

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

Jason BeDuhn

v.

Robert M. Bowman, Jr.

(Part Two: October 22, 2004—End)

As of March 11, 2005

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—Rob Bowman

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Topical Flow Chart of the Debate

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Rob #38 (closing statement)					

JASON #17 – 10/22 – #15823:
JASON #17

Dear Rob,

This post retraces certain threads of argument from earlier in our debate, prior to your posts 15-18. It reminds readers of the key issues, reviews our discussion of English word order, goes over the issue surrounding your post 6, and responds once again to your posts 11 and 12. My next messages will systematically respond to your posts 15-18. First, I must correct two mistakes of mine:

(1) When I said that our debate had gone on for three months, I was mistaken. It only felt like three months. It was actually, as you stated, just a week past two months.

(2) I was mistaken in saying that you had accused me of "ad hominem." That phrase was used by someone else on the site. You never said it, and I was mistaken in thinking that you had. I apologize for that mistake. You said I had used "insulting, maligning, offensive, and personal" remarks in the debate. The record will have to stand for itself on whether or not that was true. Let me say again that it was never my intention, and I apologize for any inadvertent offense I may have given you personally.

WHERE WE STARTED

In my book, *Truth in Translation*, I identified three defects in popular modern translations of John 8:58: (1) inversion of normal English order of main and dependent clauses of the sentence (all of my sample except the Living Bible), (2) improper rendering of verbal tense within the syntax of the sentence (all of my sample except Living Bible and New World translation), abnormal capitalization of main clause (TEV, NAB, AB). These are "defects" because they do not render the Greek accurately into English that clearly conveys how the syntax of the sentence works together to produce a coherent meaning. Since in other occurrences of grammar and syntax comparable to that found in John 8:58, these translations do render the meaning accurately, there is some unusual pressure upon them in this verse to depart from their normal practice. I identified this pressure as theological bias rooted in the mistaken idea that Jesus is quoting Exodus 3:14 here. I pointed out that this interpretation does violence to the sentence, by disconnecting the main clause from its dependent clause, and that the Greek of the two verses does not correspond in the crucial way necessary to identify the one as a quote of the other. By offering parallel examples, I demonstrated that the grammar and syntax of the verse is properly translated as "I have been since before Abraham was born." Although none of the translations I compared gets this quite right, the Living Bible comes closest, the New World translation next closest, with the others too far from the meaning of the original Greek to be acceptable.

You and I agreed that the odd capitalization found in the TEV, NAB, and AB "tips the hand" of the translators that they are being guided by the assumption of a connection to Exodus 3:14 that is not present in the Greek and was unknown to any early Christian commentator who read both passages in the Greek. (BeDuhn 107-110, Jason post 1; Bowman 121-122, Rob post 5). But we disagree on the issues of word order and verbal tense, and these two subjects have been the dominant themes of our exchange.

WORD ORDER

The NW translation differs from those preferred by you only in its rendering of the verbal tense. It agrees with them in the inversion of normal English word order, and I have criticized it alongside of them for that. In your post 3, you denied that the word order found in most English translations of this verse was, in my words, "fractured or broken syntax." You argued that English has flexibility to put dependent clauses before main clauses, and this does not constitute "fractured" syntax. I clarified that my characterization referred to both the word order and the disharmony of verbal tenses between the main and dependent clauses, and that these two aberrations together merited that characterization. You subsequently (your post 5) acknowledged that that was my meaning. I went on in my post 4, making use of one of the most respected modern grammars of English, to demonstrate that the noted flexibility in ordering clauses in English is not found in connection with the be-verb. You subsequently (your post 5) acknowledged that it was "unusual" for the be-verb to be employed with the same flexibility of word order found with other verbs. I introduced the difference between adjuncts and complements to the verb, which I had left out of my book as too technical for the broad audience I was addressing. This difference is crucial in determining how flexible one can be with the order of clauses in a sentence. Since the dependent clause in John 8:58 is a verbal complement, not an adjunct, it should not be preposed to the main clause. You subsequently (your post 5) acknowledged my explanation of this rule of English grammar (which you summed up as: "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"]") without argument or further comment. You had offered a long list of English passages from the Bible which you felt demonstrated the ability to prepose the dependent clause. I pointed out that most of them did not involve the be-verb, and those that did involved adjuncts, not complements, to the be-verb. These arguments of mine went unanswered in all subsequent posts, and so, unless you have something more to add, can be considered to have prevailed.

I provided an extensive (but far from exhaustive) list of pronoun+be-verb statements in the New Testament to illustrate when and how these were employed. This served to demonstrate that English usually reorders the sequence of words relative to the Greek in acknowledgment of the different demands of syntax between the two languages. It showed how some uses were closer to John 8:58 than others, and how the closer parallels generally avoided the final position of the be-verb in the clause, so that the verbal complement preposed to the main verb in the Greek would follow the main verb in English, since English syntax normally follows this order. This contribution, which amounts to five printed pages, was never acknowledged or responded to by you.

I further argued that English normally employs alternatives to the be-verb when we wish to make absolute existential statements, that the use of the be-verb in this capacity had fallen out of English usage since the days of King James. You initially (your post 5) tried to dispute that English had changed that much in the last three hundred years, but wisely dropped this position as untenable.

In your post 5, you conceded that the order found in most translations of John 8:58 was "unusual or even odd." In my reply I said that this admission was sufficient to place the burden of proof on a defender or "unusual or odd" word order in an English translation. You had suggested that the word order of the original was "also unusual," and this seemed to be the line of argument you intended to follow to defend the unusual or odd English order. But I stated there was nothing at all unusual about the Greek word order, and asked directly: "Please be precise: what is it that you consider out of the ordinary for Greek grammar here?" You have never replied to this question. I should also repeat here that there is no direct correlation between Greek word order and English word order. In my book, I quoted Orlinsky & Bratcher on this point. They referred to the notion that "faithfulness in translation demands that the word order of the original be reproduced," and commented, "This, of course, is simply wrong" (History of Bible Translation, 1991, page 251), a view that is shared by all the major modern translations. An "unusual" order in one does not dictate "unusual" order in the other. It is only when an "unusual" word order in Greek has some semantic significance that that significance must be rendered in English in some way – by word order if appropriate. But none of this has been demonstrated for John 8:58, by you or anyone else. Greek preposes dependent clauses more freely than English does, and quite regularly has the main verb at the end of the sentence in a way that English does not in sentences like John 8:58 when a verbal complement is present in the sentence, or when the be-verb is involved.

With your post 6 and subsequent posts, you have made no further argument on the issue of word order, leaving my position unrefuted and my refutation of your arguments standing. Thus, unless you wish to mount any new argument, we can consider the issue of word order closed. The main clause should precede the dependent clause in an accurate translation of John 8:58: "I am/have been before Abraham was born." This correct word order acknowledges the function of the dependent clause "before . . ." as a depictive complement of the main verb, a function that you have accepted without argument. It follows logically and necessarily that the main verb is semantically incomplete in this sentence, and must be read together with its depictive complement to reach the full significance of the verb. Just as "I am" does not fully convey the verbal meaning in the sentence "I am hungry," but needs its complement to communicate meaning, and likewise "I was" does not tell us the complete action intended in the sentence "I was going," so too in John 8:58 the verb only has its full meaning with its complement. Now in Greek the complement has a function of completing the tense property of the main verb. In English, this happens most often with what we call "helping" or "auxiliary verbs." So "I going," while providing full conveyance of the action involved, is not complete as regards the tense of the action: "I am going" is present tense, while "I was going" is a past tense. It is rare in English for the same verbal form to

be read one way (say, as a present) and another way (say, as a past) when combined with a modifying word, phrase or clause. The only examples that come to mind are orthographic coincidences, for example:

"I read the Bible." vs. "I read the Bible yesterday."

Someone reading the latter sentence might take "read" as a present tense until observing the adverbial complement "yesterday," which alters the tense of the verbal form. This change in the significance of a verbal form is much more common in Greek, as is recognized in all the principal grammars. But in English a verb usually changes not only significance but form when modified temporally by an adverb, adverbial phrase, or clause. So "I see you," when modified by "yesterday," cannot remain "I see you yesterday," but must become "I saw you yesterday." Or, if "yesterday" is part of a phrase with "since yesterday," it cannot be "I see you since yesterday," but must become "I have been seeing you since yesterday."

All that remains in your avoidance of this conclusion is the claim that "I am" is a "predicate absolute," and hence the "before" clause is an adjunct, not a complement. Now you have stated this claim both in respect to the English and in respect to the Greek, so I will need to address both sides of this claim. I will comment on the Greek in my reply to your post 17. On the English, first of all, it would have to be "I exist," not "I am" to be an absolute and, second, you would have to read the sentence to mean that Jesus is declaring his present existence plain and simple, not his existence in any time reference to Abraham. Since this breaks the sentence up into meaningless and decontextualized fragments, it is unacceptable. In context, Jesus is clearly saying he was already in existence at a particular point of past time, and in English this requires the dependent clause to serve as a verb complement, not an adjunct, the verb to not be read absolutely but to be completed by the sense of the dependent clause, and a resultant shift in the verb from the simple present to the past or past progressive.

WHAT MAKES A PPA? (your post 6 revisited)

Let me show you how ambiguities in the wording of your claims, and false suppositions in your assessment of the grammars, led to false leaps in your conclusions in your post 6 that had the effect of misrepresenting the evidence.

Your third conclusion in your post 6 was that 8 of 15 grammars (so roughly half) "regard the use of such an adverbial as part of the definition of a PPA." "Such an adverbial" in your statement referred to your previous, second conclusion, that "Most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression modifies the present-tense verb" in a PPA construction. Note your wording here, which poses as a limiting, defining description of how PPAs are formed. In your post 8 you objected that I "jumped the gun" in correcting your mistake in counting Brooks & Winbery among these "most," since their comment that "a verb alone is sometimes sufficient" clearly indicates that an adverbial is NOT a defining feature of the PPA for them. If all four of your "summary observations" were stated as defining or descriptive of what a PPA is, you have mistated the Brooks & Winbery position on this second point. If the second conclusion was not meant as

defining and descriptive of the PPA, what is its function? I explained my criticism further in my post 9 (Sept. 8), that if you had said "Most of these grammars state that an adverbial expression CAN modify," or "OFTEN modifies," then you would have been above reproach on this point. I made the crucial point that in this second conclusion you were using the broadest possible sense of "adverbial," ONE THAT NECESSARILY INCLUDED ADVERBIAL CLAUSES as well as adverbs and adverbial phrases, since you counted among those supporting this conclusion grammars that explicitly cited adverbial clauses among their examples, as well as those grammars that did not actually use the word "adverbial" in their definition, including 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"). This broad definition, which includes clauses, is then carried forward to your third conclusion by your expression "such an adverbial." I am with you to this point, and recognize with you that roughly half of the grammars assume that "such an adverbial" standardly is present in the PPA construct, while the other half indicate or imply that PPAs are sometimes formed without such a grammatically adverbial element in the sentence. SO NOTE THAT HALF THE GRAMMARS THINK THERE CAN BE A PPA WITH NO ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION WHATSOEVER, FOUR OTHERS THINK THE PPA IS FORMED BY MODIFICATION WITH A 'EXPRESSION OF PAST TIME' OR 'TEMPORAL EXPRESSION,' AND ONLY FOUR GRAMMARS SPECIFY MODIFICATION BY 'ADVERBIAL EXPRESSION' (JANNARIS, BURTON), OR 'A SPECIFIC PHRASE' (GREENLEE) OR 'AN ADVERBIAL PHRASE OR OTHER TIME-INDICATION' (FANNING) AS THE DEFINING FEATURE. This is how the statistical summation of these grammars should have been presented, which does not at all support your belief that the "burden of proof" is on someone who maintains that PPAs can be formed by more than just adverbs or adverbial phrases.

As you went on to apply these second and third conclusions of your post 6 in your argument, you improperly transformed statements in these grammars referring to statistical occurrence – "often," "usually," "generally" – into value judgments of how more or less "clear-cut" a particular example of a PPA would be. This leap from quantity to quality of cases is illegitimate.

This defective handling of the sources then compounds itself when we move on to the fourth conclusion you made in your post 6:

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

I dissected the falsity of this conclusion in my posts 7 and 9. Among the critical points I made were:

(1) The expression "these grammars" in "Most of these grammars" must be taken to refer to the same set of 15 discussed to this point. You failed to inform anyone that you had actually reduced the number of grammars considered for this point.

(2) "Most" is misleading because only 2 of the 15 grammars even use the phrase 'adverbial expression' that you take as a standard. 3 of 15 mention an "adverb" (Robertson, Dana & Mantey, Brooks & Winbery), but not as necessarily the modifying element of a PPA. 2 of 15 use "adverbial phrase" (Fanning, Wallace), but one of these (Wallace) only as an example of the more generic category of PPA modifiers, 'some sort of temporal indicator,' which is clearly the broader category Fanning has in mind, too, when he adds 'or other time-indication.'

Thus the whole question was raised what you possibly could mean by "most," and the whole claim proves to be baseless. When I first pointed out problems with this posting of yours, you said I should "read my four points together and understand their logical sequence and relationship." Therefore, the fourth conclusion is meant, in sequence, to narrow how "adverbial" is understood, after you have, in conclusion 2, swept under that rubric the broadest possible expressions found in the grammars, most of which quite clearly mean something broader than you attempt here to make them mean. But even if we separate your fourth conclusion from any progressive scheme, and judge it on its own merits, "most" is simply inaccurate: "most" of the grammars do not even use the term "adverb" or "adverbial," so your claim is done in on that fact alone. Moreover,

(3) Of the minority seven who do talk in these terms, Fanning cites two clausal PPAs (Acts 27:33 and 2 Peter 3:4), Wallace one (Acts 27:33), and Robertson one (2 Peter 3:4). This leaves only 4 of 15 grammars that you might construe as "evidently meaning an adverb or adverbial phrase."

(4) Relying on what few examples they happen to cite is a dubious basis on which to claim an absolute exclusion, even among these 4, of clausal cases. What they cite establishes inclusion, but cannot establish exclusion.

You protested (in post 8) that your fourth conclusion "has to do with what the grammars mean by 'adverbial expression' or whatever term they use." Pardon me, but you did not say "or whatever term they use" in your post 6, nor does this objection deal with my demonstration that "most" do not mean what you say they mean, nor does it explain while after claiming what "most" mean, you cited only five.

Those reading your post 6 "in sequence," as you suggested in your post 8 was the correct way to do so, would have understood you to be basing your "summary observations" on the material you had quoted before hand. That is what a "summary" normally is. Each of your four conclusions was based in the language used within the definition of the PPA by the grammars. I critiqued them on this same basis. In your response in your post 8 you justified your conclusions on the basis of the examples they cite, and pointed back to how you had referred in one sentence in the fourth conclusion to "the examples that the grammars cite, as we shall see." You therefore claimed "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." But not only had I already noted this very sentence in which you looked forward to the examples, but I had already pointed out that what the grammars happen to cite in selecting a handful of

examples is far from being adequate to limit the meaning of their definition, which in so many cases is quite clearly worded in very broad and cautious terms. In a subsequent post you acknowledged my point, while still maintaining that such sets of examples created the presumption, if not the conclusion, of such a limitation. This is fallacious. What they cite can inform us what they include, but it cannot inform us what they exclude, because they are each quite clearly citing only a few examples to illustrate the construction they are talking about. Since simple adverbs and adverbial phrases easily outnumber more complex adverbial clause modification in our sources, the few examples the grammarians pick are statistically likely to favor adverb and adverbial phrase examples.

(5) I had already pointed out your error in stating that "The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)," since Winer and Turner also cite it. You rejected this correction, not by disputing that they cite John 8:58, which indeed they do, but by suggesting that since "Winer and Turner say nothing at all about expressions of past time accompanying the PPA verb," they do not count in your fourth conclusion. I don't know anyone reading your fourth conclusion who would have assumed Winer and Turner were excluded, and it runs against your stated claim in your fourth conclusion to be making a summary of the evidence of "these grammars" to leave some of them. Moreover, Turner in fact references Burton for further details on defining the PPA, and so must be understood as affirming Burton's use of "adverbial expression," so Turner needs to be counted with the rest even on your revised criteria. In these five critical ways your fourth conclusion in post 6 is not an accurate representation of the grammars, and must be set aside as void.

Turning to your analysis of the examples of PPAs from the grammars, I showed how problematic your distinction of "contested" and "uncontested" was. For one thing, in only a couple cases were they actually contested as not a PPA by one or more of the grammarians (John 8:58 by Robertson and Wallace; 2 Cor. 12:9 by Fanning). But you extended "contested" status to any verse cited by a grammarian under a different construct than the PPA. I pointed out the varying boundaries and subcategories involved from one grammarian to another that made this less than a "contesting" of the verses' PPA status. And in your latest posts you seem to show agreement on the fluidity of some of these boundaries. This issue was involved in my criticism of you accepting as uncontested a verse that appeared to be contested, because it was cited as a "static present" as well as a PPA: John 15:27. The twist here was that it was cited under both by the same grammar (Dana & Mantey). I pointed out that if the same grammarians could cite a verse under two distinct categories, and you could consider that not contesting (in your post 8 you maintained that it was confusing but not contesting for a single grammar to cite the same verse under two headings), then you should not consider it contesting if two different grammarians cite a verse under two distinct categories respectively. As I said, you know seem to be approaching sharing this viewpoint with me, although you have never directly responded to the particular point of John 15:27. I decided to pursue the question further, however, and found that Dana & Mantey were actually referencing different clauses of the same verse in the respective citations (more on this in a future post). This may have implications for some of the other supposedly "contested"

examples, but I have not yet had a chance to look into that. Anyway, it turns out that you were right to consider John 15:27 as not really "contested" by your use of the term, although not for a reason you were aware of at the time. At the same time, you did count as contested a verse that had never been contested: Acts 26:31, which is commented on by three grammars, but in the two of them I have been able to check the comments you cite are not meant to contest or question, but rather explain why it is a PPA despite lacking any adverbial modification of the verb). Furthermore, you decided to overlook the "contested" status of 2 Peter 3:4 and 1 John 3:8 in your post 6, without providing any justification, and I rightly questioned this move. I said you should either include all of the "contested" examples or none of them, but it was inadmissible for you to accept only those that you thought supported your position and only exclude those that did not. These inconsistencies had the effect of skewing the examples in favor of the position for which you were arguing. Then, following my demonstration that Acts 27:33 was a clausally-modified PPA, you rejected it from the PPA category, though you had accepted it as a PPA when you thought it fit your argument. This was a move that really ran the risk of being misconstrued as recutting the body of evidence to suit your conclusions, especially compared to my rejection of 2 Cor. 12:9 as a PPA, despite the fact that it was one of only four examples of a clause construction among your sample. I did so because that was the truth of the matter, that it was not really a PPA, no matter how much its inclusion would have boosted my position. So you need to be more careful about making these unjustified adjustments of the pool of samples when they become inconvenient for what you are sure must be true.

Any future argument you wish to make concerning what makes a PPA must take account of the following two points of information:

(1) 4 OF 15 GRAMMARS CITE EXAMPLES THAT HAVE NO ADVERBIAL MODIFIER AT ALL. (Luke 2:48 Turner, Moule; Acts 26:31 Turner, BDF, Winer)

(2) 7 OF 15 GRAMMARS CITE EXAMPLES EMPLOYING AN ADVERBIAL CLAUSE (John 8:58 Turner, BDF, Winer, McKay; Acts 27:33 Fanning, Wallace; 2 Peter 3:4 Turner, Winer, Fanning, Robertson) – see my post 7.

Given the fact that adverbs and adverbial phrases are used much more commonly than adverbial clauses (a point you accepted in your post 8), and that identifying a PPA with no adverbial expression is likely to occur only in cases where no other reading is possible, these statistics are quite significant.

Since you have gone on to base your subsequent arguments for a narrower definition of the PPA on the conclusions of your post 6, all of this subsequent argument is voided. The grammars are overwhelmingly against you on this line of argument, and your use of them has been without merit as an accurate representation of how they view the PPA construct. Therefore there is no burden of proof against the PPA understanding of John 8:58, but rather a "level playing field" on which my arguments for a PPA reading, and yours for a gnomic reading can be judged for their cogency, coherence, and supporting comparative examples.

WHAT MAKES A PPA, PART 2 (reply to your posts 11-13)

You complain in your post 13 that I have not responded to the bulk of your arguments in your posts 11 and 12. You will have to go back and specify which arguments you feel have not been responded to, because I don't see anything substantial that has not been dealt with. I could be wrong, of course. You also continue to claim that I was not fair on your first conclusion in your post 11, where I pointed out errors in how you assigned points to the various grammars for how limiting they were in their characterization of the modifying elements in PPAs, errors that skewed the results in the direction you prefer them to have. You gave Goodwin a 6, I said it should be a 2. In your post 12, you said it should be a 5. This dispute over scoring the grammars on the conclusions you wished to draw comes about from two distinct flaws in your handling of them: (1) ambiguity in the wording of your points, (2) lack of objective assessment of how grammars fit your devised scale. It is true that I was very brief in my critique, and that might have resulted in my point not being made. Allow me to go over it again more carefully.

In your post 11, you said:

"I assign 6 points if the grammar specifies that THE marker [of a PPA] is an adverb or phrase."

Note the limiting nature of this category. Not that an adverb or phrase is A marker, but THE marker of a PPA. Dana & Mantey specify an adverb, but not as THE marker, and by saying that an adverb is only "generally" associated with a PPA, leaves unclear how far down your score they would slip by what other sorts of modification they would recognize. So rather than speculate on that, I allowed them to stand in score 6. Note also that you could not say, and so avoided saying, ADVERBIAL phrase, though that is what you understood and want us to understand, because one of your four grammars assigned to this score (Greenlee) says "a specific phrase expressing the past aspect." Since not all phrases expressing past time are adverbial (e.g., "a fourteenth day"), Greenlee does not really fit this score either. If you stop to think about it, you will realize that even you cannot take his mention of a "phrase" in its narrow meaning here, since because he says such a phrase is "required," such an understanding of "phrase" would have Greenlee exclude simple adverbs. We'll get to the other two to whom you assign a score of 6 below.

"5 points if it so specifies [that THE marker of a PPA is an adverb or phrase] but allows for other types of temporal expressions."

After initially giving Goodwin a score of 6, you retreated to this score after I pointed out that Goodwin says that the PPA is formed when the present is "used with expressions denoting past time, especially PALAI." Thus he clearly "allows for other types of temporal expressions" (compare Goodwin's Grammar, 1892, sect. 1258: "The present with PALAI or any other expression of past time . . ."). But due to problems with your scale, his fit at this score is not exclusive, as I will show below. I allowed this score to Brooks/Winbery, to whom you had given a 6, assuming that "THE marker" was

overstating what you meant to claim, since they say "An adverb of time is often used . . . but a verb alone is sometimes sufficient." In your reply, you insisted that their one example of the latter is not in your opinion valid, and therefore, in effect, their description of the past-time indicator was to be edited to remove the reference to "a verb alone is sometimes sufficient." But the heading under which you were assigning scores was "Description of the Past-Time Indicator," not "Description . . . adjusted according to strength of examples." So your defense of your scoring of Brooks/Winbery is invalid. I said they could be given "at most" a score of 5. I will show below why I put it this way.

"4 points if it describes the marker as an adverbial expression."

This description actually steps back above your score of 5, because in the latter you accepted the broader language of "temporal expression," and here you use the more specific language of "adverbial expression." This confusion in your terminology is problematic for your scale. Notice that Brooks/Winbery's acceptance of cases without an adverbial expression puts them lower than this.

"2 points if it simply refers to the marker as an expression."

Notice that you skipped the score of 3. Note also that Goodwin says "expressions denoting past time" (not "adverbial expression," not "adverbs, but also . . .") of which he gives an example, PALAI (compare his Grammar: "PALAI or any other expression of past time"). So he "specifies" PALAI as an example of an "expression," not as an example of an adverb. That is why 2 is the appropriate score. Since Brooks/Winbery say "a verb alone is sometimes sufficient," they could conceivably slip down your scale even farther than this.

You were outraged that after showing how your assignment of a score of 6 to the above four grammars was inaccurate, I had added "And so forth, throughout your quantifying exercise." You said in your post 12:

"You go on to imply that my entire analysis is flawed."

It is flawed, as I more than implied by going on to show how arbitrary your point scales were in each of your categories of analysis, and how contrived was the correlation between unrelated points (breadth of definition vs, happenstance of discussing translation). But you continue:

"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 one of those 75 scores."

Impressive statistics, and they fit your claim that my criticism was a "tempest in a teapot," and merited no more than an "oops!" Well, as I have just shown, your accounting of how much error there was in your scoring of just the top score of the first point of 5 is wrong, and I could have criticized it even more. But you are right that I was

too quick for you to be informed, rather than just chastised, concerning the problematic nature of your scoring. So what did I mean by "and so forth"? Since I've covered your top four (that you scored 6), let's just continue down the scoring of this first point of analysis to see what I meant:

"5 points if it so specifies [that THE marker of a PPA is an adverb or phrase] but allows for other types of temporal expressions. 4 points if it describes the marker as an adverbial expression."

You assign a score of 5 to Wallace, Jannaris, and Fanning. Wallace says "usually has some sort of temporal indicator, such as an adverbial phrase." Here again, the adverbial phrase is not specified as THE marker of the PPA; it is mentioned as an example of "some sort of temporal indicator," which combined with the given example, makes the most generous scoring a 4; a case could be pressed for "some sort of temporal indicator" to be a 2 or a 0 considering its very broad wording. Jannaris says that the present "often stands with adverbial expressions denoting past time, such as PALAI." This is clearly, word-for-word, a score of 4. PALAI is given as an example of an "adverbial expression," and not in any limiting sense. Fanning seems to be correctly scored as a 5, Burton correctly as a 4.

"2 points if it simply refers to the marker as an expression."

BDF, Young, Smyth, and McKay are assigned this score correctly. Winer and Turner are scored at 0, as they must be.

So we can see that the "and so forth" had some substance behind it, which I refrained from detailing at first. All of your errors take the form of overscoring, rather than underscoring, and they all occur in assigning the highest two scores (those closest to your view). So there is a clear tendency in these errors, which is to skew the testimony of the grammars in such a way that your position appears more broadly supported than it actually is, and mine seems less supported than it actually is. Your original scoring had 7 out of 15 grammars in the two highest scores, compared to 8 of 15 in the lower three scores. A more accurate accounting (even allowing Greenlee's reference to a "phrase expressing the past time aspect" to be scored high) has 3 or 4 out of 15 grammars (depending on where Brooks/Winbery end up) in the top two scores, and 11 or 12 out of 15 in the lower three scores. So now we can see how the grammatical evidence actually breaks on this issue, and can see how the so-called "broad" definition of the PPA is by far the majority view of it among your set of grammars. Any "burden of proof," therefore, is on a "narrow" definition of the PPA modification, that is, yours.

I think I have already sufficiently commented on the happenstance nature of grammars commenting on translation, and effectively shown that there is no exclusive correlation between those that do and the "narrow" definition of the PPA.

In my next post, I will turn to your new postings.

Best wishes,
Jason B.

**JASON #18 – 10/22 – #15826:
JASON #18**

Rob,

Here I will reply to your post 16, which you indicated should be reviewed prior to post 15. In this post, you attempt to suggest that the flexibility of grammatical categories renders the distinction between the PPA and the gnomic present fluid enough to identify EIMI in John 8:58 as more likely a gnomic present than a PPA.

You begin by introducing one grammarian's overarching category of

"I. BROAD-BAND PRESENTS"

which contains both PPAs and gnomic presents, as well as other usages. You fail to explain, however, what Wallace means by "broad-band," and "narrow-band." I am sure I am not alone in needing to have this distinction explained, and compared to the categorizations of other grammarians. For instance, he groups together the PPA (519-20), the iterative present (520-21), the customary or general present (521-22), and the gnomic present (523-25), while separating as "narrow-band" the progressive or descriptive present (518-19). You think this is a mistake on his part, and that the latter should be grouped with the rest. Dana & Mantey agree with you, if Wallace's "broad-band" category is equivalent to their "regular uses" class. Since I have Dana & Mantey at my disposal, and I don't have Wallace, I will go along with your modification of Wallace's category in line with Dana & Mantey.

You say:

"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."

You have often criticized in this discussion the relative breadth of definition of the PPA in some grammarians compared to those whose view you prefer. So let me just note here how broadly you are casting the net around a wide variety of distinct uses of the present, many of which could not be accurately translated in the same way as one another.

You continue:

"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)."

But Acts 2:8 is cited by NONE of your grammars as a PPA, and has never been part of the pool of samples we have been considering. So I don't know who has suggested that it is a PPA, and Wallace's argument that it is not is well-grounded. So this is not a case of legitimate overlap of the PPA and the descriptive based in the sources we have agreed to use so far.

You continue:

"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)."

Yes, there is a degree of overlap of all these uses, particularly since they are all translatable into English using the present tense, and they all involve verbal action that is modified by general or repeated conditions, not by temporal indicators of specific past or future events.

You conclude:

"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."

You haven't effectively demonstrated that the PPA can be lumped together with these other uses of the Greek present. Just go back to your list of PPAs from your post 6 and try to start translating them as gnomics, etc. It can't be done without making nonsense of most of those sentences. It is only when the verse is speaking of God or Jesus that you think it should be read differently. Linguists would just look at this as bizarre, and I criticize it in my book. We also need to be clear on what you mean by "formally similar?" If you mean the verb has the same grammatical form, then of course the same grammatically present form can be used in distinct ways. If you just place the verbs side by side, you could never tell a gnomic from an iterative, from a progressive, from a PPA. You need to see the rest of the sentence and how it modifies the meaning and rendering of the verb. It seems you mean something more than the form taken by the verb, perhaps the "form" of the construction, of the syntax by which these usages are identified. If so, you will need to demonstrate that they have this same "form." In your post 7, you already offered a list of texts you considered "more closely parallel . . . than the PPA" to John 8:58, many of which were gnomic or customary or so forth; but I already reviewed

those and pointed out the differences between the latter and John 8:58, while pointing out that a couple of your examples WERE PPAs. Dana & Mantey stress that "the general significance of the context" enters into "the resultant import of the present tense" in terms of these different uses (page 181), and that immediate syntactical context is precisely what you are negating in your reading of John 8:58. But besides all this, you are not really advancing an argument to merely say there are formal similarities among these uses, because the issue is not what makes them similar, but what distinguishes them, that is, how we can tell a PPA from a gnomic present. That will decide the issue. Please also note that Dana & Mantey do not regard the static present as part of the same class of "regular uses" as the others in your list.

You continue:

"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."

You will need to demonstrate such overlap, and then show it applies to John 8:58. The latter verse fits PRECISELY the conditions of a PPA, in that it is temporally modified by another grammatical element of the sentence to extend its formal present tense into a semantic range that takes in the past. Do you dispute that EIMI is temporally modified in John 8:58? Think carefully before you answer, because it has serious consequences for your position. The usages you are comparing it to and saying it overlaps with are not temporally modified in the same way, because their modifying element refers to recurring action or continuous states. Abraham being born is quite obviously neither a recurring action or a continuous state.

You continue:

"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.

Then please acknowledge, which you have never done, that the LB and NW rendering of John 8:58 is a grammatically acceptable and justified translation of the verse. Once you acknowledge that, then the debate over translation is largely over, because as I have pointed out, you are really arguing for an interpretation, and your linguistic arguments fail to defend the traditional translation of the verse as either accurate with regard to the Greek or coherent as an English sentence. But once again I must challenge your assertion that the PPA must be defined "in the broadest sense" to include John 8:58. This is false. The broadest sense of the PPA would include sentences with NO temporal indicator at all, but read as PPAs because of the general literary context (such as Acts 26:31). John 8:58 has such a temporal indicator in the same sentence and in a relationship of complementarity to the verb, which is a closer relationship to the verb than that held by several of the adverbs or adverbial phrases in other PPA examples. I have already demonstrated that your assignment of the grammars to various degrees of

support for a "narrower" sense to the PPA is largely flawed. So EIMI in John 8:58 is a PPA in a widely accepted, average sense of the category.

You continue:

"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."

You then introduce the "other broad-band categories" which you think John 8:58 fits, namely:

"II. THE GNOMIC OR STATIC PRESENT"

First, the gnomic present. You say: "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)."

This is one of the worst characterizations of the gnomic present I have ever read, which raises the question why you are taking Wallace as your authority on this. Precisely those phrase you highlight -- i.e., the ones you want to use as the basis for your argument -- are poor conveyances of the sense of time in gnomic uses, as you yourself recognize when you say:

"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.)"

But even your correction is confusing because you distinguish the omnitemporal from the proverbial, which are the same thing. Your own confusion is seen also when you say:

"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)."

You are here committing the fallacy of postulating a distinct theological grammar, that the semantic significance of grammar and syntax is different in theological discourse than in non-theological discourse. This is the foundation of the circularity inherent in modern Christian reading of the Bible. It views the Bible as insufficient to convey its meaning in its chosen language of communication, which was not any sort of special theological grammar, but the regular and ordinary grammar of the Greek of the time. You show this

by returning to the confusing aspect of Wallace's language that you elsewhere correct, and accepting "timeless" as "eternal" when you have indicated that you know gnomic presents are not characterized as "timeless" in that sense. So you contradict yourself and so confuse the argument.

To better clarify things, let me pull Wallace's remarks apart (I am relying on your quotes, since I don't have Wallace):

"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.' "

You chose to emphasize the word "timeless" in the above quote. You should have highlighted "general," that is, a fact that applies in all cases. That's what the gnomic does. As Moule says (Idiom Book, 8): "Gnomic Present -- i.e., that used in . . . a maxim or generalization. This is equivalent to the English frequentative Present: 'a good tree [always] bears good fruit.'" Notice from Moule's example that neither good trees nor good fruit are timeless things, but every time there is a good tree, it bears good fruit. So this makes the gnomic very similar to the customary, as you have said, and nothing like what pertains in John 8:58. Going back to Wallace: "It does not state that something is happening, but that something does happen." Do you understand what this means? You want this to apply to Jesus in John 8:58. If it did, then Jesus' meaning would be not that he is currently in existence, but that whenever he does exist, it is before Abraham was born. Which I guess would mean that he is not in existence at the time he says it, because that's not before Abraham was born. Hey, there's one of your paradoxes! Or, more likely, just nonsense.

The next part of your quote from Wallace:

"The action or state continues without time limits."

Wallace has been careless here. In 'a good tree bears good fruit,' the action of bearing does not "continue without time limits," but rather recurs at distinct times, but every time.

"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...."

"At all timeS" plural, that is, every single distinct time, not continuously throughout time. You have misunderstood this. To continue with Wallace:

"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."

Because the examples he gives are limited to characterizations, that is, statements about the nature of the thing, they give a false impression about all gnomic statements. 'The wind blows' is a bad example because wind and blowing are the same thing. If you said

"The air blows," then you can see that this is a gnomic present and true, but not continuously true. Take a common poetic gnomicism: 'Roses are red, violets are blue.' This is true ALL the time, that is, whenever there are roses, they are red. Roses themselves are not timeless things, but whenever they occur it is in association with red coloring, and so it is part of their nature to be red. Going back to deity, it is a gnomic present to say "God knows what you need before you ask for it." But it is not a gnomic present to say "God knew me before I was born." Both of these sentences have "before" clauses. In the first case, the "before" clause refers to an action that occurs repeatedly, at any time, past, present, or future, thus making the action of the main verb repeated "omnitemporally," at each occurrence of the circumstance referred to in the "before" clause, and hence gnomic. In the second case, the "before" clause indicates a specific PAST event, and so the main verb is not extended over multiple, customary occasions, and hence is not gnomic.

