not an obligatory complement. If EGW EIMI means something like “I exist,” then no complement is obligatory; the statement is meaningful without one. Again, it seems you had things turned around as to what makes a complement obligatory. Thus, immediately after the above sentence, you wrote:

<< One of the points we are seeking to resolve is whether it is a predicate absolute or occurs with a dependent depictive complement. I have argued that it cannot be a predicate absolute, since "before Abraham was born" must form part of the sentence. >>

I am not clear on whether you meant that “before Abraham was born” cannot stand on its own (as you said elsewhere in the same post, already quoted above) or that it is needed to

complement “I am.” As I have explained, while it is true that “before Abraham was born” cannot stand on its own, that is not a test of a complement. What you call a “dependent depictive complement,” according to the Cambridge Grammar, is technically an adjunct, not a complement (262). I am bracketing for now the question of the best translation of EIMI in John 8:58. It is clear enough that if EIMI is existential in John 8:58, then PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is, according to the definitions of the Cambridge Grammar (221, 261-62), an adjunct. It is optional rather than obligatory and depictive rather than resultative.

Let me put it this way. In biblical Greek, EIMI normally functions as a copula and either takes or implies (from the context) some sort of complement. If EIMI in John 8:58 is not a copula but instead denotes existence, then it does not need a complement and is, according to the technical grammatical definition, “absolute.” In this respect, its being “absolute” corresponds with the dictionary definitions of an absolute verb as a normally transitive verb that is used intransitively.

Second, it is possible to construe EIMI in John 8:58 as a copula with its predicate nominative or subject complement unexpressed. This is not an impossible position. In its support is the evidence that EGW EIMI in John 8:58 recalls similar EGW EIMI sayings in the Book of Isaiah, where EGW EIMI translates the Hebrew ani hû, “I [am] he.” In your book (Truth in Translation, 111) you mentioned two of the Isaiah texts to which Jesus’ statement in John 8:58 is a likely allusion (Is. 41:4; 46:4). Regarding Isaiah 46:4, you wrote that “God declares his ongoing existence in reference to the aging of his audience” (111). This is a plausible reading, especially of the Greek version on its own. However, in light of the underlying Hebrew as well as the immediate context even in the Greek version, it is also plausible, and I think more precise, to understand EGW EIMI in this text and in the other Isaianic EGW EIMI texts to mean, “I am [he].”

“Who has done and made these things? He has called it who called it from the first generations. I, God, the first and to all futurity, I am [he]” (Is. 41:4).

Here God tells Israel that he is the one who has done these things, who called it from the beginning; from first to last, he is the one (Heb., “I [am] he”; Gk., “I am [he]”).

“Hear me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of Israel, the ones borne from the womb and trained from infancy to old age: I am [he], and until you have grown old, I am [he]; I bear you, I made and I will relieve, I will carry and save you” (Is. 46:3-4).

Here God tells Israel that he is the one who brought them to life, who disciplined them throughout their years; even when they are old, he will still be their parent, putting up with them, carrying them and getting them out of trouble. In this context the repeated “I am [he]” also fits well and corresponds to the Hebrew “I [am] he.”

Likewise, it is possible to understand John 8:58 to mean, “Before Abraham came into being, I am [he],” alluding to these statements of God in Isaiah. The context of John 8 has



already set up the reader to pick up this allusion, since John 8:24, 28 unmistakably allude to another EGW EIMI (and ani hû) saying in Isaiah 43:10.

If this reading of John 8:58 is correct, EIMI is once again absolute in the sense that no predicate is expressed with it. The predicate “he” would not be directly implied in the overt context of John but would be indirectly implicit through the allusions to the Isaianic sayings.

Either way, it is a mistake to understand PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI as an obligatory complement to EIMI. If EIMI functions existentially, then no complement can be obligatory because “I exist” does not require a complement. If EIMI functions copulatively, it has an implied complement, “he,” in keeping with the allusion to the Isaiah texts.