Next, the static present. You cite Dana & Mantey on the 'static present,' although they do not consider the gnomic and static as within the same class of usage, and although you say:

"I think that two of the three examples Dana and Mantey give are misplaced. Still, the category is a valid one."

Amazing, two out of three examples are no good, in your opinion, yet you want to declare the category valid! That's some rock solid basis for an argument, Rob. Incidentally, I agree with you that the examples are misplaced.

"_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)."

You comment:

"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."

THEY do not consider this usage "formally similar or analogous to the PPA," YOU do. They put it in a completely different class, one in which the progressive character of the present tense is not prominent. You assume they assign what others consider a PPA to the 'static' category, and that is why you conclude what you do. But this turns out to be not true of two out of three examples, and the third is just a misunderstanding on their part (see below).

You say:

"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."

I can explain this for you. Dana & Mantey explicitly cite "Ye have been with me from the beginning" under the "present of duration" (PPA). Under the "static present" they do not indicate to which part of the verse they are referring; they simply say "See also: Jn.15:27." Now when we look at the verse, we see that there are TWO clauses. The aforementioned, which they explicitly identify as a PPA, and "you bear witness," which I think is evidently what they mean to refer to as a "static present." So it turns out that there is no contradiction in Dana & Mantey on this verse, they simply cite one part under the PPA and another part under the static present. However, I think this usage here is basically the same as the descriptive present.

You add:

"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)."

Here again, I think you are looking at a different clause than Dana & Mantey are. Based on how they define the static present, I would think they are referring to the first half of the verse: "The one who commits sin IS from the devil." As for the 'static' here, it is indistinguishable from the gnomic, in that it is not really a 'perpetual state,' but rather something that holds true in every case where there is a person who sins. So I really think their 'static' is a false category. The second clause in this verse is a PPA: "From the beginning the devil has been sinning." Notice how the temporal modification makes one formally present verb a PPA, and the absence of such a temporal modification makes the present a 'static' or gnomic. By Dana & Mantey's definition, you could not have a "static" verb if it was temporally modified, because then it would not be a perpetual state. That is why I think they are just wrong about 2 Peter 3:4; by separating it from the rest of the sentence they have skewed its meaning.

You say:

"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.

False. If 2 Peter 3:4 involved a gnomic (or "static") present, then it would be saying that all things have AND WILL remain the same from the beginning of creation. Because as a "timeless fact" it is ALWAYS TRUE. "All things [always] remain the same"(!).

So, as you can see, you have misunderstood in what sense gnomic presents are "timeless," and you have not even attempted to demonstrate any overlap whatsoever between gnomic presents and PPAs (or with John 8:58 for that matter). Gnomics are modified in such a way that the action or state of the verb applies generally, whenever the conditions or event described in the sentence occurs. PPAs are modified in such a way that the action or state of the verb persists from an indicated past time up to the present. As for "static" presents, you haven't even been looking at the right verbs Dana & Mantey identify as statics, so one can hardly give any credit to your attempt to associate them with gnomics or PPAs (an association with which Dana & Mantey do not agree); and again you make no attempt to show how they would work in John 8:58 without fracturing the syntax of the sentence.

best wishes,
Jason B.

**JASON #19 – 10/24 -- #15830:
JASON #19**

Rob,

In this post I will reply to your post 15. Here you go to considerable effort to prove something that is not in dispute and does not advance your position, namely, the precise construct involved in the PRIN clause of John 8:58.

In your book, you claimed that John 8:58 "does not quite belong" to the PPA "category of usage" (105). You gave as your reason for this claim your observation (which has nothing to do with the definition of the PPA, but is rather just an accident of your sample) that supposedly all other recognized PPAs in the NT involve a distinct beginning of the verbal action -- "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" (109-110) -- while there was no such beginning implied in John 8:58. Of course, this is just begging the question, since you assume what you claim to conclude. You postulate a beginning to the verbal action "whether specified or not" (that is, without anything in the original Greek referencing a beginning to the action) for other PPAs while arbitrarily ruling it out for John 8:58, which you can only do because it is not specified there. Such a circular argument is without merit. I pointed out in my post 1 that many of your other examples, like John 8:58, do not "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" (I cited Luke 2:48; Luke 15:29; John 5:6; John 14:9; 2 Corinthians 12:19; and 1 John 2:9 from the list of recognized PPAs you had offered in your book). I pointed out that the distinction between modifying the verb with a "from" or "until" clause or phrase, and modifying it with a "before" clause or phrase was not grammatically significant. No grammar has ever defined or distinguished the PPA by such an arbitrary distinction, for the simple reason that "before" clauses and phrases as much require a PPA rendering of the verb as "from" and "until" clauses and phrases to make sensible sentences. Having been refuted in your claim as it was expressed in your book, you now attempt to mount the same claim of a distinction based on identifying what sort of clause is involved in John 8:58. You state it as if being this sort of clause automatically rules out it being used to make a PPA. But this is a fallacious argument.

We can agree to call this construct an "infinitive of antecedent time" (referring to how the aorist functions within a "before" clause), of which you say:

"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)."

Of course, any "before" clause "indicates that the main verb expresses a state" or action "antecedent to the event that the infinitive denotes." No one is disputing that. What you said in your book is that the main verb is only a PPA when the modifying word, phrase, or clause indicates a time BEGINNING FROM WHICH the action of the main verb pertains. Since several of the examples you cited there, and have cited since, do not indicate a beginning of the action of the main verb, I pointed out that your claim was evidently false, and not a single grammar has ever delimited the PPA in that way. And no one has ever said an "infinitive of antecedent time" cannot be used to create a PPA. These are artificial and arbitrary distinctions of your own invention (you admitted in your book that they are "new") designed specifically to exclude John 8:58 from its proper reading as a PPA, and I have since shown how several other "before"-clause modified sentences are PPAs. I know you regarded this as a significant discovery and it's hard to let go of such things. But you must because it is indefensible.

You continue:

"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."

You don't need to argue it, because we have already agreed that many of the examples of this construct, that you supplied in your post 7, are gnomic, customary, descriptive, etc. So how does this advance your argument regarding John 8:58? If you mean this as an argument for identifying EIMI in John 8:58 as "gnomic" rather than a PPA, it is a fallacious one, as can be seen by making it explicit:

1. John 8:58 involves an infinitive of antecedent time.
2. Some sentences involving an infinitive of antecedent time contain gnomic, customary, or descriptive presents.
3. Ergo John 8:58 contains a gnomic, customary, or descriptive present. !!!!

And that's without even taking note of the fact that these various kinds of present usage are themselves distinct from one another in their meaning.

Anyway, you quote Young's definition of the "infinitive of antecedent time," the key part of which is: "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." You point out that Young mentions John 8:58 specifically as an example. You go on to provide statistics and a detailed list of occurrences. You then conclude:

"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.)"

Note your own words: "the denotative meaning of the main verb pertains to a time prior to that event or action" even when it is formally present. If the event or action of the aorist infinitive is itself a recurring action or state, then we are dealing with a gnomic, customary, or iterative main verb (procedurals come to mind as an example: "Bend your knees before you start your swing"). If the event or action of the aorist infinitive is an event of past time, then we have a PPA, because "the denotative meaning of the main verb pertains to a time prior to that event or action." There is simply no way around this, try as you might.

You have tried to contrast the PPA construct (as one where the modifying element marks the time FROM WHICH the action or state of the verb commences) to the Infinitive of antecedent time (where the modifying element marks the time BEFORE WHICH the action of the state of the verb occurs). I have shown that you claim that the PPA construct always indicates the beginning of the state or action is a false one. It is also invalid to attempt to contrast, as somehow mutually exclusive, a usage of the main verb (the PPA) and a form of dependent clause (the Infinitive of antecedent time). There is no basis to say that the two cannot appear together. Moreover, your understanding of the antecedent function of the Infinitive of antecedent time is flawed, because it ignores the difference between such clauses when they refer to customary or procedural or anticipated events, and when they refer to specific past events. This failure to distinguish the difference has resulted in some very bizarre renderings of some of your examples. Review from your many examples of the Infinitive of antecedent time the many cases where the main verb is imperfect or aorist. These are not gnomic or static constructions. These literally place the action of the main verb BEFORE the past event of the "before" clause. Now think through the implications of this if you really believe the "before" clause does precisely the same thing in John 8:58. It would confine Jesus' existence to before Abraham was born, which, since he is speaking long after that event, is a non-sequiter. Nor would your gnomic or customary examples work, unless their was a PROGRESSIVE character brought in by the use of the present tense which, as I have shown, works in different ways depending on whether the clause indicates a general, recurring circumstance of the main verb's action, or a specific, punctiliar event. In the latter case, when the specific event is future, you recognize the futurative modification of the main verb, don't you? So you must also recognize the preterative modification of the main verb when the event indicated in the clause is past.

You go on to give the same LXX passages you gave in your post 7, and on which I commented in my post 8 (Sept. 8) (helping us to get to that 400 pages I mentioned to Barry):

We agreed that Exodus 1:19 is an iterative (or customary) present.

We agreed that Job 8:12 is a customary present.

We agreed that Proverbs 18:13 is a gnomic present.

We agreed that Isaiah 46:10 is an iterative or customary present.

We agreed that Malachi 3:22 (4:5 Eng.) is a futuristic present.

We agreed that John 13:19 is a tendential present.

All of these different subcategories of present just bear out Dana & Mantey' remark that "The fundamental significance of the present tense is the idea of progress. . . the idea of present time is secondary in the force of the tense. . . The other elements entering into the resultant import of the present tense are the meaning of the verb itself and the general significance of the context." (181).

You had characterized 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.") as a "general present" in your post 7, and now call it "a general or descriptive present" (although you have never defined or cited a definition of the latter, and it is quite distinct from what you seem to mean by the former). I had pointed out in my post 8 that it is the same usage as we have been calling the "customary" or "iterative present," or one could even call it "gnomic" in that it is always true, in the sense that it is true in each and every case. The "before" clause does not refer to an event in past time, but a recurring event of every time "you ask him."

But you once again trot out Deut. 31:21 LXX (the quote of which I now for a second time complete for you): "...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 into the land I promised them on oath" and say: "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."

Your use of "already" shows that you are still stuck on the mistaken understanding of the verse given in your post # 7, where you had said:

"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."

As I already pointed out in my post 8, the "particular event of the past" is actually an event of the future. You have read the verse, but you haven't understood it at all. God is speaking BEFORE he has brought them into the land he promised, and he says explicitly that he "know(s) their wickedness . . . here this day." So the verb OIDA is a simple present, "descriptive" in Dana & Mantey's sense of simply describing the present state of affairs.

New in your post 15 is a series of procedural or didactic presents, using the imperative instead of the indicative of the present, which you subsume under the gnomic, but in any case, like all the rest of your examples here, have nothing to do with John 8:58:

Sirach 11:8: "Do not answer before you listen" (PRIN H AKOUSAI [aorist infinitive] MH APOKRINOY [present imperative]).

Sirach 14:13: "Do (POIEI, present imperative) good to friends before you die (PRIN SE TELEUTHSAI, aorist infinitive)."

Sirach 18:19: "Before you speak (PRIN H LALHSAI, aorist infinitive), learn (MANQANE, present imperative)."

Now notice what your sample has shown: a host of different applications of the Infinitive of antecedent time to different and distinct uses of the present form of the verb. The verb does not have the same significance in all of these cases, as you seem to imply. In some of these cases the verb means that something IS HAPPENING (descriptive), in some it means that something DOES HAPPEN (customary), in some it means something IS GOING TO HAPPEN (futuristic), in some it means something SHOULD HAPPEN (didactic/procedural). And this wide diversity exists even without considering the cases where something HAS BEEN HAPPENING (past progressive) which you set aside as "disputed" for no apparent reason. So what is evident here is that the Infinitive of antecedent time construction does not in itself determine the significance of the verb. That is, the mere aorist infinitive and mere "before" preposition are significant in establishing that the verbal action is antecedent, but are not sufficient in themselves to identify whether what the action is antecedent to is past, future, recurring, or continuous. The latter is determined by other contextual information, and depending on which it is, the meaning of the verb, and its appropriate rendering into English, changes. Your examples include future tense meanings of the verb, yet you exclude the possibility that it includes past tense meanings. It includes imperative (command) forms of the verb, yet you want to exclude past tense meanings. As I will show, there are four likely examples from the larger set of your examples of past progressive (PPA) uses with the Infinitive of antecedent time, as many as for any other usage with the present tense form of the verb.

You conclude:

"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."

So you have demonstrated precisely what? Since the category "broad-band present" according to Wallace's terminology includes PPAs, where have you gotten? You have shown that the Infinitive of antecedent time is used with gnomic, customary, and descriptive presents, which are all "broad-band" or "regular uses," as well as with tendential or futuristic use, which is one of the "special uses" according to Dana & Mantey. So you have proven that the Infinitive of antecedent time construct can be used with multiple implications for the main verb. Fine. And John 8:58 is one of those multiple uses, with a PPA, which is also a "broad-band" or "regular use," so not even as much of a categorical reach as the futuristic uses you acknowledge. Nothing here to lead to the conclusion that John 8:58 must fit the gnomic category. You might just as well argue that it must fit the customary category. Either claim is erroneous because it ignores the specifics of the modifying clause, which in the case of the two futuristic uses, shifts the time reference of the main verb, just as it does in John 8:58. Plus, we can adjust your statistics, and make them less tendentious, if we bring in what you for some inexplicable reason call "disputed" examples of the Infinitive of Antecedent Time. You do not

explain how they might be disputed, nor how that might be relevant to the issues we are trying to resolve. In any case, they are familiar examples from your post 7: Proverbs 8:23-25; Jeremiah 1:5; and Psalm 90.2.

A. Proverbs 8:23-25

You have been translating this as:

"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."

You had said in your post 7: "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 the writing, we may eliminate the 'punctiliar' and descriptive presents," etc. You left as the only two possibilities the "historical present" and the "eternal present." I responded in my post 8 that you had ruled out the PPA illegitimately. In our definitions of the PPA we say that the progressive action of the verb continues up to the time of the statement. That's a definition we have formulated based on observing how the Greek works. The temporal clauses that modify the verb in this passage refer to events of the past, and by being "before" clauses, they place the action of the main verb antecedent to the events to which they refer. Yet the verb remains in the present tense. These are the classic, defining conditions of the PPA. So we need to be instructed by the Greek, rather than trying to instruct it. The choice of the present form in such a "paradoxical" relation to its temporal modifiers must tell us something. I proposed in my post 8 that "The reason why the present is used as a PPA here is that the existence of the speaker is ongoing." I went on to say that I had seen this "special existential/identity function of the PPA before." You later replied that since I had excluded your proposition of an "eternal present" on the grounds that this supposed usage of the present is completely unknown to all Greek grammars, I had no more right to invoke an "existential/identity function" that was equally unmentioned in the grammars. You now say:

"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."

Let's see if I am really as tied up as you seem to think. I will use one of your favorite grammars to make the case that you think I cannot make. Under the rubric of Regular Uses of the Present (which they term "a single class" of usage), Dana & Mantey list (1) The Progressive Present, (2) The Customary Present, (3) The Iterative Present (pages 182-184). They distinguish these from the "special uses" of the present which are "not of so frequent occurrence as the regular uses." These include the aoristic present, futuristic

present, historical present, tendential present, and static present (pages 184-186). You have tried to associate the static present with the gnomic (subsumed by D & M under the customary) and customary present. Dana & Mantey would clearly disagree with that attempt, since they consider it a "special use" and the customary/gnomic a "regular use." The first category of the regular use class is the Progressive Present, of which they say: "It signifies action in progress, or state in persistence . . . In the indicative it is related to present time, and because of possible varieties in this relation to present time it may denote three points of view" (page 182). So, a single "progressive" category of use, distinct from the customary/gnomic and iterative, that may take on three aspects. The first of these is "a sense of description, to indicate that which is now going on" (page 182), and the third is the "present of duration" (page 183), which you and I have both recognized to be by Dana & Mantey's term for the PPA. Oh, by the way, please note that they say it is "generally associated with an adverb of time," but the example they quote (John 15:27) does not contain an adverb, but an adverbial phrase. Therefore we can once again see the danger of taking the description of the grammars as limiting. Here they say adverb, but they evidently don't mean ONLY an adverb, because they quote a sentence that does not contain an adverb, but an adverbial phrase. They go on to cite Lk. 13:7, which also contains an adverbial phrase, not an adverb. But now, back to my main point. The second of the three subcategories of the progressive present is the use "to denote the continuation of existing results," which they explain as "it refers to a fact which has come to be in the past, but is emphasized as a present reality" and "It . . . stresses the continuance of results through present time in a way which the perfect would not do, for the perfect stresses existence of results but not their continuance" (page 182). Sound familiar? Let's look closer at this usage which is so close to the PPA as to be listed with it as the single category of the progressive present (similarly handled in BDF). Dana & Mantey cite three examples.

One is 1 Cor. 11:18 "I hear (AKOUW 1st sing. present act. ind.) that there are divisions among you." One interesting thing about this quote is that it is one of the rare examples of the English idiom similar to the Greek, in that 'I hear' (formally a present) is not technically correct for the temporal significance of the statement. We would more precisely say "I have heard that there are divisions among you." In any case, the meaning is the same. The speaker is not saying that he is hearing this news at the same time he is speaking. He is saying that he has heard in the past of these divisions, and the result of that hearing continues with him up to the time of speaking of it. Another example they cite is Galatians 1:6 "I marvel (QAUMAZW 1st sing. present act. ind.) that you are separated (METATIQUESQE 2nd pl. present pass. ind.) so quickly from the one who called you." Now the first verb is a simple present or descriptive present, and it is evidently the second verb to which Dana & Mantey refer as a present of existing result. Here, too, the people spoken to are not in the process of separating as Paul writes, but rather have separated and continue to exist in the state brought about by that separation. The third example they cite is Luke 15:27 "Your brother has come (hHKEI 3rd sing. Present ind.) and your father has killed (ETHUSEN 3rd sing. aorist ind.) the fattened calf, because he has received him back (APELABEN 3rd sing. aorist ind.) in good health." Note that three things are described as having happened: the coming of the brother, the killing of the calf, and the reception of the brother. Two of these actions are signified

using an aorist form of the verb, because they are punctiliar events: the calf was killed at a particular moment, and the father received his son back at a particular moment. Well, didn't this same son, the brother of the person being spoken to, 'come' at a particular moment? Of course he did. But the present tense is used of this coming because the act of coming continues in the state of being come.

Now let's turn back to Proverbs 8:23-25. God is said to perform two actions with respect to Wisdom; it is said that he 'established' (EQEMELIWSEN 3rd sing. aorist act. ind.) her and that he 'begat' (GENNAi 3rd sing. present act. ind.) her. As in the case of Luke 15:27, evidently one action is seen as punctiliar and complete in the past, and the other as having a continuation of existing result. This accounts for the use of the present form of the verb here. Recall how closely Dana & Mantey associate the present of continuation of existing results with the PPA. They are subcategories of the same progressive present usage. Just as you have listed the gnomic and customary and iterative presents (along with the static) as more-or-less nuances of the same usage, so I would maintain that the CER and the PPA were basically the same usage to the Greeks. In all of the cited examples of the CER, translating them exactly as we render the PPA is perfectly satisfactory in conveying the sense, and in fact is the most communicative way to get that sense across to the English reader, containing the full meaning of what is being expressed. I think my explanation of this passage of Proverbs is much more natural and contextual, and does not require any special pleading for a special sense beyond the normal use of the language that only applies in theological discourse. As I said, we might puzzle over why the Greek writers saw one sort of past action as continuing up to the present and another as not in the same way, when WE think they either both continue, or not. But the fact remains that their choices indicate the distinctions that made sense to them, and we construct our grammars by observing what they did in practice, not by insisting on a consistent following of the rules we have formulated on the basis of partial observations we have been able to make. If I have the time, I will try to find some non-biblical uses of GENNAW that help us to see how consistent this understanding of the verb was. But what we can be sure of already is that this is NOT a gnomic or customary present, is much closer to the PPA, and so joins the company of John 8:58 as an example of the use of the Infinitive of antecedent time for other than general, gnomic, or customary verbal action.

B. Jeremiah 1:5

In your post 15 you fault me for saying the following in my 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.">>

The latter was based on the following quote from you:

"The only ones ever classified as a PPA, to my knowledge, are Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:5."

And about this you say:

"I must say that I am at a loss to understand how you came to misconstrue me in this way," that is, by my saying "usually." Guilty. I did say "usually." I did not say that you said "usually" (notice the use of quotation marks). So I am guilty of heightening the point by using "usually." You are guilty of claiming that "not one of these eleven texts is a PPA," which is falsely stated as an established fact when, in fact, you had the "knowledge" that two of the eleven were in fact classified as PPAs. So your assertion than "none of these eleven" is a PPA is simply false.

In my post #8, I had said:

<< 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." >>

On which you commented:

"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."

I must say, Rob, that I am at a loss to understand how you came to misconstrue me in this way. There are two sentences in the above quote. In the first, I say that the verse is a PPA and is usually translated that way. In the second, I state how I think it should be translated. I never said that it was usually translated the way I think it "should" be translated. I said it is "usually" translated as a PPA, and it "should" be translated as indicated, which is my own translation that best brings out, in my opinion, the distinctive PPA force of the verb. From now on I will refer to you as Mr. Pot and to myself as Mr. Kettle.

But on this, we are going to have to give each other a pass, because we both make the same slip: we both talk of English Bibles translating the Greek of Jeremiah 1:5, when of course they translate the Hebrew. So my point was wrongly made. It should have been that the original Hebrew of Jeremiah 1:5 is universally understood to have a past aspect (as your list of English translations effectively shows), and the translators of the LXX, whom we must assume were knowledgeable of the underlying Hebrew and would render it accurately into Greek, used the PPA construct to convey this past aspect to their readers. We do know that among your selected grammars, Winer considers this verse a PPA, and that reading of it is more natural and closer to how English Bibles translate the Hebrew, as you well demonstrate by quoting a long list of them, NONE of which detects 'timelessness' as being indicated in this verse. You would have to postulate a deliberate change in the meaning introduced by the Greek translators, which I really takes us too far down the road of special pleading.

You continue to dispute my criticism of your omission of Winer from the fourth point of your post 6. There you claimed that, "The only grammars that evidently include whole clauses are BDF and McKay (and only because they count John 8:58 as a PPA)." I pointed out that other grammars include clausally-modified PPAs, so you were in error here. Among the others was Winer, who cites Psalm 90:2 and Jeremiah 1:15 as PPAs

comparable to John 8:58. Since your statement of your fourth conclusion in your post 6 referred to "these grammars," and all references up to that point of your post were to the complete set of 15 grammars, your claim as stated was false. You subsequently clarified that you meant to refer only to those grammars "that actually say anything at all about a past-time." But this shifts the statistics behind your conclusion, and the false impression you gave of BDF and McKay as deviant from the norm (BDF of all grammars!). But you are right that thinking you "deliberately" ignored Winer was an unjustified conclusion on my part. It appears that you made an extra step of exclusion in your head that you failed to inform your readers of. I think this extra step of exclusion is a tendentious one, and that your fourth conclusion needs to be reworked from scratch, because it cannot stand as stated.

You go on to comment and expand on my characterization of the content of Jeremiah 1:5. We really have no disagreement on interpreting the theological import of the verse. Our difference is that I see this interpretation as an extrapolation, a thinking-out of the implications of what the verse says, that is probable, if not provable. You suggest that the words of the verse itself literally state this theological import. I think a close analysis of what the verse does and does not explicitly say supports my view of the matter, and that you are committing eisegesis.

You conclude:

"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."

"Before he is born" is not a "temporally unbounded" expression -- as you yourself are arguing in this post, it is a marker of antecedence, which by definition marks a temporal boundary. You have been repeating this and emphasizing this but do not seem to follow its consequences. An antecedent clause places the action or state of the verb before the event indicated in the clause. Hence all those examples you listed where the main verb is an aorist place the action literally and exclusively in the time prior to the event in the modifying clause. Now why, in some cases, is a present used with a marker of antecedence? It would seem to present a temporal conflict. Well, it turns out that this is an idiomatic use of the present to mark an action or state that is durative from before the event of the dependent clause up to the present. I think the problem you may be having is that the limited set of examples you are looking at abound in references to God and Christ, and this coincidence makes you conclude a theological significance to the usage. This is what I meant when I kept on you about how the content, the theological meaning that has been traditionally extrapolated from these examples, makes you read the grammatical elements in ways they would not normally be taken. I wasn't very clear in making that point, and it seems I was taken to be talking about the lexical content of the words in the Greek sentence, so that's my fault, and you were right to clarify that such lexical content is necessarily taken into consideration in determining the rendering of verbal significance and so forth, with which I certainly do (and always did) agree. One way to help with this problem is to supply more non-Biblical examples so that we can see how the grammar and syntax works in ordinary, non-theological passages.

Unfortunately, the kinds of tools at my disposal to find such example are not as effective as the very rich body of biblical reference resources. But I will keep at it as time permits.

This last point bring me to:

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

Here again I was anxious to point out the tendentiousness of your reading of the verse, how I felt you were reading in assumptions (eisegesis) rather than reading the passage in its own terms (exegesis). I made some mistakes in trying to point this out. I think you referred to one as "embarrassing," which I accept despite its presumptuousness. On your translation:

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

I had said that your translation of the third line above was "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 remark that there is "nothing at all" in the Greek behind your "even" was simply wrong, and I retract it. KAI can indeed be translated "even" sometimes. Although KAI much more is just "and," I far overstated my objection to "even." You see a progression in the verse, and construct it line by line to heighten this reading. But the three lines are not grammatically in series. The first two clauses are governed by the PRO TOU, and the KAI at the beginning of the second clause joins it to the first in its dependence on the PRO TOU. The third line is a phrase governed by APO TOU, and so distinguished from the first two lines. The KAI at the beginning of this third line is not in series with the KAI at the beginning of the second line. Now your "even" is apparently used here because you take the two KAIs to be in series, and "even" is a summative conjunction to end a series. But this is not a series. For it to be a series, you would have to drop the APO TOU, and make the final phrase governed by the same PRO TOU as the first two clauses. Then you could have something like "from all eternity" I suppose. But that is not how the sentence works. I maintain that the first two joined clauses represent a "before" statement, that is, an Infinitive of antecedent time construction that marks the event(s) before which God existed, and that the third line, the APO TOU phrase, represents a marker of durative time "and from age to age" of God's continued existence since "before . . ." So this verse is more explicit in its modifying elements than we see in other PPAs with "before" clauses, in which the "since" element is implicit in the modifier; here it is made explicit. I had pointed out this difference in my previous remarks on this passage, among which you quote back to me here:

<< 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. >>

To which you reply:

"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."

Rob, this is just not an acceptable way to speak. You cannot in English use a present tense to indicate states or actions before other past events. You are defending a non-sequiter.

You continue:

"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."

The present form of the verb EI used only in conjunction with the two temporal clauses referencing specific events of past time means, and can only mean existence "since before" up to the present. It does not in itself mean "at all times." I agree that the verse is meant to contrast God's existence to the more limited temporal existence of the cosmos. Where we keep having a conflict is the difference between what the sentence SAYS and what it IMPLIES. By definition, what a sentence implies is not explicitly said. The third line, as I have said, makes more explicit the durative aspect of the verb than we see in other examples of PPA verbs with "before" clauses alone, and heightens the point the writer is making. But your resort to "existence at all times" is rooted in your misunderstanding of the gnomic or customary present, which I have already explained does not refer in itself to eternity, but only that something is the case whenever and wherever the specified circumstance occurs. Your interpretation cannot be read into the grammatical forms, but must be read out of them, which you can do. Why is this not satisfactory to you?

You conclude:

"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."

Lo and behold, suddenly the PPA is NOT a broad-band use of the verb! Wallace doesn't say that. Dana & Mantey don't say that. So how did that happen? This is another one of those over-eager leaps of yours that can be mistaken for trying to get away with something. So let me point out the leap of argument here of which you apparently are unaware: You have not argued that the PPA is not a broad-band use. So this contrastive

conclusion is erroneous. Nor have you been able to construct a coherent English sentences by taking the verb as gnomic/static. Nor have you justified your conflation of the gnomic and static. So it is all a house of cards. On the other hand, I have shown in this example as in the two before it that they are all PPAs or indistinguishably close to PPAs in their construction and meaning. This leads us to revisit your statistics:

"Of these 11 occurrences of the infinitive of antecedent time construction,"

Correct now to 15, including the three "disputed" passages, for which you never explained why you considered them disputed, plus John 8:58.

"in 9 instances the main or controlling present-tense verb is a broad-band present."

Correct to 13, with the PPA of course being included among "broad-band presents" as you have defined them.

"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."

And 4 are PPAs, thus MAKING THE PPA USE OF THE INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME AS COMMON IN YOUR SAMPLE AS ANY OTHER USAGE.

You then review Testament of Job 2:1 and Menander, *_Dyscolos_* 615-16. I don't see anything to add to our discussion of the former. On the latter ("For assuredly I have long [PALAI] been [EIMI] your friend since before [PRIN] I saw [IDEIN] you."), your argument is:

"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."

This is a misstatement on your part. We *know* that the PRIN clause is a marker of the PPA to the same degree we *know* that PALAI is. You cite Goodwin, Smyth, and Burton for PALAI. I can cite BDF, McKay, and Winer for the PRIN clause. So this argument is erroneous.

You continue:

"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)."

You have not answered my point. I said that if you remove PALAI from the sentence, it is still necessarily a PPA. Please tell me how you would translate the sentence without the PALAI, with only the PRIN clause. I cannot conceive of a translation that does not shift the significance of the main verb due to the complementary function of the clause. You are quite correct that PALAI can get the credit for the shift as much as the PRIN clause does. This is a redundancy in the sentence, and the syntax of the sentence can be analyzed either with PALAI as a complement to the main verb and the clause an adjunct, or vice versa. There is no definitive way to distinguish which has priority here, as you assert when you say:

"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!)."

This would be valid IF priority in order within a sentence equaled dominance in control of the sentence, which is not true of Greek. Besides, it would still not answer my question: how is the sentence NOT a PPA without PALAI?

In your concluding remarks, you state:

"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." This has never been in dispute. The challenge for you is not to lock in the action of main verb antecedent to the event of the aorist infinitive, but to break it out. If it is locked in, then when the event of the aorist infinitive is in the past, then the main verb is a past tense, too. But we are not concerned with those cases; we are concerned only with when the main verb is a present tense. When it is, we have either (1) the aorist infinitive indicating a general, continuing, customary, or iterative occurrence, in which case the main verb is gnomic or customary or iterative, or (2) the aorist infinitive indicates a specific event of time, in which case the main verb is past progressive or futurative. Since you have never paid attention to that distinction within the aorist infinitive clause, your argument in without merit.

On Ps. 89:2, Prov. 8:25, and Jer. 1:5a, you say:

"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)."

I have shown why this is not true. Nor, for that matter, did you ever justify the reading you give of these verses as fitting the description of these categories.

You continue:

"In each text, the present tense expresses a state that *is* antecedent to a past event."

Since you have argued that the aorist infinitive limits the time of the main verb to before the event of the infinitive, you have quite simply argued away the continuing action of the verb after that event. It's a good thing your argument is an invalid one. The use of the present is what unlocks the action of the verb from mere antecedence, and gives it continuation to the present. If you had your way, we would be forced to use a simple past tense: was antecedent to a past event.

You add:

"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."

That's because the implicit "since" only pertains when you have both a past event in your aorist infinitive clause and a present tense main verb. None of the NT examples other than John 8:58 have this combination of features. But Psalm 90.2 and Jeremiah 1:5 from the OT do, and the rendering "since before" is needed to convey both antecedence and continuation in both instances, unless the main verb is rendered as a simple past, which would be incorrect.

Already in my posts 8 and 9 I addressed this sample of passages you regard as sharing a feature with John 8:58 (the kind of PRIN clause used). In my post 9, I pointed out that your sample of "closer parallels" were closer on the type of modifying clause used, but failed to distinguish between those cases where the modification involved the past from those where it involved present, customary, repeated, continuous, or future events. John 8:58 is closest to those whose modifying clause involve a past event, and all of these are PPAs. Please review the definitions of the PPA, which refer generally to various kinds of TEMPORAL MODIFICATION as the key to the verbal meaning, a modification that is never said to exclude the Infinitive of antecedent time (and which, in fact, several grammars explicitly cite in citing John 8:58). Then review the discussions of the Infinitive of antecedent time and see if they EVER rule out its use to form a PPA. You have simply drawn your line of distinction in the wrong place. That this particular infinitive construction CAN be used in non-PPA sentences in no way LIMITS its use to non-PPA sentences.

You have never made a case why the type of modifying clause should be the most important defining feature of John 8:58. In fact, as part of this last series of posts, you have continued to argue that the clause has NOTHING TO DO with the main verb, that the latter is a "predicate absolute." You can't have it both ways. Either you want to argue that EIMI is a predicate absolute, or you want to argue that the PRIN clause is the most important feature that determines the meaning of the verb. Imagine if one of the presidential candidates, in the same debate, argued that "We definitely need to raise taxes" and "We definitely need to lower taxes." Similarly, in my post 10 I pointed out how you attempted to defend yourself from criticism of your conclusions by saying you

never claimed that a PPA could not be formed by an adverbial clause, while at the same time arguing that there were no examples of them, that any examples were "alleged" and were to be rejected for one reason or another. I said it had to be one or the other: either there were clausally-formed PPAs or there weren't. In the first case, we could move on to other matters, in the second you must take your lumps for a position that is wrong. I asked you to please clarify which position you are taking. You have not directly answered that question in the month since it was posed.

You have simply not constructed a coherent position on John 8:58. Instead, you have lined up a series of contradictory arguments in order to defend the traditional translation by any possible means. I suspect you don't realize it. But in this series of replies, I am showing you that it is the case. When I have completed these replies, I think you will see that you have three choices: (1) Create a coherent position that takes a consistent position on the relation of the parts of the sentence to one another and stick with it, come what may, (2) Concede defeat on the translation (which, as I have repeatedly pointed out, does not mean conceding defeat on interpretation), (3) Deal with the fact that you are indeed one of "those" apologists, who defends a position regardless of the facts due to the strength of one's convictions. You have strenuously disavowed the latter option, and I have every to take your feelings on that matter seriously. Therefore, you will need at the very least to abandon the mutually exclusive arguments you have been attempting, although I am in no position to suggest which one you might choose to stick with, since each ultimately fails.

Best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #20 – 10/25 – #15832:
JASON #20

Rob, in this post I am responding to your post 17. You begin by discussing

"I. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO CLAUSES AND VERBS"

You say:

"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."

The contrast is a semantic one in the choice of verbs, which I granted you as a point of interpretation of the verse. How you are using 'contrast' here to make a different point is unclear to me. You then review the three passages from the OT that I have agreed are the most closely parallel in structure and sense to John 8:58. So thank you for finally setting aside all of those gnomic, customary, tendential, didactic, and other forms as not germane:

"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).

And conclude:

"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."

By contrast you seem to mean simply that one thing happens 'before' another, and so there is a contrast between that which exists prior and that which exists later. I fail to see any significance of kind in this observation.

You say:

"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."

Your present-tense translations of these verbs beg the question. You are literally saying that what is significant here is the very form of translation you adopt in line with your own preformed conclusions.

You say:

"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? . . .")

I find your resort to 'paradox' puzzling. A paradox is something that on its face is an impossibility: "I am my father's father." Now I suppose you mean that Jesus claims to be older than one of his own ancestors, and in that sense I can see what you mean by paradox. But what are we talking about here, a paradox of interpretation or a paradox of translation? Is there anything 'paradoxical' about the Greek of John 8:58? No, it's a perfectly ordinary Greek sentence.

Let me demonstrate this by a permutation of it:

"John Wayne said, 'I have been in existence since before Kevin Costner was born.'"

Okay, now, as a sentence in its own right, there is nothing paradoxical here. The speaker claims to be older than someone else. Add context, and we could quickly calculate how old John would have to be to be older than Kevin. We might have at our disposal, then, some means to assess the validity of the claim. Then suppose we had this permutation:

"John Wayne said, 'I have been in existence since before George Washington was born.'"

Leaving aside the possibility that he is speaking in character, we have seen a definite heightening of the claim. But this is not paradox. If we have reason not to discount the claim, we would be forced to conclude that John Wayne is supernaturally old. We may even find reason to interpret his remark as a claim to be eternal. We don't have to change his wording at all to make that interpretation, since he did not specify just how much older than George he is.

You continue:

"How can God "beget" wisdom before the beginning?"

I think you have made a mistake here. The passage says: "He established me in the beginning, before the age," not "before the beginning" and so not paradox. God can certainly establish, and beget, Wisdom "before the age."

Anyway, what is so significant in your argument of something being antecedent to something else?

You say:

"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."

First, as I have said, the passage does not say that God begets Wisdom before the beginning, so there is no paradox. Wisdom says she was begotten first, before at least some of the most basic world construction and "the age." This is part of portraying her as the instrument and means of God's subsequent creative acts. In short, God creates with Wisdom, he creates wisely. Second, the "contrast" is simply the distinct verbal forms in their different functions within the sentence, the aorist infinitive in a dependent clause, and the present indicative as the main verb. This is the same formal "contrast" found in all of the Infinitive of antecedent time constructions, and similar in kind to a dozen other constructions of complex sentence in Greek. Third, as I have already explained, the aorist infinitives are a standard part of clausally modified PPAs, and they all occur within "before" dependent clauses. The main clause is thus "he has begotten me." For it to be read as "begets," the "before" clauses would have to be customary actions, allowing the main verb to also be gnomic/customary. If they are read as punctiliar past actions, this determines the main verb as a PPA.

You say:

"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*."

But you maintain that 'to be begotten' in Proverbs 8 is also to be seen as a verb of this kind, to be translated 'transtemporally' as a present. So which is it? Do the four examples hang together or hang separately?

You say:

"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)."

Rob, you are talking interpretation here, not translation. You are not advancing a point on the translational issues. One thing is spoken of in terms of its coming into existence, the other is spoken of in terms of its ongoing existence. No one is disputing that and it doesn't get you anywhere. That Jesus wanted to stress his immediate continuing presence before his audience fits the literary context of the gospel in which Jesus contrasts the living favorably with the dead. You can, as I have said all along, extrapolate some interpretive significance from how he speaks here, but that doesn't preclude other interpretations and it certainly doesn't force an ungrammatical translation.

You say:

"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. "

You have once again contrived a wholly meaningless and meritless subjective distinction of your own between 'contrast' and 'giving a context in which the meaning is clearer.' The temporal clause in John 8:58 clearly does the latter. Jesus is not saying to his audience 'Behold, I exist!' This is really where your argument is tending. He is saying he exists in a specific temporal relation to Abraham. Do you deny that? I will show later how your mistaken notion of EGW EIMI as a 'predicate absolute' really messes you up.

You say:

"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)."

Precisely. Note how in each case the full meaning of the statement is not "I am serving you" or "I am with you" or "You are thinking" or "You know the sacred writings" or "The devil is sinning." In each case, the temporal modification provides the complete significance of the verb, which is in the duration of the action or state, not the mere facticity of action or state. This is precisely the case with John 8:58, where it is not the existence of Jesus on the day of his remark that is significant, but the duration of that existence over supernaturally long time. Don't you agree?

You add:

"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."

Again, are you talking translation or interpretation? There is absolutely no difference in degree of grammatical contrast between the latter two "before" constructions and the ones from your pet four examples. To name and to see are both punctiliar acts, and to be is an existential state -- same degree of contrast as that between coming to be at one point of time and being as an existential state.

You say:

"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."

As I have already pointed out, even without the PALAI, the sentence would still be a PPA. Please demonstrate otherwise or concede the point.

You say:

"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.*"

To repeat yet again, these translations are all tendentious, and really non-sequiters. The main verbs could only be rendered in a gnomic/static/customary present if the modifying temporal clauses also referred to gnomic/static/ customary conditions. But they do not. The conditions are all specific events of past time; this rules out the gnomic, static, or customary categories of use altogether. Moreover, you are committing the fallacy of postulating the existence of theological grammar, distinct rules of grammar that apply only in theological discourse. That is special pleading and meritless.

Your second topic in your post 17 is:

"II. EIMI IN JOHN 8:58 AS `ABSOLUTE`"

In my post 1 I already criticized your claim that EIMI in John 8:58 is a "predicate absolute" – a claim you do not support by argument in your book, other than to cite A. T. Robertson's rather cryptic remark on the matter, which as an appeal to authority is not sufficient. You say that John 8:58 "does not have the usual adverbial expression denoting the duration of the verb" (111), but as I pointed out in my post 1, and again here, this notion of yours that PPAs only involve expressions that limit the duration by referencing a specific beginning is baseless: the grammars do not support it and even your own examples do not support it. I went on in my post 1 to question the superficial invocation in your book of supposed "absolute" uses of EGW EIMI by Jesus in the Gospel of John; there is not a single clear-cut case of a true absolute use of the verb involved in these other verses. Some sort of predicate complements is typically implicit. In John 8:58 there is an explicit adverbial complement, and none of your "absolute" parallels involve an adverb, adverbial phrase, or adverbial clause, so they are not close parallels at all since none involve a temporal modification of the verb, and so are true present tense uses, whereas John 8:58 is so modified and so is properly rendered as a PPA.

Now in your post 17 you cite some selected figures who call the main clause of John 8:58 "absolute." Rob, citing authority is not making an argument. You can cite authorities from now to doomsday, but you can't make a non-absolute construction absolute. Never mind that many of the people you cite are as "unknown" as you say I am (Thatcher? Lincoln?), and all of a particular theological persuasion and interpretive bent when it comes to the "I am" expressions in John. Brown, Harner, and Ball all buy into the great "I AM" nonsense (that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like "Hi, it's me," and "I'm the one you're looking for"), and this dictates their supposedly grammatical analysis. Never mind that the universities you invoke as their home are all religious institutions. Never mind that each seems to mean something slightly different by `absolute' (for those who even use this expression) and, as we shall see, use it in a way probably irrelevant to our question. The broader point is that `bias' is a community in which accumulated ideas carry forward without question, and control even what one sees on the page in front of them.

You next go on to seek an appropriate definition for "absolute" used in English-language discussions of grammar, since you feel I need to be educated on what an "absolute" is:

"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.*"

On which you comment:

"Clearly, the applicable definition here is (b), according to which a verb is "absolute" if it is a transitive verb with no object expressed."

Pardon me!? The be-verb is transitive? You repeat this embarrassing error:

"*_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)."*

On which you comment:

"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."*

Thanks for the lesson, but obviously I am not the one in need of basic grammatical education here. Let me return the favor by quoting Mario Pei & Frank Gaynor, *A Dictionary of Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), page 219: "transitive verb: A verb expressing an action which does not end with or is not confined to the agent; transitive verbs are capable of governing a direct object." A be-verb is the quintessential intransitive verb. So much for that line of argument.

But do note definition (a) in the American Heritage dictionary: "Syntactically isolated": the main clause of John 8:58 is not syntactically isolated from the rest of the sentence. In the example from the dictionary you can clearly see that the dependent clause is an adjunct, a "by the way" remark that is not necessary to complete the verbal meaning of "the game began." This is certainly not the case with John 8:58, as I will show once again below.

You go on to say:

"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.).**

Precisely. You have done some good detective work here. You have ferreted out the way in which Thatcher, Lincoln, Brown, Harner, Ball, et al. mean that EIMI in John 8:58 lacks a "predicate." They mean it is to be distinguished from those cases where EIMI is

accompanied by a predicate noun or adjective. This has nothing to do with the verbal complement construction of the PRIN clause, as yourself have just said. So this whole line of argument has been pointless, hasn't it? So now, thanks to your good detective work, I must admit to a mistake since, as you point out, I had said that EGW EIMI was not "in any sense" a predicate absolute. You are correct that that was hyperbole. I should have said "in any sense relevant to the issues we are debating," since obviously we agree that it does not involve a predicate noun or adjective. So feel free to make any ground you can in your argument by celebrating my free admission that the main clause of John 8:58 does not contain a predicate noun or adjective. It contributes nothing to our discussion.

You now come to the core issue of your post:

"C. Is PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI a "Complement" to EIMI?"

You say:

"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)."

You had earlier quoted from my post #4 the following:

<< 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. >>

And you had asked me to clarify whether what I was saying here was meant to be about the English sentence or the Greek, to which I responded that since I was obviously commenting on the acceptable English form of the sentence. You go on this post 17 to acknowledge that:

"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."

Well, when will you? Because our debate is on both what the Greek means and how that meaning is best conveyed in grammatically acceptable English. In your very first post, you expressed dissatisfaction with my characterization of the traditional translation of John 8:58 as "fractured syntax." I responded in my post 4 to justify this characterization, part of which you quote here. So I'm still waiting for you to address that argument or concede the point, as you ALMOST do here. But you say you want to make an argument now about the Greek, not the English.

You say:

"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."

This combination of your and my remarks, taken so far out of context, threatens to confuse three different uses of the expression "existential." First, the be-verb is an existential verb in all but its auxiliary functions (in both Greek and English). To say that it is an existential verb is obviously NOT to say that it always means "I exist" absolutely. Second, the be-verb can be used either in a copulative function or an existential function: copulative when its complement is nominal, pronominal, or adjectival, existential either in absolute uses or when its complement is adverbial. This is obviously what I meant in the quote from my post 4. The existential function does not in any way preclude the depictive complement. Third, you seem to use "existential" here solely in the sense of an

absolute use, but that's not what I mean by "existential," so we need to keep these two meanings distinct in our discussion.

You continue:

"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."

You are right, I was not careful to distinguish two distinct points. On the one hand I want to point out how the the full meaning of the verb is left incomplete by fracturing the syntax in the traditonal translation. On the other hand I want to point out how the dependent clause is orphaned, cut loose from the rest of the sentence, by the interpretation that lies behind the traditional translation.

You continue:

"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."

Pardon me, but you are using an English grammar to argue something about the Greek. So are you trying to make a point about the English or the Greek? I cited the Cambridge Grammar in my post 4 because I was defending my characterization of the English of many translations as "fractured." From the passages you now cite, the only good comparative example to the English of John 8:58 is "He died young" (261), because it alone involves an intransitive verb, like the be-verb. Whether "young" here is a complement or an adjunct, it necessarily follows the verb: "He dies young," not "Young he died." This was the point I was making in post 4, and it stands.

Now it seems to me you are ignoring a crucial point I made in the passage you quoted from my post 4 about the English of John 8:58 based on the Cambridge Grammar, which says: "Most obviously, the verb be almost always requires an internal complement" (page 222). Notice "requires" and about the be-verb, too. You instead are citing material and examples from the Cambridge Grammar not specifically about the be-verb. As you well know, many of the things we can say about transitive verbs we cannot say about intransitives, and vice versa. Many of the rules and characterizations that apply for other verbs are different for the be-verb. So you are not even citing particularly relevant English grammar here, not to mention anything at all about Greek. I cited from the

Cambridge Grammar be-verb sentences closely parallel to John 8:58 that clearly illustrate the place of complements in them: "Jill is in her study" -- "in her study" is a complement, not an adjunct, because the statement is not that Jill exists, but that she presently exists in a particular place. "The meeting was on Monday" -- same comments. What the verb indicates is fundamentally different with or without its complement.

Now let's switch over to talking about Greek. You say that EGW EIMI in John 8:58 is a predicate absolute, and clearly you mean not simply "it does not have a nominal, pronominal, or adjectival complement" but something more than that. Because no one has ever said it had a copulative function here. So you mean that it is syntactically separable from the PRIN clause, right? For this to be true, it would be necessary that the full sense of the verb remain the same with or without the PRIN clause, because the meaning of "absolute" is that its full meaning is in itself, not needing any completion from the rest of the sentence. So that would mean that Jesus is declaring his existence. I find this implausible. I don't see anything in the literary context to suggest that declaring his existence was what Jesus is doing with this statement. It seems pretty obvious to me that he is making a statement not about his existence per se, but about the duration of his existence, the fact that it is continuing from a time before Abraham was born. Moreover, the relation between the temporal clause and the main verb actually CHANGES what the verb signifies in terms of tense. If, for the sake of argument, we go along with your proposition that EIMI is absolute, and that its full meaning is established in itself without an obligatory complement from the temporal clause, THEN THERE WOULD BE NO TEMPORAL MODIFICATION OF THE SIMPLE PRESENT IN EGW EIMI, AND IT WOULD HAVE NONE OF THE 'TRANSTEMPORAL,' NOT TO MENTION 'ETERNAL' SIGNIFICANCE YOU TAKE IT TO HAVE. Please note this because it is very important. Either the temporal clause is a complement that alters the significance of the verbal tense, or EIMI is absolute and a simple present. It has to be one or the other. YOU CANNOT SAY EIMI IS ABSOLUTE AND AT THE SAME TIME GIVE IT ANY ELEMENT OF TENSE BEYOND THE SIMPLE PRESENT FOUND IN EIMI ALONE. If we are to propose that EIMI in John 8:58 has any tense significance beyond the simple present, then it necessarily must draw on the temporal clause for that significance, and this drawing upon the temporal clause for significance establishes a relation of obligatory complementarity between the main verb and the temporal clause. If we agree that EIMI means more than that Jesus exists in the moment he is speaking, then we agree that the verb is modified in regard to tense; and if it is modified in regard to tense, then that modification must come from the temporal clause; and if the modification comes from the temporal clause, then the latter is an obligatory complement to the full meaning of the verb. So whether we are arguing for a PPA or an 'eternal' reading of the main verb, we necessarily agree on all these things. That means that your entire argument in your post 17, if it were supportable, would undermine your reading of the verse as much as mine. Fortunately, as I have shown, it is not nearly so well supported as you initially thought.

That is really that, but let me wrap up with the rest of your remarks, so that it will not appear I am glossing over anything.

You say:

"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."

Not only is it wholly inaccurate to equate "existential" with "absolute" as you do here, and then suggest that if the be-verb is not a copula it is absolute, but you repeat the same embarrassing error of calling the be-verb a transitive verb. Enough said.

You continue:

"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. . . it is possible to understand John 8:58 to mean, "Before Abraham came into being, I am [he]," . . ."

So now EIMI is a copula? Whenever you make up your mind about what you want to argue for, will you please let me know? This just appears to be tossing out all possible arguments hoping something, anything will stick. Can I please just remind you that you are supposed to be defending the traditional translation -- have you decided to abandon that defense?

You continue:

"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."

This is very confused. Either its a copula with an implicit predicate complement, or it is absolute. Please choose one.

You continue:

"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."

So, apparently, you are willing to trot out contradictory positions so long as they block the complement status of the PRIN clause. This is precisely the apologetic procedure that you say you want no part of. Here you keep repeating the same mistake: "existential" cannot be simply equated with absolute. "Absolute" and "copula" are not the only two ways the be-verb can be used. There are existential uses of it with complements. I hope that is clear now.

You continue:

"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."

You simply have not demonstrated this in any compelling way, and certainly not by citing English grammars(!).

You end your post 17 with a list of "conclusions" that I have addressed in series as they have appeared in your posts 15-17, so it would be redundant to go over them again here.

In my next post, I will wrap up the argument to this point, responding to the last of your new posts.

best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #21 – 10/26 – #15835:
JASON #21

Rob, in your post 18 you review the broader literary context of John 8:58, making an argument for your interpretation of the significance of Jesus' statement in that verse. From the start of this exchange, I have said that I take a position on the accurate translation of the verse, and that accurate translation is open to more than one possible application to interpretive, theological conclusions. So all I can do is ferret out any possible translational significance to your remarks here.

You say:

"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)."

My reply is this:

Jesus reveals himself throughout the Gospel. This necessarily involves him declaring and explaining that he is various literal and metaphorical things to people and to the cosmos. It is a convenience to cluster these under the rubric "I am" sayings, because that is their common element. It is not however their significant element; the latter is what it is Jesus says he is in each case, and combining all of these things (light, shepherd, gate, etc.) into a picture of his overall self-revelation. But the use of "I am" is perfectly ordinary, because it is a very common expression, in any language.

You say:

"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)."

My reply is this:

The idea of a series here is weak. The first statement is an explicit copulative use of EIMI, in which Jesus says he is the one who testifies for his own veracity. The second and third statements are implicit copulative uses of EIMI, with the context providing, first, no help in identifying the implied predicate complement, thus prompting a question for Jesus to be clearer, and then a contextual identification of the implied predicate complement as the "Son of Man." In none of these sentences does EIMI stand semantically absolute. EIMI cannot be absolute when functioning as a copula.

You continue:

"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." "

Reply:

No, this is not correct. The audience understands there to be an implicit "he" predicate complement in this sentence, which is formally absolute, but not semantically absolute. If it was the latter, they would not ask "Who are you," but might say, "Yes, we can see that you exist; so what?" Which might lead into Jesus saying something about his 'transtemporal' existence. But that's not the direction the exchange takes.

You continue:

"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."

Reply:

Yes, that is its most evident meaning in the syntax of the sentence.

You add:

"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)."

Reply:

This is all interpretation, not translation. Let me just point out, however, that blasphemy is not explicitly mentioned in v.59. You see, you are interpreting. Besides that, your series is broken because here EIMI functions existentially (though still not absolutely), not as a copula. Because EIMI is such a workhorse in the Greek language (just as the verb to be is in English) it has many uses, and it is simply naive to think that every use of EIMI connects it to every other.

You say:

"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.

Reply:

This presumes a significance to "I am" rather than to what Jesus actually says he is. It lumps together "I am"s used in quite different ways, different contexts, different meanings. Moreover, as I already pointed out in my book, it ignores the VERY NEXT "I am" in this series you are constructing, that of the blind man in John 9 (only 10 verses from John 8:58, compared to 30 verses away for the last of your series). So I guess the blind man is also "making a veiled claim to deity." That's a fascinating theology you are proposing. My point should be obvious: it is not the EGW EIMI that gives any of these statements significance. EGW EIMI is just about the most common thing people say. The significance in every single one of the "I am" sayings in John is what it is that Jesus says he is. The principle of making lexical connections transparent in translation is a good one for key technical terms of the text, but is impossible to apply to commonplace words, like EIMI, that have too many distinct usages to be always translated the same way, particularly if it means ignoring proper tense significance.

You go on:

"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."

Reply:

First of all, this is not a defense of the traditional translation. Second, it is about interpretation, not translations. Third, it would in no way get you out of a PPA reading of the main verb, and a corresponding rendering in English. You cannot say "I AM king of America before the revolution." You have to say "I WAS king of America before the revolution." If it is a claim to still be king, even after the revolution, then it can only be expressed either in the latter way or as "I have been king since before the revolution." You continue to imagine that there are special exceptions to English grammar and syntax when applied theologically. There is not. Sometimes people write ungrammatical English sentences to make a point, to pose as "paradox" as you put it, that they then go on to explain in normal English grammar. But that's not what is happening in the Greek of John, and it shouldn't happen in its English translation either.

You continue:

"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."

Reply:

This is just a matter of refusing to translate, of refusing to come down on either side of what the statement might mean. It ends up not conveying either meaning clearly, and certainly not the copulative meaning in any way. This was my original point about the traditional translation in my book, and it seems we have come full circle. You have now lined up a series of unrelated and even contradictory positions on why the traditional translation should stand. You have failed to construct a coherent position, but simply marshaled any and all possible arguments that might give reason for keeping the traditional translation. This is exactly what I said apologists do, and though you considered that description of apologetic method "insulting and maligning," your latest series of four posts goes much further than any previous ones in showing precisely what I meant. You have argued: the verb is absolute and completely independent of the temporal clause; the temporal clause is the most important factor in determining the meaning of the verb; the verb is existential; the verb is copulative; the verb is both. These are just the broadest of your many claims and arguments. At every step I have shown how your conclusions are unjustified, how you have misconstrued texts both ancient and modern, how you have slipped from one meaning of a term to another, how your arguments inadvertently work against your own position. Nothing remains of your original set of arguments that has not been fundamentally refuted. Now I am speaking here only of translational issues, of course. Therefore, concession should come rather painlessly to you. I have maintained all along that your interpretation is defensible as a possible integration of Jesus' statement in John 8:58 into a broader Christology or theology. The interpretive debate is one you can go on with on clearer ground once the accurate translation I have argued for is accepted, which it is time for you to do.

In your post 1, you attacked the NW translation of John 8:58 as a paraphrase, and not literal as that version purports to be. I rejected this in my post 2 as simply untrue, detailing point-by-point its literal character. I had already in my book, which you had read, demonstrated how all of the major translations render the verbal tense of an expression such as is found in John 8:58 in the way the NW does, in multiple cases (I cited John 14:9 and 15:27 as sufficient to prove this point), except when it comes to John 8:58. This shows that they, and not the NW, are departing from their normal practice in this case. Literal translation does not mean ignoring the significance of Greek syntax for a proper rendering of the verbal tense, and it does not mean following Greek word order in a rote fashion in a way that violates English norms. Although you charged the NW translators with anti-Trinitarian bias in their translation of John 8:58, I pointed out that it

is impossible to conclude bias from an accurate translation; it is only when a translation is an inaccurate representation of the original Greek that one has grounds to delve into motives. Moreover, as I stated in my very first post, their translation is not anti-Trinitarian, since it does not artificially introduce language of the beginnings of Jesus' existence, a subject which simply goes unreferenced in this verse. You would have more grounds for charging any one of your preferred translations with anti-Trinitarian bias for their literal translations of Matthew 2:1; John 18:37; or Acts 13:33, in each of which there is an explicit remark about Jesus having been (past tense) begotten (the verb GENNAW). So your charge against the NW is unfair and unjustified.

Even though the NW translation of this verse can be improved upon by adhering to normal English word order, it is still more accurate than most translations in its proper rendering of the tense value of the verb within the syntactical relationships of the sentence. I have demonstrated this repeatedly in reference to the testimony of the grammars, in connection with closely parallel sentences from the Greek Bible, and by refutation of contrary arguments. I don't think it is necessary to review these arguments again here. The bottom line is that the syntactical connection between the dependent and main clauses must be maintained for the main verb to have any past or 'transtemporal' meaning. Once that connection is recognized, the construction of the dependent clause provides an indication of a specific past event to which the verbal action has a relation of antecedence. The use of a present form of the main verb (rather than an aorist or imperfect) then supplies the sense of duration of the verbal action from that past antecedent time up to the time of speaking. This is a past progressive form of expression, perfectly ordinary and acceptable in Koine Greek, and is most accurately rendered by English "I have been," or "I have existed," or "I have been in existence."

I consider my argument on this issue basically complete. You have provided excellent material for consideration in this debate that has helped me clarify and refine my position at a level I did not attempt in my book, which was deliberately kept to more basic terms. Much of what was implicit there has become explicit in our exchange over the last three months. Please take your time reviewing my points and determining the appropriate response. I have rushed my responses so that you will have ample time to consider them while I am off doing other things. I will check back in in December to see where things stand.

Best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #22 – 10/29 – #15857
JASON #22

Rob,

In formulating your replies, please take into consideration the following two additional OT PPAs involving the verb EIMI that we have failed to include before now.

Exodus 4:10

"Lord, I have not been fit (OUCH hIKANOS EIMI) before (PRO) yesterday or before the third day [i.e., in the past]."

Exodus 21:36

"But if it is known of the bull that it has been a gorer (HOTI KERATISTHS ESTI) before (PRO) yesterday and before the third day [i.e., in the past] . . ."

best wishes,

Jason B.

**ROB #22 – 11/14 – #15992:
ROB #22: CHANGING YOUR POSITION ON WHAT IS
“FRACTURED SYNTAX”**

Jason,

I begin my reply to your last group of posts by addressing an issue pertaining to your position on word order that you raised in your post #17. (I will give both post numbers and page numbers from the archive in the Files section of this discussion group.)

In your post #17, you wrote:

<< In your post 3, you denied that the word order found in most English translations of this verse was, in my words, "fractured or broken syntax." You argued that English has flexibility to put dependent clauses before main clauses, and this does not constitute "fractured" syntax. I clarified that my characterization referred to both the word order and the disharmony of verbal tenses between the main and dependent clauses, and that these two aberrations together merited that characterization. You subsequently (your post 5) acknowledged that that was my meaning. >> (p. 217)

This is not an accurate summation. Here is the passage from your post #4 to which you are referring:

<< 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." >> (p. 38)

I replied in my post #5:

** 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. ** (p. 49)

The point that I was acknowledging here was that in your opinion the two “defects” (of “inverted word order” and the use of “am” to render EIMI) together constituted evidence of bias on the part of the translators. I agreed that you built your case *for bias* on the cumulative effect of these two aspects of the traditional translation (along with the capitalization of “I AM,” which as I pointed out applies to only a few modern versions). I did *not* agree that your meaning (previously) was that the traditional rendering of John 8:58 was “fractured or broken syntax” only when those two “aberrations” were combined. In fact, I pointed out that “you had claimed” that the “inversion” of the clauses was “itself bad English.” That is clearly what you said repeatedly in your post #2:

<< 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.... 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 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. >> (pp. 18, 22, 24)

Please note that you described the wording of the NWT as “broken syntax” even though it has only one of the elements for which you faulted most translations. You stated that these translations of John 8:58, including the NWT, “are not English sentences.” The only basis for this judgment with regard to the NWT was that it puts “the main clause at the end of the sentence.” And you referred explicitly to “having ‘I am’ at the end of the sentence” as “broken syntax.” In your book, you characterized the NWT along with other translations that put the dependent clause first in John 8:58 as having “mangled word order” in this respect: “Yet all of the translations we are comparing, with the exception of the LB [Living Bible], offer precisely this sort of mangled word order” (Truth in Translation, 105). I do not know how you can now claim that you had said otherwise.

We see, then, that you have flatly misstated what you originally said about the “broken syntax” of most translations of John 8:58. You cannot have “clarified” (as you claim) that you meant that two or more of the objectionable features had to be present, when you repeatedly stated outright that just one feature (wrong order of clauses) constituted broken syntax. This is really a change in your argument. I emphasize this point because some people (including you!) are claiming that you have remained rock steady in your argumentation throughout our debate while I supposedly have been desperately changing my arguments here and there in order to “win at any cost.” Is this change of argument on your part a big deal? No, in and of itself it is not. There is nothing wrong with revising

one's argument to overcome a particular objection or problem. There is something wrong with revising one's argument, denying that one has done so, and falsely stating that one's debate opponent has agreed that your meaning has not changed.

In addition to the above misstatement of your earlier argument, your review (in your post #17) also passes over the change in your argument concerning what is wrong with the order of clauses in most translations. In both your book and your first two posts, you argued that these translations erred because they put the main clause at the end of the sentence instead of at the beginning. I documented this argument in my post #3 (pp. 29-30). Your book faulted these translations for putting the "predicate phrase" before the main subject and verb. In your first post, you faulted them because they "place the main clause after the adverbial clause, rather than before it, violating standard English syntax." In your second post, you objected that "the main subject and verb should stand at the beginning of any English translation." In response, I pointed out that perfectly good English sentences often place adverbial clauses first (giving some examples from your own post) and that English Bibles like the NRSV often do so specifically when translating clauses that begin with the word "before" (my post #3, pp. 30-33).

You then replied in your post #4 that you were glad for the opportunity to "improve defects of clarity" in your book and that although you knew what you "meant to say" and your "manuscript readers" understood what you were saying, you "evidently did not successfully say" what you intended (p. 37). You went on to acknowledge that you "skipped right over" the fact that "modern English" does have some "general flexibility...in placing subordinate clauses relative to the main verb," explaining that such flexibility "is not found in connection with the English be-verb" (p. 38). "The English be-verb cannot stand alone" without a complement, and when we want to make an existential statement without a complement we cannot use the be-verb but must instead use a verb like "exist" (p. 38).

This explanation represented a considerably different, more nuanced argument than the one you had presented in your book and in your first two posts. However, I did not challenge your claim to be merely explaining what you and your manuscript readers had no trouble understanding that you had meant. I did not suggest that you had changed your argument because you wanted to win at all costs. Instead, I accepted what I called "your newly clarified argument" and addressed it alone, making nothing of the way it differed from your earlier presentation. I said nothing more about it. As everyone following this debate knows, you did not grant me the same courtesy later in the discussion when I offered a fresh analysis of the issues pertaining to the PPA.

JASON #23 – 1/11/2005 – #16597

JASON #22 [sic]

Dear Rob,

It has now been two-and-a-half months since my last posting on this subject, which concluded my answer to all of your arguments to date.

I am satisfied that I have made my position clear, and demonstrated its validity. You started to make a reply on Nov. 14th, but then turned you attention to other things and have not seen fit to return to the debate. That is your prerogative and, frankly, the character of the Nov. 14th message did not promise any new advance in the discussion. I think we have exhausted the subject. I cannot unilaterally open the forum to the site members, but if you agree that can occur now as far as I am concerned. Otherwise, I think I have fulfilled my commitment to participate on this site, and I will be signing off.

In your message of Nov. 14th (Rob #22, Message 15992), you accuse me of changing my position. I have not changed my position. I have clarified it. As I stated before, the drive to be as simple as possible in my book sometimes led me to over-generalizations which I have been able to refine in a forum such as this where the discussion gets more technical. If one says "Automobiles are a leading contributor to the destruction of the ozone layer," and then clarifies by saying "The internal combustion engines of those automobiles that have them are a leading contributor to the destruction of the ozone layer," that is not "changing positions," but clarifying what one means by being more exact. My clarification of 'broken-syntax' is a clarification, not a change of position, because it tightens up the sense in which I was saying that the inversion of standard English word order was in itself a defect of translation. I have never changed to saying it was not a defect. I have continued to maintain, as I did in my book, that it is itself a defect distinct from the issue of verbal tense. It is a defect because the isolated be-verb cannot, as a rule, stand at the end of a sentence with its predicate complement relocated to a position in front of it. To write an English sentence with this inverted order is 'fractured' or 'mangled' syntax. It appears to me that you have confused two separate issues I addressed in my book: (1) whether the inverted word order is a defect of translation, and (2) whether the defect is sufficient in itself to indicate theological bias in the translation. My answer to the first is, and always has been, YES. My answer to the second is, and always has been, NOT NECESSARILY (because habituation to the traditional translation can cause translators to not notice the defect in it, and so not consciously choose the inverted word order, but follow it as 'normal' from tradition or habituation).

So while you try to detect slight variations in how I have expressed myself on this point, you have not been able to refute my basic point, which is that the be-verb cannot ordinarily be positioned at the end of an English sentence this way. I think you are still not coming to terms with the distinction between the uses of the English be-verb and the uses of other English verbs. I do not mean to fault you by pointing out this lack of

distinction because in my book I also fail to make it explicit, as you rightfully pointed out very early in our exchange. You quote my on-line clarification that makes it explicit, but can only remark that this "represented a considerably different, more nuanced argument" than that found in my book. You then go on to say you never complained about me developing my argument in this way, of course in this very post complaining precisely that, apparently because of the way I faulted the course of your argument in my last set of postings from October. That's an understandable reaction, and we can leave it to our readers to decide whose criticism of the other has greater validity (they probably both do to some degree).

Now since your last message does not answer any of my arguments and does not advance any of your own, and since you have not, shall we say, felt compelled to put together anything further on this subject, isn't it safe to say that we have pretty much said it all, that we each consider our arguments fully stated, and we can leave it to our readers to judge? I am willing to leave it at that.

best wishes,
Jason B.

ROB #23 – 1/12/2005 – #16600
ROB #23: WORD ORDER REVISITED

Jason,

I have spent a good many hours composing my responses to your last round of posts from the end of October. It was my intention to post my responses when I had finished with all of them, so as to avoid duplicating comments on similar points. In light of your post yesterday, I will go ahead and start posting what I have ready.

In my previous post in this discussion (dated November 14), I commented on the first few sentences of your review of our earlier exchange on the matter of word order (your post #17, p. 217). In this post, I will respond to the rest of that same section of your post dealing with word order (pp. 217-19). But first I will reply to your attempt in yesterday's post (which, by the way, should be numbered #23) to show that you had not changed your position at all (pp. 274-75).

DID YOUR POSITION CHANGE?

You wrote:

<< In your message of Nov. 14th (Rob #22, Message 15992), you accuse me of changing my position. I have not changed my position. I have clarified it. As I stated before, the drive to be as simple as possible in my book sometimes led me to over-generalizations which I have been able to refine in a forum such as this where the discussion gets more technical. >> (p. 274)

I knew you were off to a bad start when you construed the matter as a difference between your book and your comments in our online discussion. The discrepancy that I noted was between your earlier posts, particularly post #2, and your post #17. Let us review. Here is what you said in post #2:

<< 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.... 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 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. >> (pp. 18, 22, 24)

This is the same position as the one taken in your book, and you return to it in today's post:

<< My clarification of 'broken-syntax' is a clarification, not a change of position, because it tightens up the sense in which I was saying that the inversion of standard English word order was in itself a defect of translation. I have never changed to saying it was not a defect. I have continued to maintain, as I did in my book, that it is itself a defect distinct from the issue of verbal tense. It is a defect because the isolated be-verb cannot, as a rule, stand at the end of a sentence with its predicate complement relocated to a position in front of it. To write an English sentence with this inverted order is 'fractured' or 'mangled' syntax. >> (p. 274)

So, in your book, in your post #2, and in your post #23, you take the position that the inverted order of most translations of John 8:58 (including the NWT) is in and of itself "broken" or "fractured" or "mangled" syntax, independent of the English tense used to translate EIMI. However, in post #17, you wrote the following:

<< In your post 3, you denied that the word order found in most English translations of this verse was, in my words, "fractured or broken syntax." You argued that English has flexibility to put dependent clauses before main clauses, and this does not constitute "fractured" syntax. I clarified that my characterization referred to both the word order and the disharmony of verbal tenses between the main and dependent clauses, and that these two aberrations together merited that characterization. >> (p. 217)

The "characterization" to which you refer with that word twice in the last sentence quoted here is "fractured or broken syntax." You state here that "my characterization referred to BOTH THE WORD ORDER AND THE DISHARMONY OF VERBAL TENSES" and that "THESE TWO ABERRATIONS TOGETHER merited that characterization." Thus, in your post #17 you claimed that your position was that it was only the combination of these two elements ("the word order and the disharmony of verbal tenses") that merited the characterization of fractured or broken syntax.

To review: in your book, your post #2, and your post #23, you clearly state that the inverted word order in most translations of John 8:58 is in and of itself fractured, broken, or mangled syntax. In your post #17, however, you claimed that you had clarified your position to be that this fractured or broken syntax characterizes the conventional translations of John 8:58 because of the "two aberrations together" of inverted word order and the translation of EIMI with "am" ("disharmony of verbal tenses"). This is clearly a contradiction in your online discussion, and in fact you have veered back and forth on the matter (inverted word order alone is broken syntax, post #2; inverted word order together with disharmony of verbal tenses constitutes broken syntax, post #17; inverted word order alone is broken syntax, post #23). Rather than further clarifying the matter, your post #23 exacerbates the problem.