Thus, even in the “wider sense” of the term, it appears that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is not a complement. As I explained earlier, we can describe EIMI as “absolute” or “unpredicated” in the sense that it appears in the sentence with no predicate nominative, no subject complement, expressed or implied. But we can also describe EIMI as “absolute” in an even more stringent sense as taking no complements at all, because PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is evidently an adjunct, not a complement.

#### D. Conclusion: EIMI as Absolute and the PPA

Let us return now to Robertson’s statement in his Grammar, at the end of his discussion of the PPA, when he excludes John 8:58 from that category with the observation that EIMI there “is really absolute” (879-80). His point evidently is that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is not the complement of EIMI, and therefore we should not construe PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI as a PPA temporal marker.

Now, I have agreed that we can view John 8:58 as a PPA if we broaden the definition a lá Winer and Turner, dropping any reference to temporal markers or conclusions as to the proper translation of the present-tense verb. (I am rather frankly disagreeing with McKay’s analysis.) If we do so, we will have to take into consideration several facts. These facts are (1) that EIMI is absolute, (2) that the sentence contrasts EIMI with GENESQAI, (3) that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is properly speaking not an expression denoting duration from the past up to the present but an expression of antecedent time, and (4) that the saying alludes to God’s EGW EIMI (in Hebrew, ani hû) sayings in Isaiah. In other words, we will have to conclude that John 8:58 lies on the outer, fuzzy boundary of the PPA, even very broadly defined. Our exegesis of the sentence will take the above four facts into account much more adequately if we construe EIMI as fitting the gnomic/static/broad-descriptive type of present-tense usage. At the very least, this perspective on the significance of the present-tense EIMI is important to a complete, accurate understanding of the sentence and its meaning.

**ROB #18 – 10/17 – #15780:**

**ROB #18: EXEGETING AND TRANSLATING JOHN 8:58**

Jason,

In this concluding short post, I wish to offer some final comments about the exegesis and translation of John 8:58.

John 8:58 is the climactic statement of Jesus in a long passage in which the overarching question is “Who does Jesus think he is?” The passage begins with one of Jesus’ many EGW EIMI sayings in the Gospel of John, using a noun phrase complement:

“I am the light of the world” (8:12).

Between this statement (audacious enough, though not understood by Jesus’ opponents) and the climactic statement in 8:58 there are a series of EGW EIMI sayings of varying forms:

“I am the one testifying for myself, and the Father who sent me testifies for me” (8:18).

“Unless you believe that I am [he], you will die in your sins” (8:24).

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [he]” (8:28).

As many scholars have noted, the response of Jesus’ opponents to the first saying in which EIMI is absolute (v. 24) implies that they were looking for a predicate: “Who are you?” (v. 25). In other words, to Jesus’ “I am” they were responding, “You are—who?” This conclusion is correct whether we translate EGW EIMI here “I am” or “I am he.” Jesus’ next EGW EIMI saying (v. 28) is also ambiguous. It can be taken to mean simply that Jesus’ hearers will find out that he is the Son of Man. However, Jesus’ language here and in verse 24 unmistakably alludes to the words of God in Isaiah 43:10, indicating that in some way Jesus is making a veiled claim to deity. His hearers do not get it yet, but they do after his final EGW EIMI saying in the passage:

“Before Abraham came into being, I am” (8:58).

The allusions here to other Isaianic sayings of God (especially Is. 41:4; 46:4) as well as to the Psalmist’s confession to the Lord of his eternal deity (which in the LXX climaxes in another predicate absolute, “You are”) evidently did not escape his hearers, who sought to stone him, presumably (given this context) for blasphemy (v. 59).