You also wrote:

<< It appears to me that you have confused two separate issues I addressed in my book: (1) whether the inverted word order is a defect of translation, and (2) whether the defect is sufficient in itself to indicate theological bias in the translation. My answer to the first is, and always has been, YES. My answer to the second is, and always has been, NOT NECESSARILY (because habituation to the traditional translation can cause translators to not notice the defect in it, and so not consciously choose the inverted word order, but follow it as 'normal' from tradition or habituation). >> (p. 274)

The above statement really makes me wonder whether you actually read all of my post #22. I clearly stated:

“I agreed that you built your case *for bias* on the cumulative effect of these two aspects of the traditional translation (along with the capitalization of “I AM,” which as I pointed out applies to only a few modern versions). I did *not* agree that your meaning (previously) was that the traditional rendering of John 8:58 was ‘fractured or broken syntax’ only when those two ‘aberrations’ were combined” (p. 272).

In the rest of your post #23, you assert that I have not yet refuted your basic point. I think I have done so, but I will revisit the matter in the rest of this post.

ADDRESSING THE CORE OF YOUR ARGUMENT ON WORD ORDER

I turn, then, back to your post #17, picking up where I left off in my post #22. You wrote:

<< I went on in my post 4, making use of one of the most respected modern grammars of English, to demonstrate that the noted flexibility in ordering clauses in English is not found in connection with the be-verb. You subsequently (your post 5) acknowledged that it was "unusual" for the be-verb to be employed with the same flexibility of word order found with other verbs. I introduced the difference between adjuncts and complements to the verb, which I had left out of my book as too technical for the broad audience I was addressing. This difference is crucial in determining how flexible one can be with the order of clauses in a sentence. Since the dependent clause in John 8:58 is a verbal complement, not an adjunct, it should not be preposed to the main clause. You subsequently (your post 5) acknowledged my explanation of this rule of English grammar (which you summed up as: "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"]") without argument or further comment. You had offered a long list of English passages from the Bible which you felt demonstrated the ability to prepose the dependent clause. I pointed out that most of them did not involve the be-verb, and those that did involved adjuncts, not complements, to the be-verb. These arguments of mine went unanswered in all subsequent posts, and so, unless you have something more to add, can be considered to have prevailed. >> (p. 217)

It isn't true that these arguments went unanswered. I gave an example from the LXX that translators usually render with the similar dependent clause (PRIN + aorist infinitive) preposed before the be-verb (Ps. 89:2 LXX). Your response was to argue, in effect, that the translators erred in their rendering of that text as well. I also argued that the dependent clause in John 8:58 can be construed as an adjunct. You may disagree, but I did answer your argument.

You wrote:

<< I provided an extensive (but far from exhaustive) list of pronoun+be-verb statements in the New Testament to illustrate when and how these were employed. This served to demonstrate that English usually reorders the sequence of words relative to the Greek in acknowledgment of the different demands of syntax between the two languages. It showed how some uses were closer to John 8:58 than others, and how the closer parallels generally avoided the final position of the be-verb in the clause, so that the verbal complement preposed to the main verb in the Greek would follow the main verb in English, since English syntax normally follows this order. This contribution, which amounts to five printed pages, was never acknowledged or responded to by you. >> (pp. 217-18)

The main point in those five pages (pp. 40-45) was whether EIMI in John 8:58 is to be construed existentially or copulatively. You cited a variety of texts to illustrate the difference and to show that when translating the Greek be-verb into English one must choose between using "exist" (or some equivalent) or a copula such as "am"—in which case the English translation must (you argued) express or clearly imply a predicate complement following the copula. In this regard, you wrote:

<< 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. >> (p. 42)

I quoted the above statements and responded to you on this issue in my post #17 (pp. 199-201).

You wrote:

<< I further argued that English normally employs alternatives to the be-verb when we wish to make absolute existential statements, that the use of the be-verb in this capacity had fallen out of English usage since the days of King James. You initially (your post 5) tried to dispute that English had changed that much in the last three hundred years, but wisely dropped this position as untenable. >> (p. 218)

"Tried to dispute" is a bit overstated. I said I was "unsure if English has changed in this respect" and said that I thought we could find contemporary examples (Rob #5, p. 50).

You disqualified the one example I gave off the top of my head (“Let It *Be*”) on the ground that it is imperative and poetry (Jason #6A, p. 54). I didn’t pursue the matter further, but I still think some contemporary examples can be found. This one might be adequate to illustrate the point:

“While Eeyore Frets...
And Piglet Hesitates...
And Rabbit Calculates...
And Owl Pontificates...
Pooh Just *Is*.”
--Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh* (emphasis in original)

It’s somewhat poetic, so you may object to it as an example of those grounds. Then again, Psalm 89:2 LXX is poetry, but you objected to translators rendering the last two words there as “you are,” so I’m not sure poetry has much to do with it. And in the above example, the dependent clause (“While...”) is preposed before the main clause. Quick—write a letter to Mr. Hoff and tell him to join the 21st-century English-speaking world!

Here’s an example from a New Age book on prayer:

“*Everything that ever was or ever will be already exists....* So in God’s world, all *already is*.”—Guy Finley, *The Lost Secrets of Prayer* (Llewellyn, 1998), 32, 33 (emphasis in original).

It’s not imperative, and it’s not poetry. So, it would seem that by your criteria the use of “is” at the end of the second sentence instead of “exists” is poor English usage. Yet it seems fine to me.

Perhaps you could argue that these examples are dissimilar to the conventional English translations of Psalm 89:2 LXX and John 8:58 in that the above examples italicize “is” for emphasis: “Pooh Just *Is*”; “all *already is*.” I think such an “out” would be a stretch. The wording would carry essentially the same force without the italics; the use of italics simply makes more explicit or emphatic what is already evident as to the import of the word “is” in these two texts.

You wrote:

<< In your post 5, you conceded that the order found in most translations of John 8:58 was "unusual or even odd." In my reply I said that this admission was sufficient to place the burden of proof on a defender or "unusual or odd" word order in an English translation. You had suggested that the word order of the original was "also unusual," and this seemed to be the line of argument you intended to follow to defend the unusual or odd English order. But I stated there was nothing at all unusual about the Greek word order, and asked directly: "Please be precise: what is it that you consider out of the ordinary for Greek grammar here?" You have never replied to this question. >> (p. 218)

Your summary of the discussion here is once again a bit off. I did not say that the word *order* of most English translations of John 8:58 was unusual or odd. I said that one might fairly describe “the wording” that way. Likewise, I said that “the wording” of the Greek was unusual, not the word *order*. Here is the whole paragraph from my post #5:

“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” (p. 50).

I have already addressed this question about what is unusual in the wording of John 8:58, at least indirectly, but I do plan to say more about it when I reply to your post #19, dealing with the PRIN + aorist infinitive clause. A brief answer here without a full explanation will almost certainly not do.

As for the burden of proof, I believe I showed why we may translate John 8:58 as most English versions do. Additionally, the fact that most English versions, including the decidedly nontraditional NWT, propose the adverbial clause shifts the burden of proof back in the direction of those who would say that all of these translators got it wrong.

You wrote:

<< I should also repeat here that there is no direct correlation between Greek word order and English word order. In my book, I quoted Orlinsky & Bratcher on this point. They referred to the notion that "faithfulness in translation demands that the word order of the original be reproduced," and commented, "This , of course, is simply wrong" (History of Bible Translation, 1991, page 251), a view that is shared by all the major modern translations. An "unusual" order in one does not dictate "unusual" order in the other. It is only when an "unusual" word order in Greek has some semantic significance that that significance must be rendered in English is some way – by word order if appropriate. But none of this has been demonstrated for John 8:58, by you or anyone else. >> (p. 218)

I did not say that the unusual wording of the Greek “dictated” an unusual wording in the English translation. However, it at least allows for it and may be a reason to prefer it, depending on the specifics of the case. Remember, you have been arguing that “I am” is absolutely unacceptable, whereas I have simply been arguing that it is legitimate and even, arguably, the best rendering—not that it *must* be translated that way. Why do I think the conventional translation is the best? With respect to word order, it is because the conventional word order in translations of John 8:58 more forcefully expresses the contrast between “came into being” and “am” that is expressed in the Greek between GENESAQI and EIMI.

You began your conclusion of your review on word order as follows:

<< With your post 6 and subsequent posts, you have made no further argument on the issue of word order, leaving my position unrefuted and my refutation of your arguments standing. Thus, unless you wish to mount any new argument, we can consider the issue of word order closed. >> (p. 218)

I have explained why I think your claim that your position stands unrefuted is false. I did respond to your arguments and rebutted the crucial points from your “refutation.”

You wrote:

<< The main clause should proceed the dependent clause in an accurate translation of John 8:58: "I am/have been before Abraham was born." This correct word order acknowledges the function of the dependent clause "before . . ." as a depictive complement of the main verb, a function that you have accepted without argument. >> (p. 218)

Again, I argued that the dependent clause might be an adjunct rather than a complement, so once again your review of the discussion is in error. Shortly after making the above statement, you acknowledged that I had made that argument:

<< All that remains in your avoidance of this conclusion is the claim that "I am" is a "predicate absolute," and hence the "before" clause is an adjunct, not a complement. >> (p. 219)

I am having difficulty putting your two claims together. Did I accept the “depictive complement” function of the dependent clause “without argument,” or did I argue that the clause “is an adjunct, not a complement”?

You wrote:

<< Now you have stated this claim both in respect to the English and in respect to the Greek, so I will need to address both sides of this claim. >> (p. 219)

I said that the Greek dependent clause is probably an adjunct. What the corresponding English words are depends on how the sentence is translated, of course.

You wrote:

<< I will comment on the Greek in my reply to your post 17. On the English, first of all, it would have to be "I exist," not "I am" to be an absolute and, second, you would have to read the sentence to mean that Jesus is declaring his present existence plain and simple, not his existence in any time reference to Abraham. Since this breaks the sentence up into meaningless and decontextualized fragments, it is unacceptable. In context, Jesus is clearly saying he was already in existence at a particular point of past time, and in English this requires the dependent clause to serve as a verb complement, not an adjunct,

the verb to not be read absolutely but to be completed by the sense of the dependent clause, and a resultant shift in the verb from the simple present to the past or past progressive. >> (p. 219)

I believe the above argument misunderstands the concept of an adjunct dependent clause. The adjunct cannot stand alone, but the main clause to which that adjunct is related could stand alone—yet the adjunct contributes something to the meaning of the whole sentence. Let me quote some examples of temporal adjunct expressions and dependent clauses from The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language:

“I read your thesis last week” (p. 694).

“When John attacked Bill the police arrested him” (p. 699).

“On hearing this news, he phoned his solicitor” (p. 699).

Obviously, the adjunct expressions and dependent clauses in these examples—“last week,” “when John attacked Bill,” “on hearing the news”—cannot stand alone as sentences; they require the main clauses to gain their meaningful context. However, the main clauses are meaningful without the dependent clauses. One could write or say, “I read your thesis” or “The police arrested him” or “He phoned his solicitor” and these are coherent, complete sentences in their own right.

Remember, all I’m arguing is that the evidence does not rise to the level needed to warrant your strong claim that most English translations botch the rendering of John 8:58. That strong claim is *prima facie* suspect when so many scholars skilled in the use of English have rendered it in that traditional way, and the specific objections you have advanced to justify your criticism all seem answerable.

My next post will complete my response to your post #17.

ROB #24 – 1/12/2005 – #16601

ROB #24: REFOCUSING THE REVISITATION OF THE PPA

Jason,

In this post I will complete my response to your post #17, addressing the sections “What Makes a PPA?” and “What Makes a PPA, Part 2” (pp. 219-27).

First, let’s look at your section “What Makes a PPA?” (which dealt with my posts #6 and #8).

In post #6, I made four “summary observations” regarding what the grammars say about John 8:58. You strongly criticized these summary observations and we have debated them at some length already. If there was a problem, it was my use of the term “adverbial expression” in my second and fourth points and “adverbials” in my third point (p. 61). You construed me to use these terms in the second and third points to fudge my analysis of the grammars with regard to the function of dependent clauses in marking the PPA. I think this criticism exposes a lack of clarity and precision in the way I expressed the second and third points, though I stand by the claims I was actually making. Let me review the four points and state them more precisely.

1. Almost all of these grammars note that the action or state that the verb expresses is “still in progress at the time of speaking” (as Burton puts it). I don’t think you challenged this point.
2. Most of the grammars make note of “some sort of temporal indicator” (as Wallace puts it) marking the PPA. In this restated, more precise articulation, please note that I am not addressing what forms this temporal indicator might take or how often it occurs in a PPA sentence.
3. Some of the grammars treat this temporal marker (of whatever forms) as a standard element of the PPA usage; other grammars indicate that the temporal marker usually or often occurs but allow exceptions. I think we can leave it at that, with no quantifying at all, and my conclusions will still follow.
4. The sorts of temporal indicators or markers that dominate the descriptions and examples of such temporal indicators given in the grammars for the PPA are adverbs and adverbial phrases, though half a dozen use the vague term “expressions” for the temporal indicators and a few cite examples in which the temporal indicator would have to be a dependent clause (the primary such example, cited in four grammars, being John 8:58 itself).

If you don't like the way these four points are articulated (it is especially difficult to state the fourth point succinctly), I will be happy to accommodate you and use your own summation:

<< SO NOTE THAT HALF THE GRAMMARS THINK THERE CAN BE A PPA WITH NO ADVERBIAL MODIFICATION WHATSOEVER, FOUR OTHERS THINK THE PPA IS FORMED BY MODIFICATION WITH A 'EXPRESSION OF PAST TIME' OR 'TEMPORAL EXPRESSION,' AND ONLY FOUR GRAMMARS SPECIFY MODIFICATION BY 'ADVERBIAL EXPRESSION' (JANNARIS, BURTON), OR 'A SPECIFIC PHRASE' (GREENLEE) OR 'AN ADVERBIAL PHRASE OR OTHER TIME-INDICATION' (FANNING) AS THE DEFINING FEATURE. >> (p. 220, capitalization in the original)

For the sake of moving the argument forward, if nothing else, let us use your own emphatically presented "statistical summation." What may we conclude from the above statement? Here is what we may conclude:

* According to several Greek grammars, a temporal dependent clause, such as one finds in John 8:58, *may* function as the temporal marker of a present tense verb as a PPA.

* At least some Greek grammars describe the PPA in such a way as to exclude from that category a text such as John 8:58 in which no temporal adverbial occurs in the same clause as the present tense verb under consideration.

From these two conclusions, I infer a third:

* There is no consensus in the Greek grammars that would put beyond controversy the claim that John 8:58 is a clear example of a PPA.

If we could agree on the above statement, then I think we could end our formal exchange and open the floor to a wider discussion. After all, my position all along has been quite simply that the evidence does not support your strong claim that John 8:58 *must* be translated idiomatically into English on the understanding that EIMI *can only be* a PPA (and therefore that the conventional translations of John 8:58 are just plain wrong). If you fall back to the weaker claim that John 8:58 *might* be a PPA and *could* be translated that way, then you will have in effect recanted your conclusion in chapter 10 of Truth in Translation. The only way I can see for you to salvage your stronger claim, while admitting the above three conclusions, is to insist that any Greek grammar that implicitly or explicitly excludes John 8:58 from the category of the PPA is definitely, clearly wrong, too: they also are ignoring clear facts. If you wish to take that stance, please let us all know.

You wrote:

<< Any future argument you wish to make concerning what makes a PPA must take account of the following two points of information:

(1) 4 OF 15 GRAMMARS CITE EXAMPLES THAT HAVE NO ADVERBIAL MODIFIER AT ALL. (Luke 2:48 Turner, Moule; Acts 26:31 Turner, BDF, Winer)

(2) 7 OF 15 GRAMMARS CITE EXAMPLES EMPLOYING AN ADVERBIAL CLAUSE (John 8:58 Turner, BDF, Winer, McKay; Acts 27:33 Fanning, Wallace; 2 Peter 3:4 Turner, Winer, Fanning, Robertson) – see my post 7. >> (p. 223)

Taking this information about the grammars at face value, what we may conclude is that some of the grammars give examples of the PPA that would be precedent for *possibly* considering EIMI in John 8:58 as a PPA. The fact that a minority of the grammars give examples of the PPA “that have no adverbial modifier at all” does not tell us anything about whether a particular text is a PPA. The fact that roughly half of the grammars give examples involving an adverbial clause shows that a text such as John 8:58 that also has such an adverbial clause *might* (in that respect) be a PPA. It does not prove that John 8:58 *is* a PPA.

There are other concerns I would raise here. Your second point is the more important of the two, and you mention three texts cited in the seven grammars as exemplifying the use of an adverbial dependent clause as the temporal marker for a PPA. One of these is John 8:58, which is of course the text in dispute. The four grammars that cite John 8:58 as a PPA provide a basis for the claim that a reasonable person *might* so classify John 8:58. They do not prove more than that. Three of those four, by your own account in the first point, do not make any sort of temporal indicator a requirement for the PPA (Winer, Turner, BDF), so their inclusion of John 8:58 does not imply that in their view the dependent clause in John 8:58 fulfills that function. To be more precise, Winer and Turner say nothing about such a temporal indicator and so we can draw no inference at all about it from their citation of John 8:58. BDF does say something about temporal indicators but allows exceptions, and so one might infer that its citation of John 8:58 is consistent with its viewing the dependent clause as such a temporal indicator. Two of those three also list 2 Peter 3:4, and the same point applies in those instances. Then again, the other two grammars that list 2 Peter 3:4 (Robertson and Fanning) also do not indicate that the dependent clause fulfills that function. It is possible that they construed the adverbial phrase in that verse as the temporal marker of the PPA, rather than the dependent clause. So the citation of 2 Peter 3:4 is not evidence of these grammars viewing dependent clauses as potential markers of the PPA. This leaves Acts 27:33 as the sole possible example that shows that the two grammars citing it are treating a dependent clause as the temporal marker for a PPA. They do not specify that a dependent clause in Acts 27:33 functions as the temporal marker, but for sake of argument I will agree that this may be implied by their classification. Thus, the evidence of these citations for the conclusion that a dependent clause ever serves that function is much thinner than your “7 of 15 GRAMMARS” indicates. You can validly claim some precedent in the grammars; but you cannot validly claim that the grammars support the view that the role of dependent clauses as temporal markers for the PPA is clear or indisputable.

Part 2 of your discussion on “What Makes a PPA” focuses entirely on further criticism of my numerically expressed analysis of the descriptions given in the grammars in my post 11. Let me quote your conclusion:

<< All of your errors take the form of overscoring, rather than underscoring, and they all occur in assigning the highest two scores (those closest to your view). So there is a clear tendency in these errors, which is to skew the testimony of the grammars in such a way that your position appears more broadly supported than it actually is, and mine seems less supported than it actually is. Your original scoring had 7 out of 15 grammars in the two highest scores, compared to 8 of 15 in the lower three scores. A more accurate accounting (even allowing Greenlee's reference to a "phrase expressing the past time aspect" to be scored high) has 3 or 4 out of 15 grammars (depending on where Brooks/Winbery end up) in the top two scores, and 11 or 12 out of 15 in the lower three scores. So now we can see how the grammatical evidence actually breaks on this issue, and can see how the so-called "broad" definition of the PPA is by far the majority view of it among your set of grammars. Any "burden of proof," therefore, is on a "narrow" definition of the PPA modification, that is, yours. >> (pp. 226-27)

Your conclusion simply misses the entire point of my analysis. I was not in the least attempting to determine whether a majority of the grammars favored a broad or a narrow definition. I was not attempting to argue for a narrow definition as opposed to a broad one on the grounds that a majority of grammars employed a narrow definition. This means that this whole last section of your post #17 (pp. 224-27), which purports to be a critique of my argument, is entirely irrelevant (except for the very last sentence; see below).

What was I attempting to prove? I set out explicitly and quite plainly what I intended to prove in my post #14, which you completely bypassed on your last round of posts (pp. 169-70). I'll repeat those points shortly. But first, let's look at your critique. In the first of my categories for noting differences in the definitions given in the grammars (description of the past-time indicator), you wanted to assign Goodwin a score of 2 rather than 5 or 6 as I had said. You said that Brooks/Winbery should have 5 at most, but arguably should get 2. Wallace and Jannaris should have had 4 points instead of 5, and Wallace could conceivably be scored much lower. Taking all of this pretty much at face value without debate (for the sake of argument), we would revise my scale to look something like this:

Winer and Turner—3 points
BDF and Goodwin—7 points
Brooks/Winbery—11 points, possibly as low as 8
Young and Smyth—10 points
Wallace—12 points, possibly as low as 10
McKay—11 points
Greenlee and Robertson—12 points
Jannaris—12 points
Dana/Mantey and Burton—14 points
Fanning—15 points

How does this revision affect my conclusions, reviewed for you in my post #14? It doesn't affect my conclusions in the slightest. Let's go over them. I'll repeat what I wrote in post #14 (pp. 169-70) with some additional comments in light of the above considerations.

* Definitions of the PPA range from very broad to very narrow, with some definitions exhibiting a mix of broad and narrow aspects. This is still clearly the case.

* The broadest definitions of the PPA appear in three of the four grammars that listed John 8:58 as an example. That's still true as well: Winer, Turner, and BDF are at the broad end of the spectrum (joined now by Goodwin); McKay is still the one anomaly.

* 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. This is all still quite true; your critique does not even begin to refute it.

* Those three grammars that give the broadest definition of the PPA (Winer, Turner, and BDF) 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. This is still true: Winer, Turner, and BDF are still at the broad end of the definitional spectrum (BDF is now tied by Goodwin by your revised numbers); Jannaris, Dana/Mantey, Burton, and Fanning are still at the narrow end of the spectrum and specify to translate the PPA using an English past tense; Young is the only grammar not at the extreme narrow end to say this.

In relation to this point, though, you do attempt a sort of rebuttal. At the very end of your post #17, you make the following comment:

<< I think I have already sufficiently commented on the happenstance nature of grammars commenting on translation, and effectively shown that there is no exclusive correlation between those that do and the "narrow" definition of the PPA. >>

Since I didn't claim there was an "exclusive correlation" in this regard, and even noted that the correlation was **not** exclusive (specifying four out of five), you are knocking down a straw man. The fact is that the three grammars that have the broadest definition of the PPA "happen" to say nothing at all about how to translate it, while four of the five grammars that specify to translate the PPA using an English past tense "happen" to sit at the narrow end of the spectrum of definitions of the PPA. This is not an "exclusive correlation," but it is a statistically significant enough correlation not to be dismissed as "happenstance." At the very least, the evidence here offers some measure of support for my position; I think the evidence is very strong.

* 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. Since the above four points clearly remain unaffected by your critique, this final conclusion also stands.

My next two posts will respond to your post #18.

ROB #25 – 1/13/2005 – #16602

ROB #25: BROAD-BAND PRESENTS

Jason,

This post is a response to the first part of your post #18 (pp. 228-31).

Let me begin by responding to the following statement:

<< You fail to explain, however, what Wallace means by "broad-band," and "narrow-band." >> (p. 228)

I will take this as a request for clarification and am happy to provide it (at the time when I wrote my post #16, I did not realize that you did not have a copy of Wallace available to you). Wallace defines the terms as follows:

“‘Narrow band’ means that the action is portrayed as occurring over a relatively short interval; ‘broad band’ means that the action is portrayed as occurring over a longer interval” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 516).

You wrote:

<< You have often criticized in this discussion the relative breadth of definition of the PPA in some grammarians compared to those whose view you prefer. >>

Once again, this is a misunderstanding of my entire line of argument. I have simply argued that on the broader definitions of the PPA, one cannot claim that all PPA verbs *must* be translated using a form of the past tense. That’s it!

I wrote:

“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).”

You replied:

<< But Acts 2:8 is cited by NONE of your grammars as a PPA, and has never been part of the pool of samples we have been considering. So I don't know who has suggested that it is a PPA, and Wallace's argument that it is not is well-grounded. So this is not a

case of legitimate overlap of the PPA and the descriptive based in the sources we have agreed to use so far. >> (p. 229)

You seem to be missing the point again. I am not disputing Wallace's analysis. Nor am I saying that Acts 2:8 was classified by someone as a PPA or that it should be so classified. I am pointing out that Wallace finds it necessary or useful to point out that Acts 2:8, though formally it may seem to fit some definitions of the PPA, is in his judgment better classified as something else. This is one of several examples from his grammar that illustrate my point about the relative fluidity of these grammatical categories and the fact that how one classifies a particular text will depend at least somewhat on how one defines those categories.

I wrote:

“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.”

You replied:

<< You haven't effectively demonstrated that the PPA can be lumped together with these other uses of the Greek present. Just go back to your list of PPAs from your post 6 and try to start translating them as gnomics, etc. It can't be done without making nonsense of most of those sentences. It is only when the verse is speaking of God or Jesus that you think it should be read differently. Linguists would just look at this as bizarre, and I criticize it in my book. >>

I didn't advocate lumping the PPA with those other usages in the sense of claiming that they can all be translated in the same way. You are missing the point still.

You continued:

<< We also need to be clear on what you mean by "formally similar?" If you mean the verb has the same grammatical form, then of course the same grammatically present form can be used in distinct ways. If you just place the verbs side by side, you could never tell a gnomic from an iterative, from a progressive, from a PPA. You need to see the rest of the sentence and how it modifies the meaning and rendering of the verb. It seems you mean something more than the form taken by the verb, perhaps the "form" of the construction, of the syntax by which these usages are identified. If so, you will need to demonstrate that they have this same "form." >> (pp. 229-30)

My sentence was explicit: the “usages...can be formally similar to one another.” Your second guess, then, was closer to the mark. I already gave you an example and you didn't get it: Acts 2:8. On a broad description of the grammatical/syntactical features of a PPA (a present tense verb denoting an action or state that began in the past and is continuing), Acts 2:8 (‘How is it that *we are hearing*’) formally fits the description. The hearing is

an action that began in the past (albeit the recent past, presumably a few minutes or perhaps an hour at most) and was apparently continuing at the time of speaking. If a past-time indicator is not needed, the text has everything one needs to find to conclude that the verb is a PPA. Yet the verb is regularly translated into English using the present tense (“we are hearing”), and Wallace construes it as a descriptive present.

I had written:

“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.”

You replied:

<< You will need to demonstrate such overlap, and then show it applies to John 8:58. The latter verse fits PRECISELY the conditions of a PPA, in that it is temporally modified by another grammatical element of the sentence to extend its formal present tense into a semantic range that takes in the past. >> (p. 230)

I have demonstrated that the *way* the present-tense denotation of EIMI in John 8:58 is related to the past is *not* typical or characteristic of the PPA or even of Greek usage generally (specifically, through the expression of a contrast with a past event of becoming using the PRIN + aorist infinitive clause). Only by carefully parsing your definition and glossing over that atypical feature of the grammar of John 8:58 can you declare that it “fits PRECISELY the conditions of a PPA.”

You wrote:

<< Do you dispute that EIMI is temporally modified in John 8:58? Think carefully before you answer, because it has serious consequences for your position. >>

In the sense that you mean by “temporally modified,” yes, I do dispute it. You mean modified to denote existence in one specific temporal aspect (from the past into the present). (I am not here using “aspect” in the modern technical linguistic sense.) The wording of John 8:58 goes beyond that temporal aspect. Of course, I do not dispute the claim that the dependent clause is meaningfully related to the main clause.

You wrote:

<< The usages you are comparing it to and saying it overlaps with are not temporally modified in the same way, because their modifying element refers to recurring action or continuous states. Abraham being born is quite obviously neither a recurring action or a continuous state. >>

Obviously. But you are reading more into my comparison of John 8:58 to texts using gnomic, descriptive, or general presents than I intend.

I wrote:

“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.”

You replied:

<< Then please acknowledge, which you have never done, that the LB and NW rendering of John 8:58 is a grammatically acceptable and justified translation of the verse. Once you acknowledge that, then the debate over translation is largely over, because as I have pointed out, you are really arguing for an interpretation, and your linguistic arguments fail to defend the traditional translation of the verse as either accurate with regard to the Greek or coherent as an English sentence. >> (p. 230)

First of all, from the premise that EIMI in John 8:58 fits a broad definition of the PPA it does not follow that the LB or NWT renderings are “justified.” On the broader definitions of the PPA, any present-tense verb that expresses a state that obtained in the past and continues to obtain in the present is a PPA. But not all such verbs are justifiably translated using an English past tense verb. The sentence *hO QEOS AGAPH ESTIN* fits this definition, because what it says that God “is” obtained in the past and continues in the present, but it would be unjustifiable to translate this sentence “God has been love.”

Second, you have things rather confused. I have argued that renderings like those found in the LB or NWT, particularly in the context of a simplified English paraphrase or idiomatic version, are *possible* options but lose something important in the translation and are not *the best* rendering in a “literal” or primarily word-for-word kind of translation, such as the NWT purports to be. If by “grammatically acceptable and justified” you meant merely that the LB and NWT renderings were possible, defensible translations, “on the radar screen” of legitimate possibilities to be considered, then of course I would agree, as I have agreed all along. Your use of “acceptable” makes it sound as though this is all you are asking. But then you go on to claim that if I were to acknowledge this point the debate would be “largely over” because I supposedly have failed to defend the conventional translation as either accurate or coherent. That makes it apparent that what you are really trying to get me to “acknowledge” is that the LB or NWT rendering is right and the conventional rendering is wrong. This is of course your claim, to put it mildly. You have argued that the conventional translations of John 8:58 are simply not “accurate with regard to the Greek” (so above), “defective,” downright “bad English,” indeed, they are “not English,” “not coherent as an English sentence” (so again above), with “mangled,” “fractured,” or “broken” syntax, “UNREADABLE,” and evidence of theological bias (apparently in all of the many, many versions, commentaries, academic monographs, dissertations, and the like that utilize the conventional rendering). In recognizing that a minority report on the translation of John 8:58 has some legitimacy as a possible view, I am not committing myself to “acknowledge” any of this!

You claim that I am “arguing for an interpretation,” presumably as contrasted with you arguing merely for a particular translation. This is a tendentious representation of the actual situation. I am arguing for a translation of John 8:58 that most fully expresses the nuance of the Greek text’s wording, in a way that the LB and NWT renderings do not. I am arguing for a translation of the text that preserves the connections between this and other sayings of Jesus utilizing the unpredicated EGW EIMI. I am arguing for a translation of the text that conveys the Old Testament allusions of this and other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus, especially those in Isaiah. These are all legitimate purposes in translation.

Besides, most people who read Greek simply disagree with your claim that rendering EIMI in John 8:58 as “am” rather than “have been” is somehow interpretive to the point of being suspect as evidence of bias. You state in *Truth in Translation*, “The first choice when faced with options of how best to translate the original Greek usually should be the most obvious, straightforward, unspecialized understanding of the word or phrase” (xv-xvi). Well, the vast majority of scholars who have translated Greek professionally have evidently been of the opinion that “I am” is the most obvious, straightforward, unspecialized understanding of EGW EIMI. This is not a fallacious appeal to numbers or majority or even a fallacious appeal to authority; it is simply empirical evidence as to what is and is not “obvious” in this instance. And while obviousness can be a matter of some subjectivity and disagreement (calling into question your own statement), I think it fair to say that it would be quite a stretch to argue that “I am” is not at least **an** obvious choice for translating EGW EIMI.

In the very next paragraph of your book after the one from which I just quoted, you wrote: “If the translation given is at least within the realm of possibility for the meaning of the Greek, we must grant that fact and not be too hard on the translators for preferring one possible meaning over another. But if they stretch beyond that rather generous range and reach for the truly novel, rare, or unlikely sense of the Greek, we must be very suspicious of their motives” (xvi). Yet you violate this “generous” allowance for translators to choose “one possible meaning over another” not only in your chapter on John 8:58, but several times in your book. Thus, somehow we are to gather that “worship” is a “truly novel, rare, or unlikely sense of the Greek” word PROSKUNEW—when it is applied to Christ (chapter 4); “God” is likewise a tendentious rendering of the Greek word QEOS in John 1:1c (chapter 11); and of course “am” is just plain wrong as a rendering of EIMI in John 8:58 (chapter 10). Forgive me, but this is brazen.

You wrote:

<< But once again I must challenge your assertion that the PPA must be defined "in the broadest sense" to include John 8:58. This is false. The broadest sense of the PPA would include sentences with NO temporal indicator at all, but read as PPAs because of the general literary context (such as Acts 26:31). John 8:58 has such a temporal indicator in the same sentence and in a relationship of complementarity to the verb, which is a closer relationship to the verb than that held by several of the adverbs or adverbial phrases in

other PPA examples. I have already demonstrated that your assignment of the grammars to various degrees of support for a "narrower" sense to the PPA is largely flawed. So EIMI in John 8:58 is a PPA in a widely accepted, average sense of the category. >> (p. 231)

As I have stated repeatedly, three of the four grammars that classify John 8:58 as a PPA offer a definition of the PPA that omits any reference to a temporal indicator. McKay is the sole anomaly. Yes, John 8:58 has a temporal subordinate clause that stands in some sort of relation to the main clause that contains the present-tense verb EIMI. However, this is not the sort of "temporal indicator" that flags a present-tense verb as a PPA in the "widely accepted, average sense." I explained why in my post on the significance of the subordinate clause.

My next post will complete my response to your post #18.

JASON #24 – 1/17/2005 – #16616

JASON #24

Rob,

There is precious little new in your post #23, and it is my intention to expedite the conclusion of this discussion by avoiding as much as possible continuation of simply "Yes it is/No it isn't" or "Yes I did/No you didn't" exchanges. We have sunk deep into navel-gazing mode, arguing more about our argument than about the issues we are supposed to be focused upon. So here is my answer to what I consider the most salient features in your post:

You say:

"In the rest of your post #23, you assert that I have not yet refuted your basic point," that is, that in normal, usual English syntax the be-verb does not stand alone at the end of a sentence with a preposed predicate complement, that for it to be so positioned constitutes "fractured" syntax. "I think I have done so, but I will revisit the matter in the rest of this post."

You offer very little that actually addresses this, besides two contemporary examples:

- > "While Eeyore Frets...
- > And Piglet Hesitates...
- > And Rabbit Calculates...
- > And Owl Pontificates...
- > Pooh Just *_Is_*."
- > --Benjamin Hoff, *_The Tao of Pooh_* (emphasis in original)

> "*_Everything that ever was or ever will be_ already *_exists_*.... So in God's world, all already *_is_*."*-Guy Finley, *_The Lost Secrets of Prayer_* (Llewellyn, 1998), 32, 33 (emphasis in original).

You then note:

"Perhaps you could argue that these examples are dissimilar to the conventional English translations of Psalm 89:2 LXX and John 8:58 in that the above examples italicize "is" for emphasis: "Pooh Just *_Is_*"; "all already *_is_*." I think such an "out" would be a stretch. The wording would carry essentially the same force without the italics; the use of italics simply makes more explicit or emphatic what is already evident as to the import of the word "is" in these two texts."

So you knew going in that there's something up with these two texts, something that makes them italicize the "is." That something is the recognition by the authors that they are employing "is" ungrammatically, precisely as you say for emphasis, to make a point; and when the second author wishes to state the same point with the emphasis elsewhere,

he employs "exists." So thank you for making my point for me. Now perhaps you will argue that the same is true of John 8:58, that it was written ungrammatically for emphasis. But there is nothing ungrammatical about the Greek. The the emphatic ungrammaticality (if that's a word) is introduced by the contemporary translators -- my point all along.

You then say:

"I did not say that the word *order* of most English translations of John 8:58 was unusual or odd. I said that one might fairly describe "the wording" that way. Likewise, I said that "the wording" of the Greek was unusual, not the word *order*. Here is the whole paragraph from my post #5:

- > "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" (p. 50).

Now Rob, since the context of your remarks in post 5 was our discussion of word order, it is natural to take your reference to wording in that immediate context as referring to order. But whatever you meant, the simple acknowledgment that the "wording" of the English translations as "unusual or odd" irreversibly puts the burden of proof on you to defend it, as I have said all along. No counting up of translations shifts that burden anywhere else, as I said way back at the beginning of all this, because those translations are made within tradition of translation and interpretation that make enumeration an illegitimate source of "evidence" on the question. You quote here again your assertion that the "wording" of the Greek is "unusual" and that you do not accept that that wording is "a perfectly normal Greek idiom." I have asked you repeatedly to identify precisely what is unusual and abnormal about that wording, and you have never offered an answer, of any kind, plain and simple. You say you will now answer, and I look forward to it.

In my posts from late October, I have replied to your assertion that the be-verb in John 8:58 is a predicate absolute. Addressing your claim that that is how the English "I am" is to be read, I pointed out that we do not say "I am" in English as an absolute statement, but "I exist" or some equivalent. The "am" automatically leads the reader or hearer to expect a predicate complement of some kind. I further said that for it to be an absolute "you would have to read the sentence to mean that Jesus is declaring his present existence plain and simple, not his existence in any time reference to Abraham. Since this breaks the sentence up into meaningless and decontextualized fragments, it is unacceptable. In context, Jesus is clearly saying he was already in existence at a particular point of past time, and in English this requires the dependent clause to serve as a verb complement, not an adjunct, the verb to not be read absolutely but to be completed by the sense of the

dependent clause, and a resultant shift in the verb from the simple present to the past or past progressive. (p.219)

To this, if I may so so, incredibly clear explanation, you have responded:

- > I believe the above argument misunderstands the concept of an adjunct
- > dependent clause. The adjunct cannot stand alone, but the main clause to
- > which that adjunct is related could stand alone-yet the adjunct contributes
- > something to the meaning of the whole sentence.

Pardon me, but I did not say anything about the fate of the Abraham clause, but about the main verb and the fundamental misconstrual of its meaning without the information of the Abraham clause. You cite examples of temporal adjunct expressions and dependent clauses from The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language:

- > "I read your thesis last week" (p. 694).

Great example. Drop "last week." Is there a complete sentence there? Yes. "I read your thesis." Now is it past tense "read" (red) or present tense "read" (reed)? The Grammar assumes we know, and therefore "last week" is an adjunct because the force of the main clause is unchanged by the presence or absence of the dependent clause. But it so happens that this is a rare example in written (as opposed to spoken) English where the tense of the verb is ambiguous. Drop the "last week," and the verb might be misconstrued as a present tense. So if we drop the assumption of the Grammar that the sentence is heard, all of a sudden "last week" takes on a complement rather than adjunct function, in that it gives us necessary information about the verb's significance.

Your give two other examples:

- > "When John attacked Bill the police arrested him" (p. 699).
- > "On hearing this news, he phoned his solicitor" (p. 699).

And comment:

- > Obviously, the adjunct expressions and dependent clauses in these
- > examples-"last week," "when John attacked Bill," "on hearing the
- > news"-cannot stand alone as sentences; they require the main clauses to gain
- > their meaningful context. However, the main clauses are meaningful without
- > the dependent clauses. One could write or say, "I read your thesis" or "The
- > police arrested him" or "He phoned his solicitor" and these are coherent,
- > complete sentences in their own right.

Absolutely right. Now, is "I am" a complete sentence? No it is not. All of your examples have objects of the verb, completing the action of these transitive verbs. "I exist" would be a complete sentence. But "am" leads us to expect a complement. Moreover, as in the case of "I read your thesis," the tense of the verb is COMPLETED for the reader by its relation to the dependent clause, something missed in the Grammar because they it assumes the sentence is heard rather than read. One thing you certainly cannot do is put

the tense of the verb and the temporal quality of either its adjunct or complement at odds with one another, such as:

"When John goes home, the police arrested him."

"When the news arrives, he phoned his solicitor"

These sentences don't work because they have mixed verbal tenses, precisely as you propose to do in John 8:58. This is an issue even in the case of adjuncts, all the more when the two clauses have a complementary relationship as they do in John 8:58.

In none of this, however, have you demonstrated that "am" is an absolute. You have not defended that identification here, and none of the examples you cite involve verbal absolutes. Nor have you in any way refuted my basic point about word order and the be-verb, as you said you were in this post.

So that's disposed of; let's move on.

best wishes,
Jason B.

ROB #26 – 1/17/2005 – #16620

ROB #26: GNOMIC OR STATIC PRESENT

Jason,

In this post I will complete my response to your post #18 of October 23, 2004 (message #15826 in the online archives; pp. 231-35 of our document in the Files section of this Group), which was your response to the last two sections (out of three) of my post #16 (pp. 173-74).

I. WALLACE ON THE GNOMIC PRESENT

I had quoted Wallace's description of the gnomic present. In response, you wrote:

<< This is one of the worst characterizations of the gnomic present I have ever read, which raises the question why you are taking Wallace as your authority on this. >> (p. 231)

Well, well. I believe the answer your "question" means to elicit is something like "I'm using Wallace because he's the only guy I could find to back up my position." The fact is that I cited Wallace throughout my post #16 (to which you were responding) because his discussion of the various uses of the present tense is (a) recent, (b) extensive, (c) part of a highly regarded reference work, and (d) illustrative of a number of points that I have made about the categories of uses of the Greek present. As I shall note below, Wallace is not alone in this matter.

Since you later acknowledge that you don't have a copy of Wallace and are relying on my quotation, let me give a more complete quotation of the relevant portion:

*****BEGIN QUOTE FROM WALLACE*****

1. Definition

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.' [Williams, Grammar Notes, 27] The action or state continues without time limits. The verb is used 'in proverbial statements or general maxims about what occurs at all times.' [Fanning, Verbal Aspect, 208] This usage is common.

2. Semantics and Semantic Situations

The gnomic present is distinct from the customary present in that the customary present refers to a regularly recurring action while the gnomic present refers to a general, timeless fact. It is distinct from the stative present (a subcategory of the

customary) in that the stative present involves a temporal restriction while the gnomic present is generally atemporal.

There are two predominant situations in which the gnomic present occurs. [See Fanning, Verbal Aspect, 208-17, for seminal work in this regard.] 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. There is a second kind of gnomic, slightly different in definition: the use of the present in generic statements to describe something that is true any time (rather than a universal statement that is true all the time). [Fanning, 209] This kind of gnomic present is more common.

Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 523.

*****END QUOTE FROM WALLACE*****

Please note also that I had previously cited the above passage as found on pages 521, 523, and this was a mistake; the entire quote comes from page 523.

Wallace goes on to focus on what he calls (following Fanning) the second, more common kind of gnomic present, the “generic” kind that describes “something that is true any time.” The fact that generic gnomics are far more common explains why grammars that give very short comments about the gnomic present refer exclusively to the generic gnomic and do not bother to make the distinction (e.g., Moule’s Idiom Book, the only grammar that you cited).

Now, your criticism of Wallace’s description of the gnomic present as the worst you have ever read may reflect in part on my not having given you a complete enough quotation. I assumed that you had Wallace and could read the entire section. I’m not sure if you’ll change your mind about Wallace’s description after getting a more complete account. In places you assert that Wallace is wrong or “careless,” and in other places you claim that I have misunderstood Wallace. My guess is that you won’t like Wallace’s view once you’ve understood it, but I expect you’ll let us know either way.

The bottom line of most of your comments is that the gnomic use pertains only to statements of what is proverbially true or true at any time. Thus, gnomic presents are of the type exemplified by such statements as “A good tree **bears** good fruit” or “God **knows** what you need.” These statements mean that whenever there is a good tree, it bears good fruit; whenever you have a need, God knows what it is. The first statement does not mean that a good tree eternally bears good fruit, and of course good trees do no such thing; the second statement does not mean that God eternally knows what you need, although that may be true. The brunt of your criticism at this point is that the gnomic does not express an action or state that obtains continuously at all times (pp. 231-33).

You may disagree with him, but Wallace clearly does distinguish two kinds of gnomic presents. The kind that you recognize is the kind that Wallace says is the most common, what he calls the “generic” type of gnomic present. But Wallace’s first, less common kind of gnomic present is what he says occurs in “universal” statements. These

statements “are true all the time” as distinguished from statements that are “true any time.”

By the way, Wallace derives this distinction from Buist Fanning’s study Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek, published by Oxford University Press in 1990 (see Fanning, 208-17). In turn, Fanning cites John Lyons’s highly influential book Semantics (Cambridge University Press, 1977) for the distinction (and overlap) between gnomic and generic statements (Fanning, 209 n. 15, citing Lyons, 680-82). Your dismissal of Wallace’s treatment as the worst you have ever read might be worth rethinking.

The two examples that Wallace gives in his description (quoted above) of the universal type of gnomic present are “the wind blows” and “God loves.” Regarding these examples, you wrote:

<< Because the examples he gives are limited to characterizations, that is, statements about the nature of the thing, they give a false impression about all gnomic statements. ‘The wind blows’ is a bad example because wind and blowing are the same thing. If you said “The air blows,” then you can see that this is a gnomic present and true, but not continuously true. >> (p. 233)

You may have a point here, though it is debatable. I see the problem in a somewhat different way, though, than you do. Wind and blowing are not the same thing; wind is a particular kind of blowing. All wind is blowing, but not all blowing is wind. (If I blow air out of my mouth, that isn’t wind.) “The wind blows” could be construed as a “generic” statement, not a universal one. Whenever and wherever there is wind, that wind blows. On the other hand, one might support Wallace’s categorization here on the grounds that “the wind” is always blowing *somewhere* on the earth; wind is a constant, continual phenomenon.

You wrote:

<< Going back to deity, it is a gnomic present to say “God knows what you need before you ask for it.” But it is not a gnomic present to say “God knew me before I was born.” Both of these sentences have “before” clauses. In the first case, the “before” clause refers to an action that occurs repeatedly, at any time, past, present, or future, thus making the action of the main verb repeated “omnitemporally,” at each occurrence of the circumstance referred to in the “before” clause, and hence gnomic. In the second case, the “before” clause indicates a specific PAST event, and so the main verb is not extended over multiple, customary occasions, and hence is not gnomic. >> (p. 233)

For some reason, you didn’t address Wallace’s other example, “God loves,” at all. Instead, you contrasted two statements about God knowing, one of which you say is gnomic and the other not. I will address those examples, but first I must point out that “God loves” is an excellent example of the “universal” type of gnomic present. The statement means that it is always true that God loves. Specific biblical examples of this statement are found in 1 John: “God is [ESTIN] love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Paul’s statement,

“God loves [AGAPA] a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7), is also clearly gnomic, though I think one could debate whether to classify it as universal or generic (I would classify it as generic). The Old Testament has some examples like these:

“He loves charity and justice” (Ps. 33:5 [32:5 Gk.]).

“For the Lord loves justice” (Ps. 37:28 [36:28 Gk.]).

“For the Lord loves mercy and truth” (Ps. 84:11 [84:12 Heb.; 83:12 Gk.]).

The above seem best construed as universal gnomic presents: they express what God always is like, not merely what God is like at the time of speaking. I grant, though, that one **could** construe them as generic gnomics. On this exegesis, the Psalmist is saying that the Lord loves it any time when human beings show charity, justice, mercy, or truth. Since either way of reading these statements implies the other, the line between universal and generic gnomics here is awfully thin. I do think a text like the following would more definitely be a generic gnomic:

“The Lord looses the fetters;
The Lord gives wisdom to the blind;
The Lord sets up the broken down;
The Lord loves the righteous;
The Lord preserves the strangers...” (Ps. 146:7-8 [145:7-8 Gk.]).

Here are some other examples:

“The Most High dwells [KATOIKEI] not in places made by human hands” (Acts 7:48; also 17:24).

“The Spirit searches [ERAUNA] all things” (1 Cor. 2:10).

“God is [ESTIN] not tempted by evil, and he tempts [PEIRAZEI] no one” (James 1:13).

“God...knows [GINWSKEI] all things” (1 John 3:20).

I grant that some of these occurrences might be classified as customary presents (1 Cor. 2:10; James 1:13), but in any case the line between the customary and the universal gnomic would be very thin in such texts. Nor do I think one can eliminate the category of universal gnomic by reclassifying all of these texts as customary presents, unless the customary present is broadened to include verbs expressing states that are always, continuously true—which amounts to letting the universal gnomic in through a side door.

Now, let’s look at your examples. “God knows what you need before you ask for it.” This could be construed as a “generic” type of gnomic present: on those occasions (past, present, or future) that you happen to ask for something you need, at any such occasion God knows before you ask. However, the sense might be that God **always** knows your need—even before you ask for it. Taken in that way, the verb could be construed as a universal type of gnomic present. In any case, we agree that “knows” in this occurrence is a gnomic present (as in the similar sentence in Matthew 6:8).

On the other hand, you deny that “knew” is gnomic in the sentence, “God knew me before I was born.” Well, given this English sentence, obviously “knew” cannot be a gnomic present because it is not a present-tense verb. (Might you be begging the question here as to how a Greek text using the present tense in this place should be translated?) What, though, of the sentence, “God knows me before I am born”? This sentence is grammatically parallel to your first example. There is a difference, one you pointed out in setting forth your two examples. In “God knows what you need before you ask,” you write, “the ‘before’ clause refers to an action that occurs repeatedly, at any time, past, present, or future.” In “God knows me before I am born” (to use my more grammatically parallel example), “the ‘before’ clause indicates a specific PAST event,” namely, the birth of the speaker. This difference, I think, clearly proves that “knows” in “God knows me before I am born” cannot be a *generic* gnomic. However, it does not preclude that “knows” in such a sentence cannot be a *universal* gnomic. At the least, the sense of the sentence is consistent with such a classification: to say “God knows me before I am born” would seem to be another way of saying “God *always* knows (or, “has always known”) me, even before I was born.” If this is not gnomic, it is something very much like it. Of course, we are here indirectly revisiting Jeremiah 1:5; I will have more to say about this verse in my response to you on that subject in a later post.

I would rather not get bogged down in a discussion of the meaning of such terms as “timeless” and “omnitemporal” (see your comments, p. 231). My comment about the word “timeless” possibly being confusing to some had reference to the fact that some people interpret the word “timeless” as a description of God to mean that God is “outside of time,” meaning that God does not participate in actual moments of time. This is not how most orthodox Christians use the word, but the confusion exists, and I was actually trying to avoid that confusion. If one understands “timeless” to mean not limited to any one specific point or period of time, the word is serviceable in this discussion, though it could still be ambiguous. A proverbial statement like “Dead men tell no tales” is “timeless” in that it applies at any time, though not literally at all times in a continuous or permanent sense. “God knows all things” is a statement of what is true continuously at all times; some would express this point by saying that it is “timelessly” true, but it does not matter to me one bit whether we use the term in this way or not. What is important is to recognize the distinction between the two kinds of statements.

I had written:

“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).”

You commented:

<< You are here committing the fallacy of postulating a distinct theological grammar, that the semantic significance of grammar and syntax is different in theological discourse than in non-theological discourse. This is the foundation of the circularity inherent in modern Christian reading of the Bible. It views the Bible as insufficient to convey its meaning in its chosen language of communication, which was not any sort of special

theological grammar, but the regular and ordinary grammar of the Greek of the time. >>
(pp. 231-32)

I disagree. Rather than “postulating a distinct theological grammar,” I am recognizing distinct uses of the same grammar in different contexts. The act of assigning an unqualified “timelessness” to statements about God and not to statements about nature is not arbitrary or theologically question-begging but arises from a consideration of these statements in their differing contexts. Likewise, I do not base my interpretation of John 8:58 solely on the grammatical features of the text in the abstract but in relation to the immediate context in John 8 and the associations that Jesus’ statement evokes in its Jewish theological context.

II. DANA & MANTEY ON THE STATIC PRESENT

Here again is what Dana and Mantey wrote about “the static present”:
“_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). (H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1957], 186.)

In my earlier post dealing with this subject, I had commented:

“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.’”

You replied:

<< THEY do not consider this usage "formally similar or analogous to the PPA," YOU do. They put it in a completely different class, one in which the progressive character of the present tense is not prominent. You assume they assign what others consider a PPA to the `static' category, and that is why you conclude what you do. But this turns out to be not true of two out of three examples, and the third is just a misunderstanding on their part (see below). >>

You have either missed or chosen to ignore the statement that Dana and Mantey made that was the basis for my comment. Regarding the static present, they wrote: “This use is practically THE PRESENT OF DURATION APPLIED TO A VERB OF BEING.” There it is, explicitly comparing the static present to the present of duration and saying that the former is “practically” the latter applied to a verb of being.

To try to disprove my point—though you cannot do so if you ignore the evidence I present for my point—you claim that Dana and Mantey assign the PPA and the static present to completely different classes and that the static present is assigned to a category “in which the progressive character of the present tense is not prominent.” Only by sleight of hand can such a claim seem persuasive. Dana and Mantey divide uses of the present tense into two categories, “Regular Uses” and “Special Uses.” In the regular uses (progressive, which includes the present of duration; customary; and iterative) the “fundamental idea of progress is especially patent” (Dana and Mantey, 182). In the special uses “the root idea is not so evidently patent”; these “are not of so frequent occurrences as the regular uses” (184). But patent and prominent are not the same. Thus, whereas most of Dana and Mantey’s “special uses” do not convey a progressive or linear force (the aoristic, futuristic, historical, and tendential uses, 184-86), they explicitly state that the static present DOES express such an idea: It represents “a condition which is assumed as perpetually existing.... The idea of progress in a verb of action finds its natural counterpart in an idea of perpetual state in a verb of being” (186, already quoted above). If there is a distinction between progressive and perpetual, it is that a perpetual state is even more extended through time than a progressive one; or it may be a distinction between a state of being and an action. In any case, Dana and Mantey explicitly state that the static present is essentially the same as a present of duration applied to a verb that expresses a state of being.

I had written:

“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.”

You ignored my second sentence and offered to answer the first. You explained that “You have been with me from the beginning” in John 15:27 is the present of duration (PPA) while “you bear witness” is the static present. You then comment, “However, I think this usage here is basically the same as the descriptive present.” I do not think this explanation will work. Here is the entire sentence:

“When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will witness about me, and you witness also, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

I see only two ways to construe “witness” (MARTUREITE) in verse 27. We may construe it as a futuristic present, conforming it in sense to the future indicative “he will witness” in verse 26. This is how the verb is translated in the NKJV, NASB, and other versions. The other choice is to construe it as an imperative, which is how it is translated in the NIV and other versions. The NRSV retains the ambiguity with its rendering “you also are to testify.” Neither of these choices understands the verb as a descriptive present. Nor do I see any plausible way that Dana and Mantey might have construed the verb as a static present expressing a “perpetually existing” state. So, I doubt they had

MARTUREITE in mind when listing John 15:27 as a static present, though it appears there is no way to prove they did or did not.

The situation is similar with their citation of 1 John 3:8. Since there are two present-tense indicative verbs in that verse and Dana and Mantey do not specify one of them, we cannot be certain which one they meant. And again, neither of them works as a static present. “The one committing sin is [ESTIN] of the devil” may be gnomic, as you said, but it is clearly not expressing a static situation or perpetual state (so, if gnomic, it must be generic, not universal). “The devil sins [hAMARTANEI] from the beginning” is the better candidate for a verb expressing something of relatively perpetual duration, though not, as I pointed out, a perpetual state. Still, given their description of the static present, it seems more likely that Dana and Mantey were referring to hAMARTANEI, though we cannot be certain either way.

Regarding 2 Peter 3:4, I wrote:

“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.”

You replied:

<< False. If 2 Peter 3:4 involved a gnomic (or "static") present, then it would be saying that all things have AND WILL remain the same from the beginning of creation. Because as a "timeless fact" it is ALWAYS TRUE. "All things [always] remain the same"(!). >> (p. 235)

Indeed! That is exactly what Peter is representing the scoffers as saying! They are scoffing at the idea that creation will be radically changed in the Second Coming of which Christians speak because it appears to them that everything just continues the same. Therefore DIAMENEI (“remains,” “continues”) in context expresses the idea of things always staying the same, “that all things have AND WILL remain the same,” as you put it.

The fact that the KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV all translate DIAMENEI in 2 Peter 3:4 using an English present tense lends considerable support to my point here. Clearly, these translators understood DIAMENEI along the same lines as Dana and Mantey and NOT as a PPA.

Now, your argument for bias in the conventional translations of John 8:58 is that these versions, in adopting that rendering, deviate from the way they translate similar verses. Yet I have cited other verses where many of these same versions also translate in the present tense a verse that you claim should be construed as a PPA. 2 Peter 3:4 is one of these. You have plainly stated that you think Dana and Mantey are wrong about 2 Peter

3:4; well, you then must also say the same thing about the KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV. Knock yourself out! But the fact that these versions translate 2 Peter 3:4 as they do undermines your argument that they handle John 8:58 in an unprecedented and skewered way. Brenton's translation of Psalm 89:2 LXX is another example. I just don't think the evidence supports your strong claim that the present-tense verbs in these texts **MUST** be interpreted as PPAs and **MUST** be translated using a form of the English past tense.

I stand by my conclusion to my post #16:

“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” (174).

Furthermore, I conclude that 2 Peter 3:4 is an especially good example of the point.

JASON #25 – 1/18/2005 – #16623
JASON #25: REVISITATION OF THE PPA

Rob,

In your message #24 you restate four basic summations of what the grammars say about the PPA, in a much less tendentious way than you did in your post 6. Well and good. The point I have been making since your post 6 is that you tend to read the grammars as restrictive. If their examples are simple adverbs or adverb phrases, you argued, they must intend to restrict the PPA to these forms alone. I have argued that this conclusion is fallacious, that the statistical preponderance of these more simple constructions using simple adverbs and adverbial phrases is prone to dominate any list of examples a grammarian may provide. Many of these grammars cite very few examples, so the handful of more complex clausal constructions are quite likely to be left out. That's my point, and it holds. I would maintain that those grammars whose characterization of the PPA refers only to adverbs and adverb phrases have been carelessly phrased here; again, the preponderance of such constructions has made their authors neglectful of other recognized forms.

You wish to conclude:

"* There is no consensus in the Greek grammars that would put beyond controversy the claim that John 8:58 is a clear example of a PPA."

If you mean unanimity, you should not hold your breath waiting for it from grammarians. "Consensus" is a bit vaguer, and disputable. In fact, NONE OF THE GRAMMARS EXPRESSLY EXCLUDE CLAUSAL CONSTRUCTIONS. Some neglect to mention such constructions. But that is to be expected in a set of grammars of varying depth, breadth, and quality.

You continue:

"The only way I can see for you to salvage your stronger claim, while admitting the above three conclusions, is to insist that any Greek grammar that implicitly or explicitly excludes John 8:58 from the category of the PPA is definitely, clearly wrong, too: they also are ignoring clear facts. If you wish to take that stance, please let us all know."

Please note that ONLY TWO GRAMMARS APPARENTLY EXPRESSLY EXCLUDE JOHN 8:58 AS A PPA. I have already said that Robsertson is wrong when he says that EIMI in John 8:58 is "really absolute." It is simply a mistake on his part. And note that this comment occurs in his discussion of what we are calling the PPA; he does not cite John 8:58 under any other category of verbal use, including any of the alternative forms you wish to invoke to explain the verse. As for Wallace, I have not been able to obtain a copy of this grammar. But perhaps you could help me here. I notice that you cite his discussion of the PPA from page 519, but cite his remark on John 8:58 from page 531

n.46. What is the context of this note? And can you give us word for word what he says in it? On the other hand, you have taken the position that four grammars (Turner, BDF, Winer, & McKay) are wrong to include John 8:58 without caveat among the examples of the PPA.

You go on to say:

"Three of those four, by your own account in the first point, do not make any sort of temporal indicator a requirement for the PPA (Winer, Turner, BDF), so their inclusion of John 8:58 does not imply that in their view the dependent clause in John 8:58 fulfills that function. To be more precise, Winer and Turner say nothing about such a temporal indicator and so we can draw no inference at all about it from their citation of John 8:58."

I beg your pardon, but aren't you the same person who uses the cited examples of grammars as complementary evidence of what they mean by their definitions? As I have pointed out, this is legitimate to do as an indicator of what sort of forms are included, but not of what are excluded, from their definition. The fact that these two grammars give extremely basic and broad characterizations of the PPA does not relieve us from identifying what in the context of the verb indicates to the reader a PPA use. Winer, in fact, in expressly comparing John 8:58 to Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalm 89:2 LXX indicates the common construction involved, which is the clausal construction of modification. But you of course have said that Winer is wrong about all of these passages.

Now I have criticized in detail problems with your various numerations and scorings of where the grammars fall on the question of the PPA. It was you, not I, who introduced such statistical arguments into the discussion. Now, however, you claim:

"I was not in the least attempting to determine whether a majority of the grammars favored a broad or a narrow definition. I was not attempting to argue for a narrow definition as opposed to a broad one on the grounds that a majority of grammars employed a narrow definition."

Well, then I must apologize on behalf of all of us, or nearly all of us, who thought that counting which grammars you saw as favoring your view versus those you thought could be seen to be in line with mine, was a method of argument on your part. I can't imagine what we were thinking.

You say:

"I set out explicitly and quite plainly what I intended to prove in my post #14, which you completely bypassed on your last round of posts (pp. 169-70). . . I'll repeat what I wrote in post #14 (pp. 169-70) with some additional comments in light of the above considerations.

* Definitions of the PPA range from very broad to very narrow, with some definitions exhibiting a mix of broad and narrow aspects. This is still clearly the case.

* The broadest definitions of the PPA appear in three of the four grammars that listed John 8:58 as an example. That's still true as well: Winer, Turner, and BDF are at the broad end of the spectrum (joined now by Goodwin); McKay is still the one anomaly."

But I did address this in my critique, which you consider irrelevant. I pointed out that some of the things on which you compiled scores were arbitrary and not really indicative of where grammars fall on a single scale, that is, that you combined very mixed variables in a crude and oversimplifying manner. So the above two claims are largely meaningless. What you term "broad" I could just as well term "most precise in inclusivity of possible forms."

You go on:

"* 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. This is all still quite true; your critique does not even begin to refute it. etc."

First, you have dismissed as a supposed "straw man" (and therefore avoided answering) my point that whether a grammar happens to remark on how to translate a form is a completely independent variable from what you term "broad" or "narrow" definition or any other thing you score. It has more to do with whether a grammar is written primarily with translators in mind or primarily for those who are studying materials in Greek without thought of producing a translation. So your attempt to correlate breadth of definition with remarks on how to translate is without merit, as I said in October. Such a correlation is essential to your claim, and not in any sense a "straw man," as you now say. Second, you avoid any comment on the fact that those who do comment on translation assume a past rendering as the norm, which clearly puts your position against the tide. Third, this issue relates to my point about verbal tense complementarity in John 8:58. You have never even attempted to contradict me (and rightly so) that English sentences require a certain verbal tense complementarity, and this is something most translations of John 8:59 violate. The only way you had open to you to avoid this issue was to try to split the sentence up, and claim that the two clauses had nothing to do with each other grammatically (which is what would be the implication if EIMI were an "absolute"). But you have acknowledged that this cannot be done, because the dependent clause cannot stand alone. As I pointed out in October, your entire argument about EIMI as an absolute is muddled by lapses in your understanding of the term and of the status of the be-verb in both Greek and English.

best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #26 – 1/19/2005 – #16629

JASON #26

Rob,

You have now completed your replies to my post #17, so I would just like to refer our readers back to that post to review what I said there, none of which has been set aside by your replies to a handful of isolated comments. The bulk of my criticisms were passed over with neither acknowledgment nor attempted rebuttal, and so we can consider that we both feel enough has been said on those topics.

As for your post #25, I also feel that I have little to add to what I said in my post #18 to which your comments are intended to reply. Thank you for explaining Wallace's usage of "broad-band" and "narrow-band." In my post #18 I questioned why you were using Wallace as your primary source for your discussion of these issues, when he seems to phrase things in problematic ways even for you. I have since been forwarded other passages from Wallace from one of our readers which show him mixing theological and linguistic analysis in a way which shows him not to be adhering to strictly grammatical principles in his grammar.

You say:

"I have simply argued that on the broader definitions of the PPA, one cannot claim that all PPA verbs *must* be translated using a form of the past tense. That's it!"

And I have shown that the way you arrive at that conclusion is fallacious. That's it.

You say:

"I didn't advocate lumping the PPA with those other usages in the sense of claiming that they can all be translated in the same way. You are missing the point still."

Rob, that is precisely what you were claiming, precisely what you were aiming to show, that John 8:58 can be translated in the same way as those other usages. We all have been watching you make that claim.

I had asked:

<< Do you dispute that EIMI is temporally modified in John 8:58? Think carefully before you answer, because it has serious consequences for your position. >>

To which you replied:

"In the sense that you mean by "temporally modified," yes, I do dispute it. You mean modified to denote existence in one specific temporal aspect (from the past into the present). (I am not here using "aspect" in the modern technical linguistic sense.) The wording of John 8:58 goes beyond that temporal aspect. Of course, I do not dispute the claim that the dependent clause is meaningfully related to the main clause."

Either it is modified or it is not. If it is modified, it is modified in the direction indicated by the temporal clause. If it is not modified, then it has no other significance than the simple present. Take your pick.

You say:

"On the broader definitions of the PPA, any present-tense verb that expresses a state that obtained in the past and continues to obtain in the present is a PPA. But not all such verbs are justifiably translated using an English past tense verb. The sentence $\eta\omicron$ QEOS AGAPH ESTIN fits this definition, because what it says that God "is" obtained in the past and continues in the present, but it would be unjustifiable to translate this sentence "God has been love."

Who has ever defined the PPA as you do here? Who has ever cited 1 John 4:8 as a PPA? You are creating a straw man here.

You say:

"I have argued that renderings like those found in the LB or NWT, particularly in the context of a simplified English paraphrase or idiomatic version, are *possible* options but lose something important in the translation and are not *the best* rendering in a "literal" or primarily word-for-word kind of translation, such as the NWT purports to be."

You have failed to demonstrate this claim.

You say:

"I am arguing for a translation of the text that preserves the connections between this and other sayings of Jesus utilizing the unpredicated EGW EIMI. I am arguing for a translation of the text that conveys the Old Testament allusions of this and other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus, especially those in Isaiah."

In other words, you are arguing for an interpretation, a hypothesized doctrinal connection between passages, while bisecting the sentence right in front of you into unrelated segments. This is scarcely a legitimate procedure in translation.

You say:

"Besides, most people who read Greek simply disagree with your claim that rendering EIMI in John 8:58 as "am" rather than "have been" is somehow interpretive to the point of being suspect as evidence of bias."

A lovely bit of completely hollow rhetoric there, Rob. Yes, please do compile statistics on what "most people who read Greek" think about this sentence.

You say:

"And while obviousness can be a matter of some subjectivity and disagreement (calling into question your own statement), I think it fair to say that it would be quite a stretch to argue that "I am" is not at least *an* obvious choice for translating EGW EIMI."

There you go again, dissing poor old Abraham. Rob, please pay attention: the rest of the sentence! So now, if as appears obvious by you continually falling back to it, you are saying that EGW EIMI is a self-standing, independent, absolute clause, then you MUST do two things:

(1) accept that the verb here is a simple present, with no temporal modification, and so no reference to "eternality" -- Jesus is simply saying "I exist" at the moment. Great news!

(2) find an alternative way to complete the syntax of the "before" clause, which you will have to combine with the previous clause, I suppose: "Truly, truly, I have been saying (LEGW as a PPA) to you since before Abraham was born, 'I exist.'" Hey, Rob, that's not bad. You might like that. Think about it. It's still not what the traditional translation has done.

best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #27 – 1/22/2005 – #16651

JASON #27

Rob,

Your post #26 continues your comments on my post #18. Once again I refer our readers to that post of mine, and will try not to duplicate here the arguments made there, all of which remain secure and valid after your comments, as far as I'm concerned.

I had remarked on the definition of the gnomonic present which you extracted from Wallace, that it was "one of the worst characterizations of the gnomonic present I have ever read." Now that you supply the whole section from Wallace, I can see that you left out of your original extract everything that would make it clear that he is seeking to distinguish two different applications of the gnomonic. Because what you quoted gave the appearance that he was characterizing all gnomonics in a way that he meant to only characterize a very special and rare use, I thought his definition badly phrased. Since most other grammars define gnomonic in the "generic" or "customary" sense of something true not eternally but regularly (any time rather than all the time), I objected to how Wallace was presenting the category, although in those bits you quoted where he was speaking of the broader gnomonic category, I was able to show how you were seemingly missing the regular rather than eternal character of time in the gnomonic use. It is now clear that you wish to invoke only the proposed "universal" subcategory of the gnomonic.

Whatever the merits of Wallace's presentation on the gnomonic, he doesn't identify John 8:58 as one, does he? Instead, he apparently offers only two hypothetical sentences: "The wind blows" and "God loves." I do not agree with you that Wallace means the first sentence to suggest that, "'the wind' is always blowing *somewhere* on the earth; wind is a constant, continual phenomenon." Rather, it means that it is characteristic of wind to blow; blowing is part of the nature or a defining feature of wind. I think everyone can see how close this is to the generic or customary application of the gnomonic. But let me leave that example behind, because I think our readers have seen enough wind from us.

Of course the second example is also only a hypothetical rather than actual sentence. You deal with this by the kindness of supplying what you regard as actual examples of what Wallace means from the Bible. Now here's the problem: in Wallace's hypothetical, "God loves," the statement can only be taken as aimed at the nature or character of God "universally," precisely because no conditioning circumstance qualifies the idea. So you are right about it, "that 'God loves' is an excellent example of the 'universal' type of gnomonic present. The statement means that it is always true that God loves."

But what about actual Greek sentences? You give several:

"God is [ESTIN] love" (1 John 4:8, 16)."

This does indeed make a statement about the nature or character of the subject, in the typical Greek fashion of subject + copula + predicate noun. The simple copula is atemporal in such constructs. In other words, if I substitute another subject, such as "A kiss is love," we would agree that what is being said is that it is of the nature of a kiss to have a loving quality. This is gnomic because the statement presents it as true generally, any time. "This is my body" would be another actual example of this construct from the Bible. Atemporality is not the same as eternity. The idea that atemporality should be converted into eternity comes from your theological concepts about the subject of the sentence, rather than from the grammar of the sentence, which does not provide so much specificity. The statement MAY be true eternally, but that is interpretation, not translation. Obviously, since "is" is used here as a copula, it does not provide a parallel to John 8:58.

You go on to cite:

"God loves [AGAPA] a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7)

"He loves charity and justice" (Ps. 33:5 [32:5 Gk.]).

"For the Lord loves justice" (Ps. 37:28 [36:28 Gk.]).

"For the Lord loves mercy and truth" (Ps. 84:11 [84:12 Heb.; 83:12 Gk.]).

"The Lord looses the fetters;

The Lord gives wisdom to the blind;

The Lord sets up the broken down;

The Lord loves the righteous;

The Lord preserves the strangers..." (Ps. 146:7-8 [145:7-8 Gk.]).

Of course, these all employ transitive verbs with objects, so are not grammatically parallel to John 8:58. As you yourself recognize, these are really classic gnomics. They state God's feelings whenever the condition occurs, whenever there is a cheerful give, or whenever there are acts of charity, justice, mercy, and truth, or they state what God habitually does. The same is true of:

"The Spirit searches [ERAUNA] all things" (1 Cor. 2:10).