The best translation of John 8:58 will not only be as faithful to the grammar of the sentence but will also be faithful to the interconnections the statement makes with earlier statements in the passage and to its allusions to the Isaianic EGW EIMI texts. In this regard, one crucial question, posed but not definitively answered in my previous post, is

whether we should construe EIMI in John 8:58 as existential or copulative. I think we should consider the possibility that John intends his readers to see both. There have been numerous studies lately showing that John's Gospel is full of double entendres and deliberate ambiguities. A few examples are John 1:5b (which may be construed "the darkness did not comprehend" the light or "the darkness did not overpower" the light), John 3:3 (You must be "born again" or "born from above"), and John 12:32 (where "lifted up from the earth" can refer to Jesus' execution on the cross or to his exaltation to heaven). In all of these texts, the best interpretation is that the ambiguity is intentional.

As it turns out, the Isaianic EGW EIMI texts to which John 8:58 alludes also have a similar ambiguity. "To all futurity, I am" (Is. 41:4), can be taken to mean, "I exist forever" or "For all time, I am he," that is, I am always the one who determines what will be. Likewise, "until you have grown old, I am" can mean "I exist even after you have grown old" or "even when you have grown old, I am he," that is, I am still the one who cares for you. The best way to translate these texts is in such a way that the reader can see either or both connotation; and the best way to do that is probably with the simple (if inelegant by modern English standards) rendering, "I am."

Similarly, I think the traditional English rendering of John 8:58 is about the best we can do: "Before Abraham came into being, I am." This rendering is not idiomatically smooth English, but it is intelligible enough. It expresses quite accurately the contrast between GENESQAI ("came into being") and EIMI ("am"). The word "am" can be understood existentially or as a mysteriously unpredicated copula—which will make sense when one becomes familiar with the statement's Old Testament background.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge that I have not addressed every point from your posts as fully as might be desirable. I have admitted to some minor mistakes (not enough, in your estimation) and I have tried to approach the subject in more than one way in order to make the reasons for my position as clear as possible. I am confident there is still room for improvement, and I am open to corrections, large or small. I do hope, in all this, that our discussion will have shed some light on the subject.

I look forward to whatever response you feel you have the time and inclination to make, as well as the discussion that we will have with those who have been waiting for several months for our one-on-one exchange to reach a conclusion.

**IF JASON AGREES, THE DISCUSSION IS NOW OPEN TO THE FORUM**

All,

As soon as Jason agrees, the discussion on John 8:58 will be open to all list members. Let me set out some guidelines:

1. No speeches; ask questions, challenge arguments, offer alternate points of view.
2. Focus on the issues directly pertaining to John 8:58, not matters relating to Jason or myself. We do not need to debate scholarly status or ability, who said things that were unfair or inappropriate, and the like.
3. If you can, refer to specific posts by number or date so we can follow what you are saying.

Thank you for your interest in this discussion.

**Jason #15 – 10/18 – #15784:**

**Jason #15**

Rob,

You have suggested that I malign you when I say that, as an apologist, you have a commitment "to win by any means." I have said that it was not my intention to malign, but merely to indicate a great difference in our standards for acceptable means of intellectual argument. We see one of those means in your postings over the weekend. I made it perfectly clear why introducing a new line of argument now, when our readers are anxious to field their comments and questions and when my time for this exchange is drawing short, would be unacceptable, because it would not give me time to review your new material. You have now introduced in your post 15 a completely new argument in support of the traditional English translation of John 8:58, one that is not in your book and has not been seen in our on-line debate before now, that is, before the prior arguments of your book and postings had been largely invalidated. This is precisely how I characterized what apologists do in my previous post: they find new defenses of old positions, new justifications for views whose old justifications have been invalidated. Yet you insist that you are not that kind of apologist. You describe your new argument as a "response" to my criticisms in my post 8, thus portraying yourself as simply wrapping up the previous part of the debate, when in fact you have introduced something totally new. Not only that, but by (falsely) portraying it this way, you suggest that I should not be allowed to respond to this material. You say, in your post 14:

"When I have finished posting that response, we will have completed a round of discussion on John 8:58. You will have posted your criticisms of my book; I will have posted my criticisms of your chapter; you will have responded to my criticisms of your chapter; and I will have responded to your criticisms of my book."