"God is [ESTIN] not tempted by evil, and he tempts [PEIRAZEI] no one" (James 1:13).

Grammatically, the first clause of the James example is a close parallel to that quoted from 1 John above: subject + copula + predicate adjective, so nothing like John 8:58.

You then cite:

"The Most High dwells [KATOIKEI] not in places made by human hands" (Acts 7:48; also 17:24).

But why don't you quote alongside of this Acts 4:16 "All those who dwell [KATOIKOUSIN] in Jerusalem," or 19:17 "All the Jews and Greeks who dwell [KATOUKOUSIN] in Ephesus"? Grammatically these are all simple presents. You CAN take your example as gnomic in the sense of atemporally expressing what is characteristic of God, but this is equally true of the "New heavens and new earth" in which righteousness "dwells [KATOIKEI]" (2 Peter 3:13) -- and they do not even exist

yet at the time the statement is made. So atemporal because the usage is not concerned with WHEN, but with WHAT -- but you cannot leap from that to eternally true on the basis of the grammar and syntax. Similarly atemporal is the statement:

"God knows [GINWSKEI] all things" (1 John 3:20).

So let's cut to the chase. You would like "I am" to belong in this "universal" category of the gnomic, and then we can quibble about the difference between atemporal characterizations of the subject and eternal ones. But we can't even get there, for the simple reason that EGW EIMI does not appear absolutely or in isolation so that we would be brought to read it as gnomic. It exists in a syntactical relation to the dependent clause which is determinative of the significance of EIMI. Until you succeed in prying EGW EIMI apart from the rest of the sentence in John 8:58, you have no other argument to make. This is really the deal breaker for us in this discussion, because you keep wanting to read EGW EIMI apart from the PRIN complement, even though you admit that they are part of the same sentence. You just can't do that in Greek grammar and syntax.

Even if we were, strictly for the sake of argument, to isolate the EGW EIMI, your universal gnomic "I exist" sentence would mean simply that it is in the nature of the speaker to exist. I can think of few more superfluous claims in any language. What you keep forgetting is that the only thing that makes us give any temporal quality to this verb other than the simple present value is its modification by the "before Abraham" clause. So your efforts to keep reading the verb in isolation from that clause only defeat your interpretive goals. This relates to another point which those who read this verse in English fall prey to, and that is thinking that the stress in this sentence is on the "I am." Actually, in Greek, the last position in the sentence is precisely the unstressed position for a verb. The dependent clause is preposed here to emphasize it; that's what is supposed to be stressed in the statement, the "before Abraham"(!).

In my post #18, I had written:

"It is a gnomic present to say "God knows what you need before you ask for it." But it is not a gnomic present to say "God knew me before I was born." Both of these sentences have "before" clauses. In the first case, the "before" clause refers to an action that occurs repeatedly, at any time, past, present, or future, thus making the action of the main verb repeated "omnitemporally," at each occurrence of the circumstance referred to in the "before" clause, and hence gnomic. In the second case, the "before" clause indicates a specific PAST event, and so the main verb is not extended over multiple, customary occasions, and hence is not gnomic."

To this you reply:

"[Y]ou deny that "knew" is gnomic in the sentence, "God knew me before I was born." Well, given this English sentence, obviously "knew" cannot be a gnomic present because it is not a present-tense verb. . . . What, though, of the sentence, "God knows me before I am born"? This sentence is grammatically parallel to your first example."

But Rob, we do not have this sentence in the Bible. So obviously you can make up anything, but let's stick to the evidence at hand.

You say:

"In "God knows me before I am born" . . . the 'before' clause indicates a specific PAST event, namely, the birth of the speaker."

Not in English, Rob. You simply don't say "before I AM born" with a past meaning in English. You are constructing a fictional grammar. And you seem to just skip over the point that when the event is unique, and not repeated, that is not what we have been calling "gnomic."

I had pointed out your repeated commitment of the fallacy of "postulating a distinct theological grammar." To this you object that it is legitimate to "not base my interpretation of John 8:58 solely on the grammatical features of the text in the abstract but in relation to the immediate context in John 8 and the associations that Jesus' statement evokes in its Jewish theological context."

Absolutely. But Rob, if you can't see that what you are talking about is interpretation, not translation, then I can't help you.

YOU had claimed that Dana & Mantey "use this term 'static present' to refer to a usage of the present that is formally similar or analogous to the PPA," to which I objected, "THEY do not consider this usage 'formally similar or analogous to the PPA,' YOU do. They put it in a completely different class, one in which the progressive character of the present tense is not prominent. You assume they assign what others consider a PPA to the 'static' category, and that is why you conclude what you do." My criticism stands. You had misconstrued their references to examples of the PPA and on that basis argued that the PPA overlaps with their static category. Now you say the basis for your argument was their remark "This use is practically the present of duration applied to a verb of being" (Dana and Mantey, 186). But this is quite different than "formally similar or analogous," the wording you chose, and you will recall that I questioned the ambiguity of your phrasing. The "analogy" they make is between how a present tense carries a sense of "progress" in its "regular uses" (which include the PPA), and that these run parallel to non-progressive "special uses" where "the root idea is not so evidently patent" (184). My criticism was that their "static" category was classified among the latter, and their comment which you now stress is not meant to suggest overlap of the two uses. Rather, the reason why the "static" is "static," and therefore does NOT have a progressive quality, is that it lacks temporal specificity. Please review their examples. "You bear witness" (John 15:27); "The one who commits sin is from the devil" (1 John 3:8). The latter is fairly much just a classic gnomic use. The first is atemporal, in that the verb doesn't carry specific temporal reference. I have no idea how Dana & Mantey can say these verbs have a "perpetual" value to them. I don't think that is a very good choice of expression. "Abiding" might have been better. They certainly don't mean "perpetual" in the sense of "eternal," as their examples make clear. What they must mean, given where the "static" falls in their system, is that it is a "state" whose temporal aspect is not in

view, rather than something that is temporally fixed, and so happening in reference to time.

Your difficulty in accepting my identification of the verbs to which Dana & Mantey are referring in their examples of the "static" (which, as you will recall was a solution to the troubling appearance of them contradictorily citing the same verb under distinct usages) comes from their poor word choice "perpetual," and your inclination to read this as "eternal." But once you consider what "static" means, and where this category is placed in Dana & Mantey's breakdown of the uses of the present, it becomes clear that they mean atemporal, where the verb is not meant to provide temporal information, but something that just is (to coin a phrase) without concern for when it is. If, when you look at the clauses where they apparently invoke the static, you don't think their definition and distinction of the static holds up, you are only agreeing with me, since from the very beginning I contended that they were getting a bit carried away in multiplying supposedly distinct uses.

Dana & Mantey's third example (2 Peter 3:4) has been treated at length before by me, explaining why it cannot possibly have a "perpetual" significance. I had pointed out that, "If 2 Peter 3:4 involved a gnomic (or "static") present, then it would be saying that all things have AND WILL remain the same from the beginning of creation. Because as a "timeless fact" it is ALWAYS TRUE. "All things [always] remain the same"(!)."

To this you reply:

"Indeed! That is exactly what Peter is representing the scoffers as saying!"

There you go again, Rob, blithely ignoring the presence of a modifying dependent clause, "from when the ancestors fell asleep," which is crucial in the context to establishing the meaning that from then until now this is the "state" of things: as they were from the beginning of creation. They might be implying that things will go on that way, but the grammar of the sentence only states what has been the case from then until now. So once again, your interpretation invades your translation. But you want to use this verse as a particularly good example for arguing how it is and should be translated using a present tense English form, despite the temporal modification of the "since" clauses. I would contend it is a bad example, not because the underlying Greek is different than that of John 8:58, but due to the idiomatic interchangeability in English of "remains" and "has remained." That is, both "The song remains the same," and "The song has remained the same" have the same meaning in English, because this English verb has a progressive quality in its root meaning. The same is not true of the be-verb, and that is why you have to choose one form or the other, depending on indications in the underlying Greek of whether the be-ing is punctiliar (or atemporal) or progressive.

In any case, I accept that we agree to disagree on all this, and I am satisfied with the arguments I have made.

best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #28 – 1/22/2005 – #16652

JASON #28: Question of Clarification

Rob,

Perhaps now would be an appropriate time to ask a clarifying question, since I for one am having difficulty following your line of argument. Do you mean to argue that the PPA so overlaps with the "universal" gnomic and the "static" that to say that EIMI in John 8:58 can be construed as a PPA is necessarily to leave open its construal as one of these other two categories of use? Or do you mean to argue that EIMI in John 8:58 is one of these other two categories of use and NOT a PPA? These are two distinct, irreconcilable arguments, but I can't quite tell which of them you are making. In either case, I think you have insurmountable obstacles to making your case. In the first line of argument, you have not been able to demonstrate that any grammars support the idea that the PPA overlaps with these other categories of use (and for good reason, because the progressive temporal quality of the PPA is exactly what is lacking in "universal" or "static" states or natures). In the second line of argument you face the challenge that none of your grammars identifies John 8:58 as belonging to these other categories of use. Four of your grammars consider it a PPA, and to the best of my knowledge none of them cite it under any other category of use. But in any case, a clarification of your position on this would be helpful.

best wishes,
Jason B.

ROB #27 – 2/12 – #17006

ANTECEDENT TIME VS. DURATION TO THE PRESENT AND THE PPA

Jason,

Thank you for understanding the delay in my posting due to the sickness that afflicted my family and me throughout much of January. In this post I will begin replying to your long post #19 of October 24 (found on pages 236-51 of the debate document located in the Files section for the Evangelical and JW Theologies Group). That post was a reply to my post #15, in which I discussed the role of the clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI in John 8:58. In this post, I will focus on the first five or so pages of your post (pp. 236-40). In these pages you critique my claim that this “infinitive of antecedent time” clause is incompatible with understanding EIMI as a PPA in the usual way it is defined.

I. PPA TEXTS AND IMPLIED BEGINNINGS

You wrote:

<< In your book, you claimed that John 8:58 "does not quite belong" to the PPA "category of usage" (105). You gave as your reason for this claim your observation (which has nothing to do with the definition of the PPA, but is rather just an accident of your sample) that supposedly all other recognized PPAs in the NT involve a distinct beginning of the verbal action -- "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" (109-110) -- while there was no such beginning implied in John 8:58. Of course, this is just begging the question, since you assume what you claim to conclude. You postulate a beginning to the verbal action "whether specified or not" (that is, without anything in the original Greek referencing a beginning to the action) for other PPAs while arbitrarily ruling it out for John 8:58, which you can only do because it is not specified there. Such a circular argument is without merit. I pointed out in my post 1 that many of your other examples, like John 8:58, do not "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" (I cited Luke 2:48; Luke 15:29; John 5:6; John 14:9; 2 Corinthians 12:19; and 1 John 2:9 from the list of recognized PPAs you had offered in your book). >>

I have a few points to make in response to the above criticism.

(1) First of all, it is far from clear that the definition of the PPA does not refer to the action or state expressed by the PPA verb as having a beginning. I have already shown in my post #11 that a majority of the grammars include some reference to the action or state as having a beginning. I wrote there, “Nine of the 15 grammars in the survey state that

the PPA expresses an action (or a state) that began in the past” (p. 133), and I listed the following quotations:

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”

I went on to nuance the point, suggesting the possibility “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” (pp. 133-34). Nevertheless, this suggestion is just that, a suggestion; it’s difficult to be sure what the individual grammarians who used this wording intended. It’s possible that some of the grammarians would agree that a beginning is implicit in the PPA while others would not.

Keep in mind that when I published the book sixteen years ago, JW’s were actually arguing that this wording (in Winer, especially, since he also cited John 8:58 as an example) confirms that Jesus’ existence denoted by EIMI had a beginning. This was the context in which I discussed the matter in my book (see *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, 105).

(2) You have (unintentionally, no doubt) missed the larger point by isolating this question of whether the PPA is defined as necessarily involving a beginning of its action or state. That larger point is the contrast between (a) a verb that expresses duration subsequent to some event or time in the past up to the present and (b) a verb that expresses an action or state antecedent to some time in the past. My contention is that EIMI in John 8:58 fits the latter description, not the former one, thus excluding it from the PPA as typically (or narrowly) defined. This is the key point in the exegetical debate, as far as I am concerned, with reference to the proper translation of John 8:58.

(3) You make somewhat conflicting, if not directly contradictory, criticisms of the evidence I gave for the temporal qualifying expression implying a beginning of the action or state. On the one hand, you claim that this is “just an accident of [my] sample,” which presupposes that what I said did at least apply to the sample I gave. On the other hand, in the same sentence you qualify my claim as only “supposedly” so and later in the paragraph assert that I “postulate a beginning” in those instances “without anything in the original Greek” to support it. This discrepancy in your argument may be the result of an overly convoluted sentence, but at any rate I have two apparently incompatible criticisms

to answer here. Let me answer both. With reference to genuine NT example texts of the PPA cited in the NT grammars (leaving aside John 8:58 for sake of argument), all of them have a temporal marker that implies that the action or state expressed by the PPA verb is a temporal one of some limited duration:

“for three years (TRIA ETH AF’ hOU)” (Luke 13:7)

“all these years (TOSAUTA ETH)” (Luke 15:29)

“a long time already (POLUN HDH CRONON)” (John 5:6)

“so long a time (TOSOUTWi CRONWi MEQ’ hUMWN)” (John 14:9)

“from the beginning (AP’ ARCHS MET’ EMOU)” (John 15:27)

“from ancient generations (EK GENEWN ARCAIWN)” (Acts 15:21)

“a fourteenth day today (TESSARESKAIDEKATHN SHMERON hHMERAN)” (Acts 27:33)

“until now (hEWS ARTI)” (1 Cor. 15:6)

“all this time (PALAI)” (2 Cor. 12:19)

“from childhood (APO BREFOUS)” (2 Tim. 3:15)

“ever since the fathers fell asleep (AF’ hHS hOI PATERES EKOIMHQHSAN)...from the beginning of creation (AP’ ARCHS KTISEWS)” (2 Pet. 3:4; take your pick of the two temporal markers!)

“until now (hEWS ARTI)” (1 John 2:9)

“from the beginning (AP’ ARCHS)” (1 John 3:8)

This includes the eleven examples I gave in my 1989 book, plus Acts 27:33 and 1 Corinthians 15:6 (which appeared in grammars published after my book). Of the 17 NT examples cited in the grammars I have surveyed, the above excludes only Luke 2:48, which is textually suspect, grammatically debatable, and has no temporal marker at all; Acts 26:31, which is disputed as a PPA (Winer indicates no, BDF says yes) and also has no temporal marker at all; 2 Corinthians 12:9, which we both agree is mistakenly cited as a PPA; and John 8:58, the text in question.

Please note that I do not have to “postulate” a beginning for the actions or states denoted by the present-tense verbs in these texts. In most of the texts, that the actions or states had a beginning is self-evident from the qualifying temporal language (“all these years,” “from the beginning,” and the like). The only texts of those cited above where the qualifying temporal language does not make this immediately obvious are 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 John 2:9, where “until now” (hEWS ARTI in both texts) in and of itself gives no hint as to how long that is. I find it interesting to note that most translations render the verb in both texts with an English present tense. (In fact, **all** of the English versions I have surveyed, including the NWT, do so; I say “most” only because there are too many to check them all.) Even this expression hEWS ARTI, though it gives no indication by itself of the length of time involved, connotes a temporal duration that in context clearly has a beginning. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul says that most of those who saw Jesus after his resurrection “remain until now”; in this context the action of the verb clearly begins with their sightings of the risen Jesus. In 1 John 2:9, the false Christian who professes to be in the light and yet hates his brother “is in the darkness until now”; this state of darkness in context obtained from the beginning of the false brother’s life. In

both texts, the expression *hEWS ARTI* clearly expresses duration from some time in the past up to the present. So, your second criticism is apparently without any merit at all.

I think you were confusing two issues: whether the text **specified** a **particular** point in time for the beginning (of a datable or measurable time), and whether the text implied some limited duration for the state or action, some beginning, “whether specified or not,” as I clearly noted in my book. With regard to the first issue, of course in most cases the text does not quantify the duration or date the beginning with any specificity (it does a few times, but not usually). But I never claimed otherwise and in fact went out of my way to qualify my remarks to exclude such a misunderstanding. With regard to the second issue, this is my claim, and the texts bear me out. Of the six texts you say that you cited as examples of PPA texts with no indication of a beginning (Luke 2:48; Luke 15:29; John 5:6; John 14:9; 2 Corinthians 12:19; and 1 John 2:9), the only one I definitely excluded from the PPA category is Luke 2:48. The other examples you cite all are consistent with my point, using qualifying expressions like “all these years,” “a long time already,” “so long a time,” and “all this time.” One could argue for partial exceptions in 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 John 2:9, which have “until now,” and which just about everyone seems to translate in English using the present tense. I have not excluded 1 Corinthians 15:6 or 1 John 2:9 from the category of the PPA, but they could be regarded as lying on the fringes or outer perimeter of that category (depending, as I have said many times, on how narrowly or broadly one defines the PPA). Assuming that you will want to include them, in both of these texts the verb clearly expresses duration from some time in the past up to the present, which is the crucial point.

Your first criticism has at least some possible plausibility to it; a sample of a dozen or so texts is not overwhelming, and even a much larger sample would leave some wiggle room. But if most (one need not claim all) of the other NT examples of the PPA have a marker of this sort that clearly qualifies the present-tense verb as having a temporal duration, then the exegete is justified, at the very least, in questioning or disputing the identification of John 8:58 as a PPA when such a qualification is lacking. And again, it is not merely that John 8:58 lacks the same kind of qualifying temporal language as these other texts, but that the temporal language it does have is of a sort incompatible with the PPA as typically defined.

(4) You claim that I am guilty of “arbitrarily ruling...out” a beginning “for John 8:58,” and that I “can only do [so] because it is not specified there.” This criticism rather badly misrepresents my argument. It treats my point about the lack of any implied beginning in isolation rather than as part of the larger point, as I have noted, about the difference between temporal language that marks the verb as expressing duration from the past to the present and temporal language that marks the verb as expressing an antecedent action or state. Your criticism further isolates this specific point from the larger argument that takes notice of (a) the predicate absolute use of EIMI, (b) the clear contrast in the sentence between GENESQAI and EIMI, and (c) the evident allusion to Old Testament “I am” sayings of God, especially those in Isaiah.

II. THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF ANTECEDENT TIME AND THE PPA

You wrote:

<< I pointed out that the distinction between modifying the verb with a "from" or "until" clause or phrase, and modifying it with a "before" clause or phrase was not grammatically significant. No grammar has ever defined or distinguished the PPA by such an arbitrary distinction, for the simple reason that "before" clauses and phrases as much require a PPA rendering of the verb as "from" and "until" clauses and phrases to make sensible sentences. Having been refuted in your claim as it was expressed in your book, you now attempt to mount the same claim of a distinction based on identifying what sort of clause is involved in John 8:58. >>

The distinction is not arbitrary, and I do not agree that you ever refuted the argument as I had presented it in my book. The idea of the PPA is that the verb expresses an action (or state) that began some time in the past and continues up to the present. This grammatical usage is understood to express an ongoing action or state from the past into the present. *All* 15 of the grammars that I surveyed make this point. Note the following language in the grammars:

- * “commenced at an earlier period but still continues” (Winer)
- * “the sense of a perfect and a present combined” (Goodwin)
- * “in English the progressive present would seem to be required” (Jannaris)
- * “to describe an action which, beginning in past time, is still in progress at the time of speaking” (Burton)
- * “the present of past action still in progress” (Robertson)
- * “that which has begun in the past and continues into the present” (Dana and Mantey)
- * “is used to express an action begun in the past and continued in the present” (Smyth)
- * “in those cases where the duration or repetition of an act up to and including the present is to be designated” (BDF)
- * “indicates the continuance of an action during the past and up to the moment of speaking” (Turner)
- * “An action or a state of being which began in the past is described as continuing until the present” (Brooks and Winbery)
- * “Past action continuing into the present” (Greenlee)
- * “to denote a situation which began in the past and continues in the present” (Fanning)
- * “an action that began in the past and continues into the present” (Young)
- * “signals an activity begun in the past and continuing to the present time” (McKay)
- * “used to describe an action which, begun in the past, continues in the present” (Wallace)

Now, it is hardly arbitrary to notice that using a present-tense Greek verb to denote an action or state that is “qualified” in the sentence by an expression beginning with the word “before” (PRO or PRIN) in reference to a past time or event simply does not look like a usage intended to do any of the above. This observation, which I made in my book, has never been refuted. I have not had to abandon the argument at all; I have simply

augmented its presentation with a considerably more thorough review of the evidence supporting it.

You wrote that

<< no one has ever said an "infinitive of antecedent time" cannot be used to create a PPA. >> (p. 237)

That is a fallacious argument from silence. If a PPA expresses a state or action from the past into the present, then an infinitive of antecedent time simply doesn't fit what we mean by a PPA. I don't need a grammarian to say this explicitly in order for my observation to be justified. If "the action of the main verb takes place BEFORE the action expressed by the infinitive," as Young says (Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 166, emphasis added), then the main verb is not being used to express or denote action taking place AFTER the action expressed by the infinitive.

You continued:

<< These are artificial and arbitrary distinctions of your own invention (you admitted in your book that they are "new") designed specifically to exclude John 8:58 from its proper reading as a PPA, and I have since shown how several other "before"-clause modified sentences are PPAs. I know you regarded this as a significant discovery and it's hard to let go of such things. But you must because it is indefensible. >>

There you go again. What I said in my book was that one specific point was "somewhat new" (*Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, 110). The qualification "somewhat," which you omitted, reflects the fuller qualification I had made on the previous page: The point "has not before been specifically stated by grammarians with reference to John 8:58, but is based on the usual definition of the PPA as given by such grammarians as Robertson, Burton, Dana and Mantey, and others" (109). I had not seen anyone else connect the dots as I had when I wrote my book. Later I discovered Young's definition of the infinitive of antecedent time, which makes the point (he even cites John 8:58 as an example) even though he does not refer in that context to the PPA. Your alleged counterexamples using "before" clauses are all disputable counterexamples, as I have shown.

III. ANTECEDENT TIME AND GNOMIC-LIKE BROAD-BAND PRESENTS

You quote me as saying:

"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."

You then comment:

<< You don't need to argue it, because we have already agreed that many of the examples of this construct, that you supplied in your post 7, are gnomic, customary, descriptive, etc. So how does this advance your argument regarding John 8:58? If you mean this as an argument for identifying EIMI in John 8:58 as "gnomic" rather than a PPA, it is a fallacious one, as can be seen by making it explicit:

1. John 8:58 involves an infinitive of antecedent time.
2. Some sentences involving an infinitive of antecedent time contain gnomic, customary, or descriptive presents.
3. Ergo John 8:58 contains a gnomic, customary, or descriptive present. !!!! >> (p. 237)

You quote me as saying that the present-tense verb in such cases "often" fits a class of uses other than the PPA and then speculate that I am arguing that because "some sentences" of this type fit one of those uses then John 8:58 fits one of those uses. I apologize for spoiling your fun (and it looks like you had fun constructing this straw-man argument), but my argument was nothing of the sort. A better representation of my argument would run along the following lines:

1. John 8:58 involves an infinitive of antecedent time.
2. The definition of the infinitive of antecedent time is incompatible with the PPA as usually defined.
3. Few if any of the 16 occurrences with a present-tense main verb of an infinitive of antecedent time could conceivably be classified as a PPA as usually defined. Besides John 8:58, only three such texts in the LXX speaking of God's wisdom, knowledge, or existence have ever been so classified. One of these (Prov. 8:25) cannot be a PPA, and the other two (Ps. 89:2; Jer. 1:5) are disputable examples of the PPA.
4. On the other hand, most of the present-tense main verbs associated with an infinitive of antecedent time fit into such categories as the gnomic, customary, or broad-band descriptive usage.
5. The use of EIMI in John 8:58 as usually interpreted fits something like the (non-proverbial) gnomic or broad-band descriptive category.
6. Therefore, John 8:58 is better categorized as using the present tense in something like the (non-proverbial) gnomic or broad-band descriptive usage than the PPA (as usually defined).

The above argument doesn't look nearly as silly as your straw-man version of my argument.

You wrote:

<< If the event or action of the aorist infinitive is itself a recurring action or state, then we are dealing with a gnomic, customary, or iterative main verb (procedurals come to mind as an example: "Bend your knees before you start your swing"). If the event or action of the aorist infinitive is an event of past time, then we have a PPA, because "the denotative

meaning of the main verb pertains to a time prior to that event or action." There is simply no way around this, try as you might. >> (p. 238)

This is a peculiar argument. If the main verb denotes an action or state PRIOR TO AN EVENT OF THE PAST, then it does not denote an action or state in its CONTINUANCE UP TO THE PRESENT. Those are two different denotative uses of the verb. I could say, "There is simply no way around this, try as you might."

You wrote:

<< Moreover, your understanding of the antecedent function of the Infinitive of antecedent time is flawed, because it ignores the difference between such clauses when they refer to customary or procedural or anticipated events, and when they refer to specific past events. >>

No, my argument doesn't ignore those differences. I pointed out that there are two different kinds of gnomic presents, and that the descriptive present has also been understood in a broad-band way as well as a narrow-band way. I have never claimed that John 8:58 uses the present tense in the exact same way as, say, Proverbs 18:13. Rather, I have argued that the usage in John 8:58 is more like what we find in Proverbs 8:23-25 and Psalm 89:2 (LXX).

By the way, I wish to clear up a misunderstanding. Regarding Deuteronomy 31:21 LXX, I had commented:

"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."

In response, you claimed that my use of "already" shows that I am "still stuck on the mistaken understanding" that OIDA expresses a timeless knowledge that God possessed even before a "particular event of the past," whereas the event "is actually an event of the future" (p. 239). You are reading more into my use of the word "already" than is there. I understand that in this verse God was referring to an event in the immediate future (the Israelites' entrance into the Promised Land). My point is that God was asserting that "he already knew" how the Israelites would behave even before they went into the land.

You wrote:

<< Review from your many examples of the Infinitive of antecedent time the many cases where the main verb is imperfect or aorist. These are not gnomic or static constructions. These literally place the action of the main verb BEFORE the past event of the "before" clause. Now think through the implications of this if you really believe the "before" clause does precisely the same thing in John 8:58. It would confine Jesus' existence to before Abraham was born, which, since he is speaking long after that event, is a non-sequiter. >> (p. 238)

Again, since I did not claim that John 8:58 is “precisely” like these texts in which the main verb is not a present-tense verb, your criticism is completely unsound; it proceeds from a false premise.

In my next post, I will continue my response to your post #19, once again revisiting the three LXX texts that use the infinitive of antecedent time and that you classify as examples of the PPA.

ROB #28 – 2/12 – #17053

THREE DISPUTED LXX EXAMPLES OF THE PPA

Jason,

In this post I will continue my response to your post #19, focusing on the middle pages (pp. 241-48) that discuss the three LXX texts that have an infinitive of antecedent time and that you claim are PPAs (Prov. 8:23-25; Ps. 89:2; Jer. 1:5).

I. PROVERBS 8:23-25 LXX

Regarding your claim that GENNAi in Proverbs 8:23-25 is a PPA, I had commented:

“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” (p. 181).

You began your response to this challenging comment as follows:

<< Let's see if I am really as tied up as you seem to think. I will use one of your favorite grammars to make the case that you think I cannot make. >> (p. 243)

This is in reference to Dana and Mantey's *Manual Grammar*, which you had earlier asserted “is one of the weaker grammars” (p. 103) and which you described as being guilty of a “silly classification” (p. 110). Yet here you are, in a jam, trying to use Dana and Mantey to support your “existential/identity function of the PPA.” That would be all right, though, if they supported your position—but they do not. Of course, Dana and Mantey is *not* one of my favorite grammars; indeed, I have expressed some disagreements with their grammar in the course of this debate. It is fascinating that you would try to use a reference work that you had previously panned to defend a hitherto unrecognized use of the PPA, and in the process wrongly characterizing my view of that grammar and, as I shall show, misconstruing the grammar and displaying apparent unawareness of the facts about the grammatical phenomena in question.

You take a few detours along the way to making your point, but I will cut a straight path to the core of your argument. Dana and Mantey categorize the PPA as one of three varieties of the “Progressive Present,” the other two being a present “of *description*” and a present that approaches the perfect and that denotes “the continuation of *existing results*” (Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1957

ed., 182-83). The latter you reference using the acronym CER (Continuation of Existing Results). Since Dana and Mantey treat the PPA and this present of existing results (CER) as “subcategories of the same progressive present usage,” you conclude “that the CER and the PPA were basically the same usage to the Greeks.” You then assert:

<< In all of the cited examples of the CER, translating them exactly as we render the PPA is perfectly satisfactory in conveying the sense, and in fact is the most communicative way to get that sense across to the English reader, containing the full meaning of what is being expressed. >> (p. 243)

Dana and Mantey cite three examples of the present of “existing results” (CER). The first is 1 Corinthians 11:18, which Dana and Mantey translate, “I hear that there are divisions among you” (Dana and Mantey, 182). They translate this lead example using an English present tense verb (“hear”), which would seem problematic for your use of this category with reference to John 8:58, where you insist that the verb *must* be translated using an English past tense verb. You try to explain:

<< One interesting thing about this quote is that it is one of the rare examples of the English idiom similar to the Greek, in that 'I hear' (formally a present) is not technically correct for the temporal significance of the statement. We would more precisely say "I have heard that there are divisions among you." In any case, the meaning is the same. >> (p. 242)

If anything, this example shows that the present tense can be used where a purist view of English grammar might call for the past tense, if there is some contextual or idiomatic justification for doing so. There is more going on here, though, as I shall explain further below.

The second example in Dana and Mantey of this usage is Galatians 1:6, which you translate, “I marvel (QAUMAZW 1st sing. present act. ind.) that you are separated (METATIQUESQE 2nd pl. present pass. ind.) so quickly from the one who called you.” It is just barely possible that you are right in thinking that the verb Dana and Mantey have in view here is METATIQUESQE. However, most modern English translations render this verb using an English descriptive present tense verb: “you are so quickly deserting” (ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV); “you are turning away so soon” (NKJV, NLT). These versions also do not parse the verb as a passive here (though it is so used elsewhere), but rather as a middle form (so also the UBS Greek-English Dictionary). Even the NWT, which construes the verb as a passive, also translates it as a present tense (“YOU are being so quickly removed”). Thus, all of these versions disagree with your interpretation when you assert:

<< Here, too, the people spoken to are not in the process of separating as Paul writes, but rather have separated and continue to exist in the state brought about by that separation. >>

It looks rather as though Paul were describing the Galatians as apostatizing without treating their apostasy as an accomplished fact. In the very next verse, Paul says that “there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7). The two present-tense participles here cannot be construed as presents of existing results; they denote the actions and intentions of people who are still in Galatia and still trying to mislead the Galatian Christians. In this light, the English translations quoted above evidently have verse 6 right. The verb METATIQHMI is used with a middle sense elsewhere (Sirach 6:9) and such a sense fits the context in Galatians 1:6.

I cannot prove with any certainty which of the two present-tense verbs in Galatians 1:6 Dana and Mantey thought was a present of existing results. If they meant METATIQUESQE, one must conclude that they were probably mistaken. It is quite possible and even likely, however, that they meant QAUMAZW after all. On this view, Dana and Mantey would be implying that Paul was amazed when he first heard about the Galatians’ slide into apostasy, and that amazement had the “continuing result” of his dismay as expressed in the epistle. This interpretation seems at least possible, so I am inclined to guess that Dana and Mantey had QAUMAZW in view. One could argue that the translations “am amazed” (NASB) and “am astonished” (ESV, NIV, NASB) reflects this understanding of the force of the verb. Moreover, I suspect that Dana and Mantey derived this example from Burton, who comments that QAUMAZW, “in Gal. 1:6, is a Progressive Present, but is best translated *I marvel*, the verb itself sufficiently suggesting the idea of action in progress” (Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek*, 3d ed. [1900], 8). Whatever Dana and Mantey might have meant, the fact is that either of the two present-tense verbs in Galatians 1:6 can be and usually is translated into English with present-tense verbs.

Dana and Mantey’s third example is the verb hHKEI in Luke 15:27, usually translated “has come”: “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound” (e.g., NASB). At last, one of the three examples cited by Dana and Mantey is of a present-tense verb usually translated into English with a past-tense verb. You have that much going for you. But then, you ask why the other two verbs in the sentence are aorists (“killed,” “received back”) but this verb, which also refers to a past event that occurred “at a particular moment,” is a present tense form. Your answer: “the present tense is used of this coming because the act of coming continues in the state of being come” (p. 243).

I can see how you could arrive at this conclusion, guided only by Dana and Mantey and spurred on by the desire to find some precedent for your existential/identity function for the PPA (though you’re still a long way off from it). However, there’s one little problem: the present-tense hHKEI usually has this past-tense force to it. Of the 51 occurrences of this specific form hHKEI in the Greek Bible, only 8 (2 Chron. 20:2; Job 3:24; Ps. 98:9 [97:9]; Song of Sol. 2:8; Jer. 25:30-31 [32:30-31 Gk.]; Ezek. 30:9; 33:33; 47:9) are not usually translated with the English perfect “has come” (and even some of these might be so translated). The same sort of statistic applies to other present-tense forms of the same verb. Reading into the present tense form of hHKEI the sort of subtle distinction you

suggest is overreaching, even though Dana and Mantey’s citation of Luke 15:27 must have seemed to you to justify it.

On this particular verb, various grammars have observed that its present-tense form regularly has a perfect-tense sense in English. Burton, for example, comments: “The Present form hHKW means *_I have come_* (John 2:4; 4:47; etc.)” He adds, “This, however, is not a Present for the Perfect of the same verb, but a Present equivalent to the Perfect of another verb. The use of AKOUW meaning *_I am informed_* (cf. similar use of English *_hear_, _see_, _learn_*) is more nearly a proper Present for Perfect (1 Cor. 11:8; 2 Thess. 3:11). Such use of the Present belongs to a very few verbs” (Burton, 10). Turner names both hHKW and AKOUW as among the “rare” verbs that exhibit the “Perfective Present,” and he cites Luke 15:27 and 1 Cor. 11:18 (Turner, *_Syntax_*, 62). More recently, Wallace also uses the term “Perfective Present,” but he distinguishes “lexical” and “contextual” types of the perfective present. “The *_lexical_* type involves certain words (most notably hHKW, which almost always has a perfective force to it” (Wallace, *_Greek Grammar beyond the Basics_*, 532; he cites Luke 15:27 as an example, 533). In a footnote, he mentions that Fanning observes that AKOUW and a few other Greek verbs also “occasionally function as perfective presents” (Wallace, 532 n. 53, citing Fanning, *_Verbal Aspect_*, 239-40). Wallace cites as contextual types of the perfective present those texts that use the present-tense LEGEI (“it says” or “he says”) to introduce an Old Testament quotation (532, 533). He makes the interesting comment, “This usage is so distinct that it could be given a different label, something like the *_introductory formula present_*” (532 n. 54). Indeed this usage accounts for all of the examples he cites of the “contextual” type of perfective present. Here again, the Greek idiom is duplicated in English, since we often cite texts of the past using present-tense forms. That is why English versions commonly translate LEGEI in these occurrences in the present tense, “says” (e.g., Rom. 9:15, 17, 25; 10:6, 8, 11, 16, 19-21; 11:2, 4, 9; and many, many other NT occurrences).