This does not even merit a "nice try," because it is blatant high-handedness. Naturally, I do not agree. New evidence has been introduced, new arguments not found in your book have been presented all along. You admit that, right? And now, more new things from you. The fact that you have had three months to respond to my criticism of your book does not seem to induce you to any sense of fair play or "level playing field" now. And in all that time, have I actually introduced a single new argument of my own? I'll have to go back and check. I think it fair to say that mostly, if not exclusively, I have been just responding to each new attempt of yours to dislodge my position and support your own, as you drop arguments tried in your book and in your earlier postings that did not work, and keep piling on new ones, the latest of which is clearly brand-spanking new, as you suggested in your earlier post when you said you thought you could come up with a new argument that did not invoke your "eternal present." You have posted a whole set of new material and then, in your message today, you try to unilaterally declare the exchange over and the forum open with all of your new material unreviewed. This is precisely

what I mean by "by any means," since this move cannot be accredited by any recognizable standards of free and fair debate.

I think it is necessary for me, therefore, to rescue you from this self-damaging tactic. I mean, Rob, it just looks bad. People might say that these are the tactics of a desperate man, one who realizes that he has been refuted at every turn and will be again if his opponent is heard from. I would have a hard time sleeping nights knowing that people were left with that bad impression of you. So I need to make the sacrifice of helping you to save face here. Since you have gone away from our discussion for several weeks at a time, either to attend to other things or to develop new arguments, I will invoke this as a precedent to get around the current pressures on my own time. I will afford myself the same privilege you have afforded yourself. I will review all of your remarks carefully and respond to them as warranted. I will continue to respond to your arguments, at a pace of my own choosing. Given the fact that I warned about the consequences of pressing on to new arguments at the expense of our patient readers, I hope they will now understand why your new material merits careful review and comment before we can open things for them. Any other course of action would just be blatantly unfair, as I am sure they will agree. They have my sincere apologies that things have transpired in this way against my best efforts and intentions. But if I couldn't open the forum when I and they wished, neither can you. We will have to wait for the time we are both satisfied. And that will not necessarily mean an interminable refusal to yield the floor. In my debate with Robert Hommel, I gave him the last word after I felt there were no new points that required my response and that we had reached a point of just repeated restatements of our respective positions. I imagine the end here will look something like that.

In your post 14, you said:

"I do not accept any characterization of our differences that would bar me from saying with you, as I do say, 'I am an academic, whose single purpose is to get to the truth of a matter, however much I like or dislike that truth, however much or little it serves me personally.' If I thought this purpose was incompatible with what I do as a so-called 'apologist,' I would quit being an 'apologist' tonight."

This sounds earnest to me and I will accept it. I will give you the chance to prove the commitment you spell out here, and I will publicly hold you responsible for the consequences if you violate that commitment. I will ask you to engage with me in this protracted quest for the truth of the matter until we have both said everything we think worth saying, however long that takes. I will ask you to refrain from fielding questions and comments from others on this site before we have mutually agreed to do so. I will reply over time to every point you have made, and will not preclude you from responding however you see fit. I will confront you with facts that have emerged and will emerge on the subject at hand, and when you find no further way to dispute those facts, I will expect you follow where the truth leads, just as I will when confronted with indisputably proven facts. I will also do my utmost to create a constructive atmosphere of open exchange by freely admitting whatever mistakes I have not already acknowledged as I find them in my

review of our discussion. It is perhaps too late to restore this discussion to the level of amicableness it enjoyed at the beginning., but I will try to be patient and generous. I will abide by your request that I consider repeated errors signs of incompetence rather than attempts at deception, and particularly convoluted defenses as a matter of fog rather than smoke.

I will work on this as time permits, but I am sure it will be into December before I am able to find the time to respond as thoroughly as you have (when I get to them, it does not take so long; but it is in finding the time to get to them that I am now particularly tied up). May I suggest that our exchange, while being left where it is, also be copied to a separate file on the site for greater ease of reference for interested readers, considering the considerable amount of time over which it has (and will) transpired. Perhaps in making that copy, someone could correct my lapse in not numbering all of my posts. I think both you and I have made mistakes in assigning numbers to the ones that are given just as "Reply to Rob #x." I apologize for not being more consistent.