It turns out, then, that the “perfective present” is limited either to certain verbs (hHKW and a few others) or, when used with other verbs, is limited to certain idiomatic purposes akin to English idiom—notably the introductory use of LEGEI, as well as introductory verbs such as “I hear,” “I see,” “I learn,” or even “I marvel.” One of Dana and Mantey’s examples fits the first type (hHKEI in Luke 15:27), while their other two examples fit the second type (QAUMAZW, Gal. 1:6; AKOUW, 1 Cor. 11:18). The first type we normally translate with an English past tense; the second type we normally translate with an English present tense.

In view of the limited nature of these lexical and idiomatic types of the perfective present, the notion of a general “present of the continuation of existing results” as a category that can be applied to GENNAi in Proverbs 8:25 LXX simply falls by the wayside. GENNAW is not one of the verbs belonging to the lexical type of perfective present, and Proverbs 8:25 is not analogous to any of the idiomatic uses of the perfective present.

Three other points of a broader nature are in order here. The preceding analysis of the perfective present shows that one cannot treat Dana and Mantey's "present of existing results" and their "present of duration" (the PPA) as if they were the same usage of the present tense. However, if you do so, you have to give up the claim that the PPA must always be translated using a past-tense form in English. After all, the idiomatic present of existing results (or idiomatic perfective present) is usually translated into English using the present tense, as I have documented. Only lexical perfective presents involve words that despite their present-tense form are normally translated into English using the past tense, and these are limited to certain Greek verbs.

Likewise, by your own reasoning, if Dana and Mantey's second and third types of progressive present were for the Greeks the same usage, then Dana and Mantey's first and third types of progressive present would also have to be viewed as identical types for Greek readers. Yet their first type of progressive present, the present of description (aka the descriptive present), is normally translated into English using the present tense.

Let me put it this way, which turns your argument on its head: Suppose we agree that the subcategories of the progressive present identified by Dana and Mantey really were one usage for Greek readers and should all be translated in a similar way. Well, the first type (present of description) is normally translated with the English present tense; the second type (present of existing results) is also normally translated with the English present tense except with a few certain verbs (hHKW, AKOUW, and a few others). So, may we conclude that the third type (present of duration, aka the PPA) should also normally be translated using the English present tense? Hmm...something seems to have gone wrong. This isn't the conclusion you wanted!

Second, I don't see any of your tortured handling of the perfective present as helping to establish an "existential/identity function" for the PPA. You had explained this function as using the present tense where a past-tense verb is expected to express the idea that "the existence of the speaker is ongoing." I can't see this as having any precedence in the perfective present or "present of existing results." In 1 Corinthians 11:18, are we to understand that Paul chose to write "I hear" rather than "I have heard" in order to convey the idea that Paul has continued to exist after hearing? I could ask a similar question with regard to the other two example texts that Dana and Mantey give, or with regard to any of the examples cited in the grammars of the perfective present.

Finally, I must comment briefly that I do not think you have been able to refute my exegesis of Proverbs 8:23-25. Indeed, you offered no arguments against it at all, except the claim that your PPA exegesis is better. But I have shown here that you cannot make GENNAi fit the PPA category in verse 25; Dana and Mantey's present of existing results is really a distinct usage from the PPA and cannot justify interpreting a PPA as perfective, let alone interpreting Proverbs 8:25 as a PPA. So you seem to be even more "tied up" in this regard than you were before you summoned Dana and Mantey to your defense. Given the apparent impossibility of making the PPA category work in this instance, I continue to favor the view of GENNAi in Proverbs 8:25 that I have defended

previously: the present tense reflects the context in which this “action” is said to antedate creation, which is another way of saying that it expresses an eternal reality.

II. JEREMIAH 1:5 LXX

A. Another Misrepresentation

Before discussing Jeremiah 1:5, I must address an unpleasant bit of misrepresentation on your part. In my post #7, I had made the following two statements:

“It turns out that not one of these eleven biblical texts is a PPA” (p. 70).

“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” (p. 74).

In your post #8, you had attempted to pit these two statements against each other, as follows:

<< 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." >>

In my post #15, I replied:

“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.” (pp. 182-83)

In your post #19, you quoted only the last sentence and commented:

<< Guilty. I did say "usually." I did not say that you said "usually" (notice the use of quotation marks). So I am guilty of heightening the point by using "usually." You are guilty of claiming that "not one of these eleven texts is a PPA," which is falsely stated as an established fact when, in fact, you had the "knowledge" that two of the eleven were in fact classified as PPAs. So your assertion than "none of these eleven" is a PPA is simply false. >> (p. 244)

In order to deflect my criticism that exposed your misrepresentation of my position, you attempt here to contrast your supposedly being merely “guilty of heightening the point” with my supposedly saying something that “is simply false.” This is spin if I ever saw it.

First, your admission of “heightening the point” is woefully inadequate. In fact you twisted what I said by (a) cutting out the word “ever” in your quotation of my statement and ignoring its import, (b) using the word “usually” in place of “ever” (albeit carefully doing so outside of the words you attributed directly to me) to distort what I said in the opposite direction of my clear intent, and (c) on that basis invented a contradiction between what you claim I “conceded” here and what I had stated earlier. In other words, where I had said “*ever* classified as a PPA,” you substituted “*usually* ‘classified as a PPA,’” substituting “usually” for “ever” but leaving it out of the quotation marks so that you could not be accused of actually “misquoting” me. Without this distorted representation of my statement, your claim that I was here conceding something contrary to my earlier statement couldn’t get off the ground.

Second, my statement that “only” two LXX texts have “ever” been classified as a PPA” is not in any way contradictory to my claim that “not one of these eleven biblical texts is a PPA.” It is transparently obvious that the latter statement represents *my own conclusion in the matter,* whereas my acknowledgment that two of the texts have been classified as PPAs is a reference to what *others* have thought. Indeed, I made both statements back-to-back in successive statements, as quoted above: “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” (p. 74). I was therefore expressing my view while duly noting that one can find precedent (though slim) in the literature for a different view with respect to those two texts. My statement that none of the eleven texts is a PPA may be mistaken, but the opinion of Winer does not prove that my statement is “simply false” as you claim.

In your post #8, you had written:

<< 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." >>

I took issue with this claim in my post #15. The only thing I said that you quoted in your rebuttal (in your post #19) was the following sentence:

“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.”

You then tried to throw my words back at me:

<< I must say, Rob, that I am at a loss to understand how you came to misconstrue me in this way. There are two sentences in the above quote. In the first, I say that the verse is a PPA and is usually translated that way. In the second, I state how I think it should be translated. I never said that it was usually translated the way I think it "should" be

translated. I said it is "usually" translated as a PPA, and it "should" be translated as indicated, which is my own translation that best brings out, in my opinion, the distinctive PPA force of the verb. From now on I will refer to you as Mr. Pot and to myself as Mr. Kettle. >> (p. 244)

All one has to do to see that you have once again missed my point is to go back and read what I wrote:

“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’” (p. 183).

As you can see, my point was that the English versions of Jeremiah 1:5 do not offer an English equivalent of the PPA idiom. They do not have “I have known”; instead, they have “I knew.” “I knew” does not express a state of knowing from the past continuing up to the present. That is why in your own rendering you suggested “I have known,” because that can serve as an English equivalent to a PPA. Also, none of the English versions translate the qualifying temporal language in the way you say they should if that language was serving as the marker for a PPA (“since before you were born”). The first point is the crucial point here; the second point is further confirmation. Since all of these English versions fail to have a wording consistent with an underlying PPA (or even its equivalent), your claim that it “is usually translated that way in English Bibles” is flat-out wrong. And you know it. That is why you continued by saying:

<< But on this, we are going to have to give each other a pass, because we both make the same slip: we both talk of English Bibles translating the Greek of Jeremiah 1:5, when of course they translate the Hebrew. >>

Sorry, I won't take the fall with you on this one. In the sentence immediately preceding the one that you quoted from my post, I made this very point:

“Of course, most English Bibles are translations based primarily on the Hebrew text, not on the Greek Septuagint” (p. 183).

What would you say, I wonder, if I so blatantly misrepresented you?

You continued:

<< So my point was wrongly made. It should have been that the original Hebrew of Jeremiah 1:5 is universally understood to have a past aspect (as your list of English translations effectively shows), and the translators of the LXX, whom we must assume were knowledgeable of the underlying Hebrew and would render it accurately into Greek, used the PPA construct to convey this past aspect to their readers. >> (p. 244)

This won't work. For one thing, "a past aspect" is not the same thing as a PPA or its equivalent. For another thing, Hebrew verbs don't work the same way as Greek verbs; the interplay of tense and aspect is quite different between the two languages.

And another thing: You know quite well that the LXX translation does not always offer a strictly formal equivalent rendering of the Hebrew text. In fact, in at least one place in your book *_Truth in Translation_* you implicitly disagree with the LXX translation of the Hebrew. Moreover, you do so in your chapter on John 8:58! Regarding Exodus 3:14, you comment, "Actually, 'I am' is a very uncertain rendering of the Hebrew expression in Exodus" (*_Truth in Translation_*, 107). You don't explain, but your comment here presupposes the widespread view that the Hebrew EHYEH is better translated "I will be." But "I am" is how the LXX renders one part of the expression, by your own admission, since on the next page you write, "The Septuagint of Exodus 3:14 has God say *_egô eimi ho ôn_*, 'I am the being,' or 'I am the one who exists'" (108). And "the being" (*hO WN*) beyond all controversy is not a formal equivalent rendering of EHYEH.

The fact of the matter is that it is dicey to infer how one should construe the Greek of the LXX on the premise that it reflects an intention to produce a formal equivalent rendering of the underlying Hebrew. Such formal equivalency often obtains but not often enough to make this a reasonable presumption, let alone an unequivocal premise to one's exegetical argument. Therefore, the Hebrew of Jeremiah 1:5 cannot settle the matter as to the precise nuance of the use of the present tense in the LXX rendering of Jeremiah 1:5. But it gets worse: it turns out that the Hebrew verb (*YADA'*, in the *qal* perfect form) can be translated with either a present or a past tense verb depending on context. Thus, the *qal* perfect form of *YADA'* is translated:

- * in Genesis 39:8 with the present tense *GINWSKEI* in the LXX and with "knows" or "has concern" in most English versions.
- * in Ex 33:12 with *OIDA* (a verb that has a perfect form but takes a present meaning) in the LXX and with "I know" in most English versions (the NASB has "I have known").
- * in several texts (Deut. 34:6; Job 11:11; 15:23; 23:10; 28:13, 23; Prov. 9:18) with *OIDEN* (a form of *OIDA*) in the LXX and with "knows" in most English versions.
- * in 1 Kings 2:44 with *OIDAS* (another form of *OIDA*) in the LXX and with "you know" in most English versions.
- * in Job 18:21 with *EIDOTWN* (a participial form of *OIDA*) in the LXX and with "know(s)" in most English versions.
- * in Isaiah 59:8 twice with *OIDASIN* (yet another form of *OIDA*) in the LXX and with "know(s)" in most English versions (in some versions, the second occurrence is translated with a **future** tense).

You wrote:

<< You go on to comment and expand on my characterization of the content of Jeremiah 1:5. We really have no disagreement on interpreting the theological import of the verse. Our difference is that I see this interpretation as an extrapolation, a thinking-out of the implications of what the verse says, that is probable, if not provable. You suggest that the words of the verse itself literally state this theological import. I think a close analysis of what the verse does and does not explicitly say supports my view of the matter, and that you are committing eisegesis. >> (p. 245)

I'm sorry, but these comments suggest you do not understand what eisegesis means. Eisegesis means to read something INTO the text that is not warranted from what the text says in its context (both narrow and broad context). If my interpretation "is probable" and represents a "thinking-OUT of the implications of what the verse says," then whatever my interpretation is, it is not eisegesis.

I wrote:

"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."

You replied:

<< "Before he is born" is not a "temporally unbounded" expression -- as you yourself are arguing in this post, it is a marker of antecedence, which by definition marks a temporal boundary. >>

I did not say that "before he is born" (or rather "before you were born") is a "temporally unbounded" expression. I said that the meaning of the text is evidently that "God's knowing" is temporally unbounded. The expression "before you were born" does not set a boundary or limit to God's knowledge but rather conveys the fact that God's knowledge of Jeremiah is not even bounded or limited to his historical existence.

For sake of time and energy I will have to move on to our third and last LXX text.

III. PSALM 89:2 LXX (90:2 ENGLISH)

First, I appreciate your retraction of your earlier statement that there was "nothing at all" in the Greek behind my use of the word "even" in translating Psalm 89:2 LXX. Here again is that translation:

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

You wrote:

<< You see a progression in the verse, and construct it line by line to heighten this reading. But the three lines are not grammatically in series. The first two clauses are governed by the PRO TOU, and the KAI at the beginning of the second clause joins it to the first in its dependence on the PRO TOU. The third line is a phrase governed by APO TOU, and so distinguished from the first two lines. The KAI at the beginning of this third line is not in series with the KAI at the beginning of the second line. Now your "even" is apparently used here because you take the two KAIs to be in series, and "even" is a summative conjunction to end a series. But this is not a series. For it to be a series, you would have to drop the APO TOU, and make the final phrase governed by the same PRO TOU as the first two clauses. Then you could have something like "from all eternity" I suppose. But that is not how the sentence works. >> (pp. 246-47)

Your objection rests on an overly narrow understanding of my use of the word "even" in translating the third line. Put "and" in place of "even" if you like and you still have a progression backward in time from the creation of the mountains back to the creation of the earth and the world and finally back to the everlasting past. The three lines do not need to be grammatically parallel for that progression to be evident.

You wrote:

<< I maintain that the first two joined clauses represent a "before" statement, that is, an Infinitive of antecedent time construction that marks the event(s) before which God existed, and that the third line, the APO TOU phrase, represents a marker of durative time "and from age to age" of God's continued existence since "before . . ." So this verse is more explicit in its modifying elements than we see in other PPAs with "before" clauses, in which the "since" element is implicit in the modifier; here it is made explicit. >>

In the above statement, you appear to be claiming that the phrase APO TOU AIWNOS HEWS TOU AIWNOS is the qualifying element that marks the present-tense verb EI as a PPA. Yet you go on immediately to quote yourself saying quite the contrary:

<< 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. >> (p. 247)

In the above paragraph, you claimed that if we removed the APO TOU phrase the verb in Psalm 89:2 would be "a classic PPA," with the qualifying element being the lines fronted by the preposition "before" (PRO TOU or PRIN), as in John 8:58. But now you are claiming that it is the APO TOU phrase that has this function. Your rationale for construing Psalm 89:2 as a PPA appears to have changed significantly. If we accept your

latest explanation, the PRO TOU (“before”) element does not function as the marker of the PPA. Fine; then you can no longer cite Psalm 89:2 as precedent for construing PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI in John 8:58 as the marker of a PPA. And if you insist on characterizing EI in APO TOU AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS SU EI as a PPA, it will have to be, as I have said before, an unusual sort of PPA, one that expresses a state that is everlasting and not merely durative from some time in the past up to the present.

I had written:

“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.”

You commented:

<< Rob, this is just not an acceptable way to speak. You cannot in English use a present tense to indicate states or actions before other past events. You are defending a non-sequiter. >>

I disagree. But as I noted before, I could accept a translation of Psalm 89:2 that coordinates the tenses in the purist way you want and that makes the same point (p. 187):

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

Unless I missed it, you have not commented on this suggestion.

You wrote:

<< The present form of the verb EI used only in conjunction with the two temporal clauses referencing specific events of past time means, and can only mean existence "since before" up to the present. It does not in itself mean "at all times." I agree that the verse is meant to contrast God's existence to the more limited temporal existence of the cosmos. Where we keep having a conflict is the difference between what the sentence SAYS and what it IMPLIES. By definition, what a sentence implies is not explicitly said. The third line, as I have said, makes more explicit the durative aspect of the verb than we see in other examples of PPA verbs with "before" clauses alone, and heightens the point the writer is making. But your resort to "existence at all times" is rooted in your misunderstanding of the gnomic or customary present, which I have already explained does not refer in itself to eternity, but only that something is the case whenever and wherever the specified circumstance occurs. Your interpretation cannot be read into the grammatical forms, but must be read out of them, which you can do. Why is this not satisfactory to you? >> (pp. 247-48)

Your criticism here is utterly beside the point. I have not advocated translating EI as “exist at all times” or “exist eternally.” If I had advocated such a translation, your criticism might have some merit. But I have merely advocated translating EI with the simple present “are.”

I had written:

“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.”

I’m afraid you completely misunderstood the above statement. You commented:

<< Lo and behold, suddenly the PPA is NOT a broad-band use of the verb! Wallace doesn't say that. Dana & Mantey don't say that. So how did that happen? This is another one of those over-eager leaps of yours that can be mistaken for trying to get away with something. >>

No, this is another one of those misunderstandings of yours. The “gnomic/static/broad-descriptive classification” does not exhaust the category of broad-band uses of the present. The PPA belongs to that category as well. You may be confusing what I meant by “a broad sense” of the PPA with the term “broad-band.” As I have explained in the past, if one defines the PPA in a broad, that is, wide, open-ended, loosely defined way, then it overlaps considerably with other uses of the present tense. The term “broad” in this context does not mean “broad-band.” Every PPA is a broad-band present.

IV. CONCLUSION

You attempted to offer a general rebuttal to my argument concerning the infinitive of antecedent time by disputing a certain statement I made mid-way through my post #15 on the subject:

BEGIN QUOTE FROM BEDUHN

This leads us to revisit your statistics:

"Of these 11 occurrences of the infinitive of antecedent time construction,"

Correct now to 15, including the three "disputed" passages, for which you never explained why you considered them disputed, plus John 8:58.

"in 9 instances the main or controlling present-tense verb is a broad-band present."

Correct to 13, with the PPA of course being included among "broad-band presents" as you have defined them.

"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."

And 4 are PPAs, thus MAKING THE PPA USE OF THE INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME AS COMMON IN YOUR SAMPLE AS ANY OTHER USAGE.

END QUOTE FROM BEDUHN

The only correction I think I need to make is that I should have counted 12, not 11, occurrences that were indisputably not PPAs, and 10 of those 12 are broad-band presents. I said 11 because I overlooked Psalms of Solomon 14:8 ("he knows the secret of the heart before it happens"). Of the four texts that you claim are PPAs, three are clearly broad-band presents (this is not clearly so for Proverbs 8:25), whether or not they are PPAs. It is, frankly, bizarre for you to claim that I never explained why the three LXX texts and John 8:58 are "disputed": you say they are PPAs, I say they are not. That makes them disputed. To my knowledge you are the first person to argue that Proverbs 8:25 is a PPA; I have argued that such a classification makes no sense. So that is disputed. Standard English translations of Psalm 89:2 LXX render EI with the present tense "are"; these translations clearly do not recognize it as a PPA. Jeremiah 1:5 is your best hope, but no one translates the Hebrew or Greek versions as a PPA. The vast majority of translations render John 8:58 as though it were not (as you recognize and criticize). So, not one of these four texts is an undisputed example of the PPA, even outside our one-on-one disagreement over the question.

It is really impossible to make GENNAi in Proverbs 8:25 LXX fit the category of the PPA as usually defined. I do not think you have succeeded even at making a plausible case for that claim. I am not aware of anyone else who has made that claim, either, besides you.

With Winer's parenthetical reference to Jeremiah 1:5 LXX and Psalm 89:2 LXX as parallels in his citation of John 8:58 as a PPA, you have one notable grammarian supporting your position that those two LXX texts fit the category of the PPA. However, as I have explained, Winer's definition of the PPA is the broadest on record of all the 15 grammars that I surveyed and does not address the question of how the present-tense verb should be translated into English (Winer, of course, wrote in German). That having been said, I have given reasons for disagreeing with Winer that any of the present-tense verbs in these texts "indicates a state which commenced at an earlier period but still continues, -a state in its continuance" (as Winer puts it). I have given an alternative understanding of the nuance or force of the present tense in the two LXX texts that makes good sense of the texts in context. That is all I really need to do in order to defend my position. I do not need to demonstrate that it is impossible for any Greek text anywhere to use the PPA in conjunction with the infinitive of antecedent time. I have shown that such a usage would be uncharacteristic of the PPA and uncharacteristic of the infinitive of antecedent time. I have also shown that these texts that use the infinitive of antecedent time to refer to a past event in association with a present-tense verb all make good sense as paradoxically stated

affirmations of states unbounded by the events to which they are compared. These can be restated to meet purist canons of English grammar: God begets wisdom even before anything is created; God knows Jeremiah even before he is born; God exists before anything is created and from age to age; Jesus exists even before Abraham is born. The traditional translations, though, particularly of Psalm 89:2 LXX and John 8:58, make the same points and have historically been well understood despite their “irregularity” of English expression.

My next post will complete my response to your post #19.

ROB #29 – 2/14 – #17055

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME

Jason,

This post will conclude my response to your post #19 (pp. 249-51).

You wrote:

<< The challenge for you is not to lock in the action of main verb antecedent to the event of the aorist infinitive, but to break it out. If it is locked in, then when the event of the aorist infinitive is in the past, then the main verb is a past tense, too. But we are not concerned with those cases; we are concerned only with when the main verb is a present tense. When it is, we have either (1) the aorist infinitive indicating a general, continuing, customary, or iterative occurrence, in which case the main verb is gnomic or customary or iterative, or (2) the aorist infinitive indicates a specific event of time, in which case the main verb is past progressive or futurative. Since you have never paid attention to that distinction within the aorist infinitive clause, your argument is without merit. >> (pp. 249-50)

It is simply false to say that I have not paid attention to the two different cases you mention of the use of a present-tense main verb with the infinitive of antecedent time. In my post #15, I noted the two futuristic uses (Mal. 3:22; John 13:19), which are not broad-band uses, and distinguished them from the uses that are broad-band, including the gnomic, customary, and iterative occurrences (p. 179). Our disagreement is whether there are occurrences that can be described as “past progressive,” by which I assume you mean belonging to the PPA category. I have argued that there are no clear instances of such occurrences, at least not in biblical Greek.

You seem to have misunderstood my view as implying that the action of the main verb is “locked in” to time antecedent to the event of the aorist infinitive. Thus, you write:

<< Since you have argued that the aorist infinitive limits the time of the main verb to before the event of the infinitive, you have quite simply argued away the continuing action of the verb after that event. It's a good thing your argument is an invalid one. The use of the present is what unlocks the action of the verb from mere antecedence, and gives it continuation to the present. If you had your way, we would be forced to use a simple past tense: was antecedent to a past event. >> (p. 250)

No, I have never “argued that the aorist *limits* the time of the main verb to before the event of the infinitive,” in such a way that the state is “locked out” from continuing after that event. I have argued that the main verb in these constructions *denotes* a state antecedent to the main verb. That the state continues after the event denoted by the aorist

infinitive is implicit from the context (e.g., Jesus obviously exists when he speaks the words of John 8:58), but the denotative *sense* is that the state obtains antecedent to the event; in turn, the *meaning* (in context) is that the state is unbounded with respect to the event of the past denoted by the aorist infinitive.

I had written:

“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.’”

You replied:

<< That's because the implicit "since" only pertains when you have both a past event in your aorist infinitive clause and a present tense main verb. None of the NT examples other than John 8:58 have this combination of features. But Psalm 90.2 and Jeremiah 1:5 from the OT do, and the rendering "since before" is needed to convey both antecedence and continuation in both instances, unless the main verb is rendered as a simple past, which would be incorrect. >>

Again, according to you, there are four biblical Greek texts in which a rendering like “since before” is needed (Ps. 89:2; Prov. 8:25; Jer. 1:5; John 8:58). Yet none of the English translations in current use of the LXX or of the Greek NT has ever translated any of these four texts with the locution “since before” or any equivalent.

The rest of your closing remarks in your post #19 either repeat arguments already addressed or anticipate matters relating to later posts, so I will conclude this post here.

JASON #29 – 2/23 – #17163

JASON #29

Rob,

In your post #27 you reveal a basic confusion about what you are arguing. You pose the infinitive of antecedent time and the PPA as an either/or choice, decision, or interpretation about John 8:58. But the infinitive of antecedent time applies to the dependent clause of John 8:58 ("before Abraham was born"), while the PPA applies to the main clause ("I have existed"). Since these two categories of analysis apply to different parts of the sentence, and to different verbs in the sentence, it is simply false to suggest that the existence of one precludes the existence of another.

You make this false either/or opposition, for example, in titling a whole section of your discussion "The incompatibility of antecedent time and the PPA," when you say "If a PPA expresses a state or action from the past into the present, then an infinitive of antecedent time simply doesn't fit what we mean by a PPA," and when you say:

"You have (unintentionally, no doubt) missed the larger point by isolating this question of whether the PPA is defined as necessarily involving a beginning of its action or state. That larger point is the contrast between (a) a verb that expresses duration subsequent to some event or time in the past up to the present and (b) a verb that expresses an action or state antecedent to some time in the past. My contention is that EIMI in John 8:58 fits the latter description, not the former one, thus excluding it from the PPA as typically (or narrowly) defined. This is the key point in the exegetical debate, as far as I am concerned, with reference to the proper translation of John 8:58."

You can see here that you have falsely made the infinitive of antecedent time something about the main verb, "a verb that expresses an action or state antecedent to some time in the past," rather than something about the infinitive. You say that "an infinitive of antecedent time simply doesn't fit what we mean by a PPA" – exactly, because the infinitive of antecedent time is an INFINITIVE construction, and the PPA is an INDICATIVE construction. Now in John 8:58, we have only one infinitive, and that is GENESTHAI, and we have only one indicative, and that is EIMI. You have taken a section of the grammars about infinitives and used it as if it was about indicatives. When Young cites John 8:58 as an example of the infinitive of antecedent time construction, he is simply commenting on the "before" clause, and its infinitive verb, not on the main clause, and its indicative verb. While it is true that the infinitive modifies the indicative, it simply does not modify it in the restrictive way you would like it to, as I will show.

If you review examples of the infinitive of antecedent time, for example those listed by Robertson, page 1091, you can see, as Robertson himself notes, that in such constructions it is not the infinitive that provides the temporal setting of antecedence, rather it is the main verb to which the infinitive is dependent, that does that. So in some of the

examples the temporal setting is in the past because the main verb is in the past; in some examples the temporal setting is the future because the main verb is in the future. In other words, the exact aspect of antecedence fluctuates depending on the dictates of the main verb. The infinitive is more or less temporally neutral. You can see that the infinitive construct does not limit or dictate in any way what sort of main verb can be employed with it; and the meaning of the sentence is formed by harmonizing the antecedence of the dependent clause with the verbal tense of the main verb.

Now in John 8:58, the main verb is formally in the present. Recognizing that the infinitive used in the dependent clause is temporally neutral, one could translate the sentence as a straightforward present-tense: "I exist before Abraham is born." You have suggested something like this for one of the LXX examples we have been discussing. But what we find in the main English translations of the Bible, the ones you are defending, is a mixing of tenses that is not acceptable English. This is what I criticized in my book. The dependent clause is put into a past tense, because we know that the event to which it refers is in the past. That in itself is fine. But you can't do that and at the same time leave the main clause in the simple present tense, because there is a relation of antecedence involved, so the two verbs need to be brought into semantic harmony, a harmony that such mixed tenses breaks. It is when we give due weight to the past nature of the antecedent events, which is perfectly legitimate, that the idiomatic nature of the present tense of the main verb comes to the foreground. If John meant to convey simple, limited antecedence in relation to a past event, he would have to have put the main verb in a past tense. Instead, he uses the present tense in a PPA construction to indicate progressive action or state.

If you reject this progressive sense of the main verb, and insist that the infinitive restricts what the main verb can mean, then you would end up with "I existed before Abraham was born," grammar be damned. But, of course, you want and need the main verb to be in the present tense; so your whole argument insisting on the restricted nature of antecedence does work against your own purposes, your "larger point." Of course it is false of you to say that I have "missed the larger point." You yourself quote, at the beginning of your post #29, one of my responses to this larger point, showing how your attempt at limiting antecedence to a boundary behind the wall of the infinitive event completely destroys not only the meaning John 8:58 has, but even the meaning YOU want it to have. You can scarcely claim to have missed that set of comments, since you quote it back to me.

You review the character of the PPA to be progressive from the past to the present of the statement, which hardly needs repeating since no one is disputing it, and then say: "Now, it is hardly arbitrary to notice that using a present-tense Greek verb to denote an action or state that is "qualified" in the sentence by an expression beginning with the word "before" (PRO or PRIN) in reference to a past time or event simply does not look like a usage intended to do any of the above. This observation, which I made in my book, has never been refuted."

But of course it is completely arbitrary for you to make a subjective "observation" that something "does not look like" something else. You are bypassing the grammars which you claim to use, several of which include John 8:58 as an example of a PPA and none of which place the EIMI in that verse as an example of any other verbal usage, falsely opposing the infinitive of antecedent time to the PPA, which no grammar does, confusing the verbs referred to by the two categories (the one to the finite verb, the other to the infinitive), and simply offering, "I don't see it that way." There is nothing more arbitrary than that.

Smyth's grammar differentiates two distinct uses of the infinitive with PRIN, distinguished by whether the main clause is affirmative or negative. If it is a negative, then PRIN signifies "until" and has a more restrictive temporal significance, even a conditional quality, of antecedence than is the case when the clause is affirmative, as in John 8:58, where it means "before." In the latter case, "the clause with PRIN simply adds a closer definition of the time" (2433). Smyth adds that, "PRIN is used with the aorist or (less often) with the imperfect indicative only when PRIN is equivalent to hEWS until" (2434). This, of course, is different from the infinitive constructions. "When PRIN must be rendered by before, it takes the infinitive" (2434). Smyth then gives three examples of different uses:

Negative main clause: "I was not doing this until (or before) Socrates arrived." Here the time of the negated action is restricted to before, whereas the implied positive action begins some unspecified time after, the arrival of Socrates.

Affirmative main clause, with indicative dependent verb: "I was doing this until Socrates arrived." Here the affirmative action is limited to the time antecedent to Socrates' arrival. THIS IS HOW YOU CLAIM JOHN 8:58 IS TO BE READ. But this employs an indicative dependent verb, not an infinitive, and so is not parallel to John 8:58.

Affirmative main clause, with infinitive dependent verb: "I was doing this before Socrates arrived." Grammatically, this is the same form of sentence found in John 8:58. Note that it "simply adds a closer definition of time" than there would be if the main clause stood alone. It does not restrict the action to the time before Socrates' arrival, but informs the reader that the action had already commenced before that arrival, with no implied termination of action at the time of his arrival, and, of course, no specification of a beginning of the action.

What this comparison shows is that the use of the infinitive of antecedent time, in its affirmative form (as in John 8:58) has no necessary limitation of the action of the main verb to the time before, but only indicates that the action or state was already the case before.

Note, too, that in the example "I was doing this before Socrates arrived," nothing is said about the beginning of the verbal action. Now suppose we know that the speaker is Plato. You would say that we know that Plato is a mortal, and therefore whatever action he was performing must implicitly have a beginning. But suppose the speaker is Christ.

You would say that there is no necessary beginning of an action performed by Christ. So you see that your reading depends on theology, not on grammar, because in the one case you say the grammar implies one thing, and in another you say the very same grammar implies something else. This is utterly illegitimate.

I had criticized your false claim that all PPAs involve a distinct beginning of the verbal action. Even in your book, you recognized that the grammars often speak of the verbal action "beginning" simply as a figure of speech, given that verbal actions usually start sometime, and as part of the grammars expressing the nature of the PPA as carrying the action forward. In other words, they have to say that the verbal action 'begins' in the past in order to let us know that a simple present does not adequately convey the meaning of the PPA.

In your post #27, you reiterate, in a slightly more careful manner than before, your assertion that, "With reference to genuine NT example texts of the PPA cited in the NT grammars (leaving aside John 8:58 for sake of argument), all of them have a temporal marker that implies that the action or state expressed by the PPA verb is a temporal one of some limited duration." You go on to again list the sample you mean.

Of course, by changing how you express your point to "some limited duration," you are no longer talking about them all referring "to a period of time beginning at some point" (see your book, pages 109-110). And no one is disputing that all PPAs are limited in their duration at the present end, that is, by the time when the statement is made. This says nothing about when the action may or may not have begun. Even you concede that some of these examples (note the contrast to your reference to "all of them" above) do not in fact refer or convey a beginning of the verbal action: "The only texts of those cited above where the qualifying temporal language does not make this immediately obvious are 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 John 2:9, where 'until now' (hEWS ARTI in both texts) in and of itself gives no hint as to how long that is. . . . Even this expression hEWS ARTI, though it gives no indication by itself of the length of time involved, connotes a temporal duration that in context clearly has a beginning."

What you are doing is reading your assumptions, your own theological and anthropological constructs, into what the individual verses are talking about, and from that extrapolating an implicit beginning to the verbal action. Whatever that is (I call it eisegesis), it is not based in the grammar, and it assumes too much even about the intellectual context of the biblical writers. For example, in regard to 1 John 2:9, you say, "the false Christian who professes to be in the light and yet hates his brother 'is in the darkness until now'; this state of darkness in context obtained from the beginning of the false brother's life." You do not know, for a fact, that that is the case. You do not know that that is John's concept of the beginning of individual human existence, whether or not he believes in pre-existence of the soul, whether he has an emanationary psychology, how deeply his dualism runs, not to mention the simple issue of whether any beginning is in view to this dwelling in darkness, which may regress infinitely into the past awaiting the light of Christ. All along I have been making the point that your theology and your Christology are dictating your translational positions. You simply posit no beginning for

Christ's existence, while positing a beginning of existence for everyone and everything else that may be talked about. Thus you presume what you claim to conclude from John 8:58 – an obvious circularity. Whether or not your theology and ontology are correct, reading them into the text, rather than out of it is illegitimate. Whether or not we buy into a cosmology that says that everything has a beginning, many of your examples simply have no reference to a specific beginning in time. And one of those that does specify a beginning, 1 John 3:8, provide no more and no less than what the broadest literary context of John does for Christ (John 1:1), i.e., existence "from the beginning" (compare "in the beginning"). To go further in differentiating one reference to a beginning from another is theology, not exegesis. John 8:58 shares with many of your examples no reference to a beginning of the action at all.

You continue to say things like, "This criticism rather badly misrepresents my argument. It treats my point about the lack of any implied beginning in isolation rather than as part of the larger point, as I have noted, about the difference between temporal language that marks the verb as expressing duration from the past to the present and temporal language that marks the verb as expressing an antecedent action or state. Your criticism further isolates this specific point from the larger argument that takes notice of (a) the predicate absolute use of EIMI, (b) the clear contrast in the sentence between GENESQAI and EIMI, and (c) the evident allusion to Old Testament "I am" sayings of God, especially those in Isaiah."

Now Rob, it is simply impossible to respond to or criticize all of your points at the same time. I must assess them one by one, and I have addressed each of these three points, in greater or lesser detail. (a) On EIMI as a predicate absolute, please keep reading my past posts, which have argued in detail how utterly absurd such an identification is. (b) The supposed "contrast" of the two verbs comes down to no more than this: (1) since Christ is speaking of his ongoing existence, not his origin (as one who is "the living one" as opposed to "the dead"), he could not use the same verb as is used of Abraham; (2) the EIMI is not in the emphatic position, the PRIN is – hence the contrast rests on "before," while the use of the present form of EIMI preserves the progressive meaning from simple antecedence. (c) As I have argued in my book and in considerable detail in my post #4, the vast majority of "I am" statements piled up into this argument simply evaporate under close scrutiny. What you are left with is a tough choice, on whether you want to line up Jesus' copulative "I am (he)" statements with the ANI HU / EGW EIMI statements made by God in the OT (of which Exod. 3:14 is NOT one), or you want to line up the existential "I exist" of John 8:58 with those statements. The latter choice has certain problems, since the possible existential reading of the OT statements requires the mediation of the Greek of the LXX. But I went so far in my book as to say that it is possible that Jesus is invoking this language with reference to himself. Such an invocation does nothing to solve the translational issue of normal English word order and verb tense harmony, nor does it in and of itself settle any interpretive issues because it remains open to interpretation in what way he means to invoke this language. The abiding existence of Christ, quite clear from an accurate translation of John 8:58, lines up perfectly with the emphasis of similar statements in the OT, as I said in my book.