To Barry: I think we're shooting for 400, he he.

Best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #20 – 10/18 – 15790:**  
**ROB #20: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE (AGAIN)**

Jason,

Perhaps you missed some things in my recent posts, including the last one. You wrote:

<< Not only that, but by (falsely) portraying it this way, you suggest that I should not be allowed to respond to this material.... You have posted a whole set of new material and then, in your message today, you try to unilaterally declare the exchange over and the forum open with all of your new material unreviewed.... People might say that these are the tactics of a desperate man, one who realizes that he has been refuted at every turn and will be again if his opponent is heard from. I would have a hard time sleeping nights knowing that people were left with that bad impression of you. >>

Jason, the subject heading of my post today reads as follows:

"John 8:58: IF JASON AGREES, the discussion is now open to the forum"  
(emphasis added).

That subject heading alone makes it clear that your allegation that I tried to end our exchange "unilaterally" is false. In the body of the post, my very first sentence reads:

"AS SOON AS JASON AGREES, the discussion on John 8:58 will be open to all list members" (emphasis added).

At the end of my post #18, I wrote:

"I LOOK FORWARD TO WHATEVER RESPONSE YOU FEEL YOU HAVE THE TIME AND INCLINATION TO MAKE, as well as the discussion that we will have with those who have been waiting for several months for our one-on-one exchange to reach a conclusion" (emphasis added).

Really, Jason, how could you so badly distort my intentions? Could I have made myself any clearer?

In my post #14, I wrote:

"The fact is that we had no timetable for completing this discussion and I am accommodating you by hurrying my response to your criticisms of my book.... If you wish to return to the list and resume our discussion at a later date, of course that would be fine."



The last sentence was not precluding you responding whenever you were ready, but was simply acknowledging your statement that you were about to run out of time to continue our exchange.

You wrote:

<< I made it perfectly clear why introducing a new line of argument now, when our readers are anxious to field their comments and questions and when my time for this exchange is drawing short, would be unacceptable, because it would not give me time to review your new material. You have now introduced in your post 15 a completely new argument in support of the traditional English translation of John 8:58, one that is not in your book and has not been seen in our on-line debate before now, that is, before the prior arguments of your book and postings had been largely invalidated. >>

You are a hard man to please, Jason. In your post #13, you complained that I had not responded to your posts #9 and #10 (which were actually #8 and #9). In your post #14, you accuse me of "ignoring" your criticisms, again referring to those posts. My post #15 responds in detail to much of your argument in one of those posts, and now you complain about that!

My post #15 is in its entirety a defense of my claim that the PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI clause does not denote duration from the past up to the present but is instead marking a point in the past \*before\* which the state or action of the main verb is said to occur. You criticized that claim in your very first post, and post #15 was my first direct response to that criticism. Part of that response addressed your criticisms of my exegesis of Jeremiah 1:5, Psalm 89:2 LXX, and Prov. 8:25, which were a major part of the two posts that you had complained about me "ignoring."

You wrote:

<< New evidence has been introduced, new arguments not found in your book have been presented all along. You admit that, right? And now, more new things from you. >>

It is truly bizarre for you to criticize me for presenting new evidence and arguments in support of the position taken in my book. Perhaps you would have preferred it if I had simply repeated myself?

You wrote:

<< I think it fair to say that mostly, if not exclusively, I have been just responding to each new attempt of yours to dislodge my position and support your own, as you drop arguments tried in your book and in your earlier postings that did not work, and keep piling on new ones, the latest of which is clearly brand-spanking new, as you suggested in your earlier post when you said you thought you could come up with a new argument that did not invoke your "eternal present." >>

Toward the beginning of our discussion, I pointed out some serious deficiencies with your argument about the proper word order of the conventional translations of John 8:58. You thanked me for the opportunity to "clarify" your argument. Well, it looked to me like a heavily reformulated argument if not a new argument, but I did not challenge your characterization of it. Perhaps I should have.

Unlike you, I have never complained about you taking the discussion in any direction you wished, except when you started speculating about my motives, methods, and values.

You wrote:

<< I think it is necessary for me, therefore, to rescue you from this self-damaging tactic. I mean, Rob, it just looks bad. People might say that these are the tactics of a desperate man, one who realizes that he has been refuted at every turn and will be again if his opponent is heard from. I would have a hard time sleeping nights knowing that people were left with that bad impression of you. So I need to make the sacrifice of helping you to save face here. >>

Jason, I have to say it: the more you indulge in this sort of posturing on the basis of easily documented distortions of things I say, the more "it just looks bad" for you. Anyone who has followed the discussion can see that YOU started angling over a month ago for an early end before I finished answering you, as with the following comment:

<< I have run through the data with you, and made my own argument of how your conclusion is based on misconstrual and misinterpretation of the grammarians and of the examples. I suppose we can go around and around on this. But without any expectation of progress, I think we have both had our say. >> (Jason #9, message #15585, 9/8/2004)

Then five days ago, without any warning, you announced that you only had a couple more weeks that you could participate and insisted I not post any further:

<< I must agree with those on this site who have intervened to say we have reached the completion of a cycle of this discussion.... We had promised to those who wished to see this discussion/debate on this site that there would be an opportunity for anyone who wished to comment or raise questions. Our readers have now called for this promise to be fulfilled, and for that purpose, I will remain on the site for two weeks. >> (Jason #12, message #15758, 10/13/2004)

I, on the other hand, have NEVER tried to squelch your participation, NEVER called for an end to the discussion, NEVER opposed you offering a further response of whatever kind you wished, whenever you wished.

You wrote:

<< Since you have gone away from our discussion for several weeks at a time, either to attend to other things or to develop new arguments, I will invoke this as a precedent to

get around the current pressures on my own time. I will afford myself the same privilege you have afforded yourself. I will review all of your remarks carefully and respond to them as warranted. I will continue to respond to your arguments, at a pace of my own choosing. Given the fact that I warned about the consequences of pressing on to new arguments at the expense of our patient readers, I hope they will now understand why your new material merits careful review and comment before we can open things for them. Any other course of action would just be blatantly unfair, as I am sure they will agree. They have my sincere apologies that things have transpired in this way against my best efforts and intentions. But if I couldn't open the forum when I and they wished, neither can you. We will have to wait for the time we are both satisfied.... I will work on this as time permits, but I am sure it will be into December before I am able to find the time to respond as thoroughly as you have (when I get to them, it does not take so long; but it is in finding the time to get to them that I am now particularly tied up). >>

A simple check of the web site archives will show that at no time did two weeks ever go by after you had posted to our discussion before I posted to it again. One of the two longest gaps occurred when I reported to the group that I had a medical problem arise without warning. You now wish to use these relatively short delays as "precedent" for keeping the list waiting two months. I well understand the difficulties of juggling responsibilities and interests in one's schedule, but I object to the manner in which you are trying to control the flow of information. You tried to stop me from posting, and since that didn't succeed, you are now trying to put discussion on hold for a very long time.

Since you say you are "sure" that the list members will agree with your position on how we should proceed, I am "sure" you won't mind if I put it to a vote of the list membership. I will agree to move immediately into group discussion, delay group discussion for a few days, or delay group discussion until January, according to whatever our list membership decides. In a few minutes, hopefully, I will post a poll on our list for the members to use to express their desires.

**JASON #16 – 10/19 – #15797:**

**RE: ROB #20: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE (AGAIN)**

Rob,

If we both keep posturing like this, we're going to throw our hips out. It is quite ironic for you to suggest that I have been trying to control things on a site you control. We've had a dust up. We're working it out. That's the bottom line.

Obviously, as I indicated, I have not had the time to get to the BOTTOM of your LAST OF FOUR LONG NEW MESSAGES. You could have just said that you felt like you had presented all the arguments you needed to, and the forum could open as soon as I felt the same about mine. You did something quite different than that, and I would be derelict in my duty if I didn't call you on such debate tactics. I complain about what I see in the presidential debates, too, so you're in good company.

I hoped you would see the humor in some of my remarks. I guess I'm not in a position to attempt levity at this late date.

Given the constituency of this site, I never expected a neutral audience, nor would I expect equal treatment in a poll. Now please, people, that's NOT ad hominem -- that's an observation about demographics. Which brings me to this exaggerated sense of the ad hominem. Honestly, have none of you participated in a debate before? For one thing, ad hominem is a technical term in logic that refers to a close analysis of an argument for the technical weakness of conflating things about the source of an argument with the argument itself. As such, identifying an argument as committing the ad hominem fallacy is a defensive instrument in debate. In other words, one says, "That argument commits the ad hominem fallacy." I occasionally commit the ad hominem fallacy. But it is not an ad hominem to challenge an authority as biased, if the authority's testimony is being accepted as proving a point without argument. If the authority makes an argument, then it would be an ad hominem to declare the authority biased rather than refute the authority's argument. I hope that is clear. Now the remarks of mine that have been pointed to in this discussion as "insulting," and "maligning," are also not ad hominems because they have not been arguments or parts of arguments. Nor is it an ad hominem to point out patterns of misrepresenting the evidence, as I explained two posts ago.

Finally, Rob, it is my job to be hard to please. You can rib me about it; that's fair. We both have complaints about the other's tactics, and that's understandable. Debates get rough some times. Robert Hommel and I also had a couple of tense moments in our exchange, but I think they worked themselves out. So please don't waste time faulting me for things you yourself do. We both try to score points at the other's expense, and that's the nature of what we are at. Please understand that I do not fault you for introducing new arguments, or for belatedly answering criticisms I made three months

ago. It was the circumstances in which a pause was called for and you ignored that call to rush in new material that I was critical of. I don't blame you; if I were you, I would have done the same thing, given the state of your position. But since you knew that I had said I wouldn't have time to address any new material, you knew quite well the situation you were creating by introducing a big load of new material, and then declaring yourself ready to open the forum. So let's both knock off playing the injured party. I set myself up to be taken advantage of, and you obliged. I have no one to blame but myself. So let's just get on with it. And please pardon me for not recognizing the material in your post 15 as somehow a distant cousin of some remarks you made in your book. It really is so reformulated from the latter as to take the form of a new angle on the material. A much clearer formulation than in the book, I think, so congratulations. So onward.

best wishes,  
Jason B.

**ROB #21 – 10/19 – #1579 :**

**ROB #21: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE (AGAIN)**

Jason,

To most of what you said, I would simply refer you and others to the specifics of my previous post, which I think holds up just fine.

The list members may have surprised you. There are several here who are zealously on your side in our discussion, and, although they won't do it in politics, here they are not shy about voting. And I'm guessing that a number of persons who favor my perspective on John 8:58 voted to go along with your desire to postpone group discussion until you and I have finished, whenever that may be.

I happen to agree with you that you did not commit the ad hominem fallacy when you questioned my motives, methods, and values as an apologist. However, you did misjudge me in those matters. It would also have been nice if you had acknowledged that I was right when I pointed out to you (in my post #14) that you were incorrect in complaining repeatedly that I had accused you of an ad hominem. Oh, well.

You wrote:

<< Please understand that I do not fault you for introducing new arguments, or for belatedly answering criticisms I made three months ago. >>

Jason, your very first post appeared on August 4, only two-and-a-half months ago. You covered a wide range of issues in that one post, and I have been replying to various parts of it ever since.

You wrote:

<< And please pardon me for not recognizing the material in your post 15 as somehow a distant cousin of some remarks you made in your book. It really is so reformulated from the latter as to take the form of a new angle on the material. A much clearer formulation than in the book, I think, so congratulations. >>

I'm glad you think so.