So if the parts and steps of your argument are not valid, or fail to establish anything towards building your argument, your argument as a whole is not valid. You want to add up a series of 'may-bes', 'could-bes', 'arguably-bes', 'for-the-sake-of-argument-bes' into a final 'definitely is!' I can understand your frustration that I won't let you do that.

In regard to your attempt to identify John 8:58 as a "gnomic-like broad-band present" (whatever that is supposed to be), you outline a six-step argument you think you have made. But neither the second step ("The definition of the infinitive of antecedent time is incompatible with the PPA as usually defined") nor the fifth step ("The use of EIMI in John 8:58 as usually interpreted fits something like the (non-proverbial) gnomic or broad-band descriptive category") is valid, and therefore your argument as a whole is invalid. I have further demonstrated the invalidity of the second point above. As to the fifth point, I note your language "something like." Please list for us every grammar that has cited John 8:58 as a gnomic present. You don't have any? Then how can you possibly make this claim? What, then, does "usually interpreted" mean, and are you talking about grammar or theology? You have completely ignored my earlier demonstration that gnomic does not mean what you think it means. I have pointed out that for all your criticism of supposedly broad and loose definitions of the PPA, you are offering an extremely vague and broad category in which you prefer to place John 8:58, one that you build up by including things like the descriptive present, which has no temporal quality whatsoever beyond the simple present of the time of speech (such as the hierarchical reading of Col. 1:17, although its temporal reading as a PPA has a lot to be said for it), and so in no way supportive of your case for an 'eternal' sense to Christ's words in John 8:58.

Even if we go this far with you, and for the sake of being supportive of you accept something as vague as "something-like" the gnomic for John 8:58, what we arrive at is "I exist before Abraham IS born." But that is not the translation you are defending, where the tenses are mixed in an illegitimate and, ahem, distinctly non-gnomic manner, which is what I criticized in my book. What these translations acknowledge is that the reference of the dependent clause is not a general or recurring event, but a particular past event at the time Jesus is speaking, and so semantically a singular past event that strips away any "transtemporal" or gnomic quality to the statement. But in making the necessary correction to the sense of the dependent clause, they go astray in not accordingly modifying the tense of the main clause.

In my book, and in my post #4, I had offered two examples besides John 8:58 of NT PPAs involving forms of the verb EIMI (John 14:9 and 15:27). These were chosen because they use EIMI in the first person singular form, exactly as in John 8:58, and occur in John, so provide evidence for how the author employed this verbal form. They also served well because most major translations render their PPA quality accurately, which allowed me to show how anomalous was the rendering of John 8:58 in these same translations. While accepting these as PPAs, you have tried to downplay their value since they are modified by a temporal phrase rather than a temporal clause, which is what we see in John 8:58. You have tried various ways to defy the grammars that cite the EIMI of John 8:58 as a PPA. You have ignored that some grammars cite John 8:58 side-

by-side with my comparative examples as PPAs (Turner, Winer, BDF). You have tried to argue away the other clausally-modified PPAs cited in the grammars. In all of these efforts you have failed.

Of course, there are other clausally-modified PPAs in the NT besides the ones that happened to be cited in the grammars, even ones employing a present form of the verb EIMI. For example:

Mk. 9:21: "And he asked his father, `How much time has it been (ESTIN) that this has happened to him?'"

Here the temporal modification is made by the dependent clause HWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi. Note the PPA sense: the action has been occurring in the past up to the time of the question. The PPA sense is accurately rendered by all major translations except the KJV:

"How long has this been happening to him" (NRSV, NAB, NASB, NW)

"How long has he been like this" (NIV, TEV)

"How long has he been this way" (LB)

"How long has he had this" (AB)

"How long is it ago since this came unto him" (KJV)

In my next message, I will reply to your posts #28-29.

Best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #30 – 2/23 – #17165

JASON #30

Rob,

In your post #28, you wish to continue to dispute the PPA reading of three LXX sentences (Prov. 8:23-24; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 89:2), even though two of them are recognized by Winer as PPAs closely comparable to John 8:58, in that they are both clausally-modified as is John 8:58. I am quite content to stand on the arguments I have made, and to stand with Winer on the identification of Jer. 1:5 and Ps. 89:2 as PPAs. As I demonstrated in my post #29, your assumption that the PPA and the "Infinitive of antecedent time" are mutually exclusive categories to which the contents of a single sentence can be assigned is a very basic mistake, rather like saying that a sentence EITHER has a nominative noun OR an accusative noun, when it quite clearly can have both. The same noun, of course, cannot be both nominative and accusative, and neither can the same verb be both a PPA and an Infinitive of antecedent time. But in John 8:58, EIMI is a PPA and GENESTHAI is an Infinitive of antecedent time. Likewise, both Jer. 1:5 and Ps. 89:2 involve multiple verbs, some of which are infinitives of antecedent time, and others PPAs. Your argument that these are mutually exclusive is a logical argument, not a grammatical argument, based in what you wrongly think is the limits of what we mean when we speak of antecedence. This simply has nothing to do with grammar.

As for Prov. 8:23-25, we have probably argued to a stand-off. I have suggested a PPA quality to it, in the sense that what has occurred puntiliarly in the past has lasting outcome in the present. But I admitted from the very beginning that this is a usage of the PPA not yet established in the grammars, and I will not insist on it. I did a little Rob-like experiment of making a case based on existing recognized uses of the present, but you have not accepted that argument. To me, this sentence seems to work in the same way as Rev. 21:1: "The first heaven and the first earth were gone, and the sea was (ESTIN) no more." Notice that the disappearance of the sea is a past event which creates the ongoing condition of it being absent. 5 of 8 major translations render it as if a historical present (he LB omits the clause altogether).

"And there was no more sea" (KJV)

"And the sea was no more" (NRSV, NAB)

"And there was no longer any sea" (NIV)

"And there no longer existed any sea" (AB)

2 translations show a recognition of the continuation of state in the present.

"And the sea is no more" (NW)

"And there is no longer any sea" (NASB)

Now as amorphous as the grammatical category of the historical present is, I certainly don't wish to sidetrack us into a discussion of its merits. We both agree that John 8:58 is not a historical present. Prov. 8:23-25, on the other hand, could easily be construed as one if Rev. 21:1 can be.

We are dealing, in general, with the fact that what Greek expresses with a present tense verb does not exactly line up with what English expresses with a present tense verb. We agree that that is the case. There are idioms in both languages where the formal grammatical tense does not correspond with the temporal semantics meant to be conveyed. We cannot be sure that the Greeks recognized all of the distinctions we infer for the uses of the Greek present tense. We label one present as one use, and another as another use, in order to negotiate the mis-match between our language and theirs as to the semantics of the verb. That is why in my book I address both the Greek grammar and the demands of English.

In your discussion of Jer. 1:5, you say:

"As you can see, my point was that the English versions of Jeremiah 1:5 do not offer an English equivalent of the PPA idiom. They do not have "I have known"; instead, they have "I knew." "I knew" does not express a state of knowing from the past continuing up to the present. That is why in your own rendering you suggested "I have known," because that can serve as an English equivalent to a PPA. Also, none of the English versions translate the qualifying temporal language in the way you say they should if that language was serving as the marker for a PPA ("since before you were born"). The first point is the crucial point here; the second point is further confirmation."

First, as you can see, you are making an argument based on what "the English versions of Jeremiah 1:5" do. When I pointed out that we both had inadvertently fallen into the mistake of citing English Bible translations of OT passages when discussing the meaning of Greek sentences in the LXX of the OT, and made a joke about it, you rather ungraciously said that YOU had never made such a mistake, right after saying the above.

Second, if we are talking of English translations specifically of the Greek of the LXX (e.g., Brenton), then "knew" is obviously a mistranslation, since the Greek verb is in the present tense. One could always resort to the ever-handly "historical present," which so easily glosses over any insurmountable problem in the use of the Greek present, but we both agree that John 8:58 is not a historical present, and we both agree in citing Jer. 1:5 as a parallel to John 8:58, although to different purposes.

Third, if for whatever reason we accept "knew" as an accurate rendering of this construct in Jer. 1:5, then the parallelism that we both accept to John 8:58 would indicate that we should translate the latter as "I existed." I don't think that's correct, but if you do you are welcome to it. It doesn't help your position at all.

I had suggested that "the original Hebrew of Jeremiah 1:5 is universally understood to have a past aspect . . . and the translators of the LXX . . . used the PPA construct to convey this past aspect to their readers." (p. 244)

You replied, "This won't work. For one thing, "a past aspect" is not the same thing as a PPA or its equivalent." But I never said this, Rob. I did not say that the Hebrew "past aspect" is "the same thing as a PPA." I said that the LXX translators of Jer. 1:5 used the PPA to convey the past aspect of this specific verse. Check my words above again. Of course, "Hebrew verbs don't work the same way as Greek verbs; the interplay of tense and aspect is quite different between the two languages." That is why translation involves choices of how to convey the semantics of the source language in the target language, as between Greek and English. Your objection is not to the point.

You go on to say "the Hebrew verb (YADA', in the qal perfect form) can be translated with either a present or a past tense verb depending on context." Of course. And what is the context here, Rob? Modification of the temporal sense of the verb by past tense clauses. So what's the point of citing a bunch of passages where such modification does not occur. The only relevant parallels would be ones where there is a similar modification. Even in your sample, which I assume was selected to prove your point, contains some PPAs, for example Job 28:13 (Brenton: "has not known") and Deut. 34:6 (where a PPA sense is rendered with an idiomatic English present by Brenton: "no one knows to this day").

In your discussion of PSALM 89:2 LXX (90:2 ENGLISH) you repeat your poetic exegesis:

- > "Before [PRO TOU] the mountains were brought into being,
- > And [KAI] the earth and the world were formed,
- > Even [KAI] from [APO TOU] everlasting to everlasting,
- > You are."

I had pointed out that you wrongly constructed a grammatical series, and explained how the first two clauses are governed by the PRO TOU, and were in series, with the KAI at the beginning of the second clause joining it to the same PRO TOU as governed the first clause. I said that for the series to continue, the KAI at the beginning of the third line would work, IF there was not an intervening APO TOU which sends the third clause off in a different direction. In other words, the first two lines are "before" clauses, while the third line is a "since" phrase (pp. 246-47). You completely missed my point, which has nothing to do with "an overly narrow understanding of my use of the word "even"" as you claimed. You went on to insist that "you still have a progression backward in time from the creation of the mountains back to the creation of the earth and the world and finally back to the everlasting past. The three lines do not need to be grammatically parallel for that progression to be evident."

Here once again, you are allowing the logic of your construal overwhelm the grammar. You interpret AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS as a period of time broader than, and

encompassing the previous periods mentioned. The APO TOU is against you, because it is quite explicitly "from, since," that is, progressive time forward from the previous "before" clauses. The switch from PRO to APO signals a shift of direction in the time under consideration. If the writer wanted to convey what you mean, he could have employed a different, non-contrastive construct, such as an EN or DIA phrase.

In comparing this verse to John 8:58, I had noted the parallel of "before" clauses making a PPA, which is of course what makes a comparison relevant to what this whole discussion is about. You seemed to be resting much of your reading of the verse on the significance of the "from, since" [APO] phrase, and I suggested you shouldn't, because this was not one of the parallel features that can be compared to John 8:58. In fact, I said, the APO phrase is superfluous to the construction of a PPA sense in this verse, and merely adds something that we don't usually see in other examples of the PPA, including John 8:58. "So this verse is more explicit in its modifying elements than we see in other PPAs with 'before' clauses, in which the 'since' element is implicit in the modifier; here it is made explicit."

You completely misunderstood me, and replied:

"In the above statement, you appear to be claiming that the phrase APO TOU AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS is the qualifying element that marks the present-tense verb EI as a PPA. Yet you go on immediately to quote yourself saying quite the contrary:

<< 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. >> (p. 247)"

In other words, if you had taken the care to read all of what I said, there would be no way for you to make the mistake of thinking I was saying the APO TOU is what made the PPA. Something's a bit off with your much-vaunted "contextual" reading here, Rob. You continue:

"In the above paragraph, you claimed that if we removed the APO TOU phrase the verb in Psalm 89:2 would be "a classic PPA," with the qualifying element being the lines fronted by the preposition "before" (PRO TOU or PRIN), as in John 8:58. But now you are claiming that it is the APO TOU phrase that has this function. Your rationale for construing Psalm 89:2 as a PPA appears to have changed significantly. If we accept your latest explanation, the PRO TOU ("before") element does not function as the marker of the PPA."

Quite clearly, you have not understood me.

Later, you repeat that your position on this verse is that, "I have merely advocated translating EI with the simple present "are.""

Obviously, this would be a non-sequiter in English. The only way to use it here would be to jettison the two "before" clauses as belonging to a separate sentence. You would need to do the same thing with the "before" clause in John 8:58. Since the translations you are defending do not take this drastic step in either case, you have not offered a sound argument in support of your position.

In your message #29, you insist:

"I have never 'argued that the aorist *limits* the time of the main verb to before the event of the infinitive,' in such a way that the state is 'locked out' from continuing after that event."

Oh no? Not only did you before I said that you did, but afterwards, in your post #27, you say:

"If 'the action of the main verb takes place BEFORE the action expressed by the infinitive' (. . . Young . . . emphasis added), then the main verb is not being used to express or denote action taking place AFTER the action expressed by the infinitive." (your emphasis)

"If the main verb denotes an action or state PRIOR TO AN EVENT OF THE PAST, then it does not denote an action or state in its CONTINUANCE UP TO THE PRESENT. Those are two different denotative uses of the verb." (your emphasis)

So you can see that I am hardly putting words into your mouth. Your whole argument for the Infinitive of antecedent time not allowing a progressive verbal sense (which strangely, as I pointed out, would be the only verbal sense not allowed, while every other tense and use is), amounts precisely to this. The problem is that you cannot or will not recognize that that is the case. Don't you understand the meaning of your own words or the consequences of your own arguments?

You continue:

"That the state continues after the event denoted by the aorist infinitive is implicit from the context . . . but the denotative *sense* is that the state obtains antecedent to the event . . ."

First, if this were true, then how would you explain the use of the present tense EIMI in a way compatible with established principles of Greek grammar? Your argument has gone from making a non-sequiter in English to a non-sequiter in Greek. You simply don't have any clear cut examples where the infinitive of antecedent time involves a past action and the main verb is present tense that does not involve a PPA. Your only way out would be to understand and translate "I exist before Abraham IS born." But the translations you are defending do not take this out, so this does not support your position. My position, on the other hand, supported by Greek grammars, is that this is a recognized idiomatic

construct, in which the use of the present tense with a past tense modifier signals a past state continuing to the present. If the grammar supplies this meaning, you do not need to resort to context.

Second, you are wrong to say that the context implies that "the state continues" even though by the grammar "the state obtains antecedent to the event." The fact that Jesus is now speaking a sentence that denotes that the state of his existence obtains antecedent to the event of Abraham's birth in no way establishes continuation of existence. If you are going to ignore the present value of the main verb, and force into a strictly antecedent value, then Jesus could just as well be speaking of reincarnation. That is, the implication could as easily be read as juxtaposing past and present existence, rather than implying continuous existence.

Third, what you are saying here is that John 8:58 is semantically a PPA, even if you will not agree that it is grammatically so. Note your own words "a state antecedent . . . continues." Now, as a principle of translation, are you not bound to provide an English sentence that accurately renders the meaning of the Greek. Wherever you think you are deriving that meaning, whether from a strict reading of the grammar, or from its modification by its immediate context, that is what you are obliged to do. Now how, in English, do we convey a state that pertains already antecedent to a past event and continues to the present? Do we use a simple present to do that? No. Do we use a simple past? No. We use a progressive form: "I have been, I have existed." Isn't that so?

best wishes,
Jason B.

ROB #30 – 2/28 – #17208

JOHN 8:58 - ROB #30: THE RELATION OF THE TWO CLAUSES, AND EIMI AS ABSOLUTE, IN JOHN 8:58

Jason,

I here reply to your post #20, which in turn was a response to my post #17, in which I discussed the relation between the two clauses in Jesus' statement in John 8:58.

I. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO CLAUSES AND VERBS

In the first section of my post #17, I made the point that in John 8:58 GENESQAI and EIMI stand in striking contrast to one another, in a way similar to the contrasts between the aorist infinitive and present tense verb in the three LXX texts we keep debating (Ps. 89:2 LXX; Prov. 8:23-25; Jer. 1:5). You commented:

<< By contrast you seem to mean simply that one thing happens `before' another, and so there is a contrast between that which exists prior and that which exists later. I fail to see any significance of kind in this observation. >> (p. 253)

Are you being serious here? I explained very clearly what I meant by 'contrast' in the very next sentences:

“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.”

It is truly disappointing to see how you repeatedly misconstrued my arguments in the series of posts you offered in October (posts #17 through #22). This is yet another example.

Regarding the first sentence quoted above, you wrote:

<< Your present-tense translations of these verbs beg the question. You are literally saying that what is significant here is the very form of translation you adopt in line with your own preformed conclusions. >>

In the text, Wisdom says that God “established” her in the beginning but “begets” her before his various acts of creation. See my discussion of this passage in post #15 (pp. 180-82) for the argument for understanding the passage in this way.

You wrote:

<< Anyway, what is so significant in your argument of something being antecedent to something else? >>

There it is again: a complete miss as to what I am arguing.

The rest of your comments on Proverbs 8 presuppose your classification of GENNAi as a PPA, a classification that I have shown to be impossible to defend and from which in your more recent posts you have backed away.

I wrote:

“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*.”

You asked:

<< But you maintain that `to be begotten' in Proverbs 8 is also to be seen as a verb of this kind, to be translated `transtemporally' as a present. So which is it? Do the four examples hang together or hang separately? >>

I don't see the inconsistency you are implying is to be found in my handling of these texts. The above quote from my post does not say anything that would exclude Proverbs 8 from using the present tense in a way similar to what we find in Psalm 89:2 or John 8:58. The semantics of the text is somewhat different, though, since GENNAi is an action word, not a word expressing a state.

I wrote:

“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).”

You replied:

<< Rob, you are talking interpretation here, not translation. You are not advancing a point on the translational issues. >> (p. 255)

No, I am talking exegesis, and exegesis is relevant to translation.

You continued:

<< One thing is spoken of in terms of its coming into existence, the other is spoken of in terms of its ongoing existence. No one is disputing that and it doesn't get you anywhere. >>

There's more to it than that, as you surely know. Jesus affirms his "ongoing existence" in juxtaposed contrast and as antecedent to Abraham's long-past coming into existence, in a way that echoes Old Testament sayings of God.

You wrote:

<< That Jesus wanted to stress his immediate continuing presence before his audience fits the literary context of the gospel in which Jesus contrasts the living favorably with the dead. >>

Huh? Not only are you now the one who is "talking interpretation," your interpretation rests on a vague and unsubstantiated claim about "the literary context of the gospel" that I am quite confident all learned students of the Gospel of John will recognize as mere smoke!

I wrote:

"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."

You replied:

<< You have once again contrived a wholly meaningless and meritless subjective distinction of your own between 'contrast' and 'giving a context in which the meaning is clearer.' The temporal clause in John 8:58 clearly does the latter. Jesus is not saying to his audience 'Behold, I exist!' This is really where your argument is tending. He is saying he exists in a specific temporal relation to Abraham. Do you deny that? >>

I have already answered this question. Jesus says that he exists antecedently to Abraham, and he says this in a way that contrasts his existence with Abraham's coming into existence.

You do not seem to be making much of an effort to understand anything I say. To help you, add the word "merely" after the word "rather" in the sentence you quoted above.

Here again are the two extrabiblical examples you cited:

"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).

I wrote:

“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.”

You replied:

<< Again, are you talking translation or interpretation? There is absolutely no difference in degree of grammatical contrast between the latter two "before" constructions and the ones from your pet four examples. To name and to see are both punctiliar acts, and to be is an existential state -- same degree of contrast as that between coming to be at one point of time and being as an existential state. >> (p. 256)

Please note how you missed the point. I wrote:

“...there is no *semantic* contrast between the two verbs...”

You replied:

“There is absolutely no difference in degree of *grammatical* contrast....”

I’m starting to feel that I am wasting my time. Perhaps some of those investing their time trying to follow these proceedings will see why.

I wrote:

“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.”

I pass over those elements of your reply that I have already addressed. You wrote:

<< Moreover, you are committing the fallacy of postulating the existence of theological grammar, distinct rules of grammar that apply only in theological discourse. That is special pleading and meritless. >> (pp. 256-57)

I see no “theological grammar” specified or implied anywhere in the sentence quoted above. Your criticism seems to be without merit.

II. EIMI IN JOHN 8:58 AS “ABSOLUTE”

You wrote:

<< In my post 1 I already criticized your claim that EIMI in John 8:58 is a "predicate absolute" – a claim you do not support by argument in your book, other than to cite A. T. Robertson's rather cryptic remark on the matter, which as an appeal to authority is not sufficient. >>

By now, those following this debate closely may be able to guess that the above criticism is factually incorrect. Once again, you make an assertion about my argumentation that is without question factually wrong. You couldn't even bring yourself to refer to the correct page in my book where I cited Robertson. Let me quote part of the relevant material:

“The first [critical observation] comes from A. T. Robertson, who in his extensive discussion of the PPA points out in passing that in John 8:58 ‘_eimi_ is really absolute,’ implying that for this reason it is not a true example of the PPA. What Robertson means by ‘absolute’ is that in John 8:58 _eimi_ occurs as what is known as a predicate absolute, a construction in which a copulative verb is used without an object or complement” (_Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John_, 107).

There it is: Robertson’s statement is backed up with a clear explanation of what he meant, sufficient to establish that what Robertson said is correct as long as you are aware of the fact that EIMI is indeed a copulative verb and that EIMI is used in John 8:58 with no object or complement. You manage to obscure the point by failing to come to terms with what I meant by “complement,” since in context I meant a subject complement and you wish to argue that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is an adverbial complement. Nevertheless, your assertion that I resorted to mere appeal to authority at this point with no argument at all to back up my claim is patently, factually incorrect.

You wrote:

<< Now in your post 17 you cite some selected figures who call the main clause of John 8:58 "absolute." Rob, citing authority is not making an argument. You can cite authorities from now to doomsday, but you can't make a non-absolute construction absolute. >>

As you have done so often, your comments here completely ignore the context of my remarks. Let me remind you. You had written:

<< 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.... 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. >>

I replied:

“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.’”

To show that Robertson’s view cannot plausibly be regarded as a rare foolish mistake overlooking something as plain as anything could be on the page in front of us, I documented the fact that Robertson’s view is shared by countless exegetes whose record of scholarship is much more relevant to the study of the Greek New Testament and to John in particular than yours (or mine, for that matter). An appeal to authority is a legitimate way to refute the kind of claim you were making.

You wrote:

<< Never mind that many of the people you cite are as "unknown" as you say I am (Thatcher? Lincoln?), and all of a particular theological persuasion and interpretive bent when it comes to the "I am" expressions in John. >>

If you do not recognize Andrew T. Lincoln as a New Testament scholar of repute, then you are out of the loop. He has written several well-received books, including at least two commentaries, and numerous articles in the field. As for these scholars’ theology, perhaps you know more about them than I do. I don’t know anything about Thatcher’s own theology, for example. But speaking of fallacies, your criticism reeks of ad hominem.

You wrote:

<< Brown, Harner, and Ball all buy into the great "I AM" nonsense (that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like "Hi, it's me," and "I'm the one you're looking for"), and this dictates their supposedly grammatical analysis. >>

Absolutely false. All three writers relate some or many of Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings in John to the “I am” sayings of God in Isaiah. However, they nuance even this association, and they do not claim that Jesus is alluding to, let alone invoking, Exodus 3:14 in *any* of those sayings. Raymond Brown barely mentions Exodus 3:14 once in his appendix on the “I am” sayings (Brown, The Gospel according to John, 1:533-38), and only part of the OT background to the sayings (536). He does not even mention Exodus 3:14 in his

comments on John 8:58 (360, 367-68). In Philip Harner's *The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel*, the primary OT source for Jesus' sayings is identified as the ANI HU sayings in Isaiah (6-15). Regarding Exodus 3:14, Harner argues that it "can hardly be considered a direct source for an absolute use of *ego eimi* in the Fourth Gospel," although "we should not entirely exclude the I AM of Exodus 3:14 as part of the more general background" (17). Later, in his chapter discussing specific "I am" sayings in John, Harner compares these texts to the sayings of God in Isaiah but does not even mention Exodus 3:14 (37-48). In his conclusion he comments that in the EGW EIMI sayings in John "we have not found any specific aspects of the phrase that would be especially reminiscent of Exodus 3:14" (60). In David Mark Ball's 300-page book *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, according to the index, he refers to Exodus 3:14 only once, in a brief comment about Harner's view (34).

It might be a good idea to READ these scholars before accusing them of "nonsense."

You wrote:

<< Never mind that the universities you invoke as their home are all religious institutions. >>

More *ad hominem*. And I don't recall saying anything about Harner or Ball's institutional affiliation. Is it hard work making up these false assertions, or do you enjoy it?

Next, you complained that I wrote as if you needed "to be educated on what an 'absolute' is" when, you claim, "obviously" you are "not the one in need of basic grammatical education here." All this because the first two dictionary definitions of 'absolute' I quoted both mention that the term applies to a "transitive" (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*) or "normally transitive" (*Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*) verb. You write:

<< Let me return the favor by quoting Mario Pei & Frank Gaynor, *A Dictionary of Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), page 219: "transitive verb: A verb expressing an action which does not end with or is not confined to the agent; transitive verbs are capable of governing a direct object." A be-verb is the quintessential intransitive verb. So much for that line of argument. >>

You might have had a point—if only I had claimed that EIMI in John 8:58 was transitive. But I did not make that claim. I merely claimed that the definition of 'absolute' underlying its usage by biblical scholars with reference to John 8:58 was similar or analogous to the above dictionary definitions. Some grammarians classify the 'be' verb as neither transitive nor intransitive, while others do classify it as a type of intransitive verb. In any case, the 'be' verb normally takes not a direct object but a subject complement: "You are Jason"; "She is a girl"; "I am human." However, in John 8:58 there is no subject complement. This is the point that I made after quoting those dictionary definitions.

You wrote:

<< But do note definition (a) in the American Heritage dictionary: "Syntactically isolated": the main clause of John 8:58 is not syntactically isolated from the rest of the sentence. In the example from the dictionary you can clearly see that the dependent clause is an adjunct, a "by the way" remark that is not necessary to complete the verbal meaning of "the game began." This is certainly not the case with John 8:58, as I will show once again below. >>

Yes, by definition (a) in the American Heritage, the clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is not absolute. But no one said it was. This definition has nothing to do with whether the main verb EIMI is absolute. You are quite muddled here.

I wrote:

"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.)."

You replied:

<< Precisely. You have done some good detective work here. You have ferreted out the way in which Thatcher, Lincoln, Brown, Harner, Ball, et al. mean that EIMI in John 8:58 lacks a "predicate." They mean it is to be distinguished from those cases where EIMI is accompanied by a predicate noun or adjective. >> (p. 259)

If you had ever actually bothered to read any of these scholars' discussions of the matter, or even paid close attention to my discussion of the predicate absolute in my book, you would already have known this. Then you would not have accused them of "nonsense," as I noted earlier. Oddly enough, you neglected to mention Robertson in your list of scholars above, whose reference to EIMI in John 8:58 you characterized as "foolish." That criticism now turns out to be indefensible as well. Still, you give it a go:

<< This has nothing to do with the verbal complement construction of the PRIN clause, as yourself have just said. So this whole line of argument has been pointless, hasn't it? So now, thanks to your good detective work, I must admit to a mistake since, as you point out, I had said that EGW EIMI was not "in any sense" a predicate absolute. You are correct that that was hyperbole. I should have said "in any sense relevant to the issues we are debating," since obviously we agree that it does not involve a predicate

noun or adjective. So feel free to make any ground you can in your argument by celebrating my free admission that the main clause of John 8:58 does not contain a predicate noun or adjective. It contributes nothing to our discussion. >>

There you go again. I never said that your statement was hyperbole, nor did I say anything that could be fairly paraphrased in that way. Here is what I actually said:

“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” (pp. 197-98).

Moreover, the problem with your argument was not limited to the three words “in any sense.” Rather, your whole line of argument was riddled with such false claims. Robertson’s statement was “foolish”; his statement and most translations make the mistake of treating “before Abraham came into being” as “a complete sentence in itself”; therefore “it is simply false” to say that EIMI is a predicate absolute “in any sense,” since nothing is “more obvious on the page of the text in front of us than that.” Each of these elements of your argument is flat-out incorrect.

I had written:

*****BEGIN QUOTE FROM ROB’S POST*****

“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.”

*****END QUOTE FROM ROB’S POST*****

You replied:

<< This combination of your and my remarks, taken so far out of context, threatens to confuse three different uses of the expression "existential." First, the be-verb is an existential verb in all but its auxiliary functions (in both Greek and English). To say that it is an existential verb is obviously NOT to say that it always means "I exist" absolutely. Second, the be-verb can be used either in a copulative function or an existential function: copulative when its complement is nominal, pronominal, or adjectival, existential either

in absolute uses or when its complement is adverbial. This is obviously what I meant in the quote from my post 4. The existential function does not in any way preclude the depictive complement. Third, you seem to use "existential" here solely in the sense of an absolute use, but that's not what I mean by "existential," so we need to keep these two meanings distinct in our discussion. >> (pp. 260-61)

If you can find a reference to an absolute use of the be-verb in the material from my post quoted above, feel free to point it out. I don't see it. There was nothing wrong with what I wrote; you have created problems with it out of thin air. I took nothing from your post out of context. You wrote, "To say that it is an existential verb is obviously NOT to say that it always means 'I exist' absolutely." Well, I never suggested or implied that it did. Your statement, "The existential function does not in any way preclude the depictive complement," is true but undisputed; the implication of that statement is that I had somehow disagreed with it, which is not true. What I said was that if EIMI is existential (meaning "I exist") then if it has a complement it will not be an obligatory one. Somehow you managed to address all sorts of things I did not say while ignoring the main thing I did say.

I wrote:

"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."

You replied:

<< You are right, I was not careful to distinguish two distinct points. On the one hand I want to point out how the the full meaning of the verb is left incomplete by fracturing the syntax in the traditional translation. On the other hand I want to point out how the dependent clause is orphaned, cut loose from the rest of the sentence, by the interpretation that lies behind the traditional translation. >>

I really don't see the basis for these claims. What lies behind the "traditional translation" is simply the recognition of EIMI as a present tense indicative first person singular form of the Greek be-verb, which is normally translated "am." The traditional interpretation, far from cutting loose the dependent clause from the rest of the sentence, construes it as an integral and crucial element in Jesus' statement. Moreover, the 'PPA translation' is the one that loses the full force of the verb in its context by construing Jesus to have been saying only that he was older than Abraham. As fantastic as even that claim would have been, Jesus' statement claimed something far greater.

I wrote:

"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.”

You replied:

<< Pardon me, but you are using an English grammar to argue something about the Greek. So are you trying to make a point about the English or the Greek? >>

I was making a point about the Greek, as I stated very clearly in a previous paragraph that you seem to have missed:

“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” (p. 199).

I quoted from the *Cambridge Grammar* because its definitions and examples illustrate points of relevance to the Greek text. I discussed the English translation of John 8:58 in my next post, which was my post #18 (pp. 203-4).

You wrote:

<< You say that EGW EIMI in John 8:58 is a predicate absolute, and clearly you mean not simply "it does not have a nominal, pronominal, or adjectival complement" but something more than that. Because no one has ever said it had a copulative function here. So you mean that it is syntactically separable from the PRIN clause, right? For this to be true, it would be necessary that the full sense of the verb remain the same with or without the PRIN clause, because the meaning of "absolute" is that its full meaning is in itself, not needing any completion from the rest of the sentence. So that would mean that Jesus is declaring his existence. I find this implausible. >>

To say that the main verb is meaningful without the complement is not to say that the complement adds nothing to the meaning of the sentence or that it has no relation to the main verb. It is to say that the complement is optional and depictive rather than obligatory and resultative, as I have already explained. An optional complement—or adjunct—is informative with respect to the main verb, but not strictly necessary for the main verb to function in the sentence. As I stated, quoting the *Cambridge Grammar*, “A ‘depictive’ is a predicative that specifies a description of the conditions of the action of the verb, as in ‘He died *young*’ (261)” (Bowman, 198). The word ‘young’ is of

course informative about the circumstances and timing of the verb ‘died,’ but nevertheless the verb ‘died’ is meaningful and functions properly in the sentence without it. By definition, then, ‘young’ in that sentence is an adjunct. Now returning to the Greek of John 8:58, if EIMI is understood existentially (i.e., to mean “I exist” or the equivalent), then EGW EIMI is a functional clause on its own and does not actually need the dependent clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI in order to function as a meaningful clause. Nevertheless, of course, the dependent clause contributes significantly to the meaning of that main clause by providing a temporal orientation from which the full meaning of the main clause is to be understood. This is precisely what is meant by an adjunct or optional complement. If Jesus’ entire statement had been merely EGW EIMI, we might have construed it to mean merely “I exist” and that would indeed have seemed an oddly banal thing for Jesus to say in that context. But the adjunct dependent clause makes it clear that this statement is not a mere affirmation of existence but an affirmation of existence of an extraordinary kind.

Your remaining comments on this point (pp. 262-63) labor under the same misunderstanding. To say that EIMI is absolute is not to say that the dependent clause contributes nothing to our understanding of the temporal orientation or significance of EIMI. This either—or analysis of yours simply doesn’t hold up.

Toward the end of my post #17, I argued that whether we construe EIMI in John 8:58 as existential (meaning “I exist”) or as a copula with no predicate expressed (meaning, say, “I am [he]”), either way the dependent clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI would not be an obligatory complement but would be an adjunct. You did not address this argument but rather complained that I was not choosing one of those ways of construing EIMI:

<< Whenever you make up your mind about what you want to argue for, will you please let me know? This just appears to be tossing out all possible arguments hoping something, anything will stick.... This is very confused. Either its a copula with an implicit predicate complement, or it is absolute. Please choose one.... So, apparently, you are willing to trot out contradictory positions so long as they block the complement status of the PRIN clause. This is precisely the apologetic procedure that you say you want no part of. >>

On one level, this objection simply misses the point. Suppose I pick one of these two ways of construing EIMI. Whichever one I pick, the dependent clause is an adjunct. Thus, either way, my claim that the dependent clause is an adjunct will stand. So, what will you gain polemically from my choosing one way over the other? Nothing of relevance to the point I was making.

On another level, your objection sets up the topic of my post #18, to which you responded in your post #21 (pp. 265-69). So I will save further comments on the matter for my next post, in which I will reply to your post #21.

ROB #31 – 3/10 – #17255

JOHN 8:58 - ROB #31: EXEGETING AND TRANSLATING JOHN 8:58

Jason,

In this post I will reply to your post #21, in which you were replying to my post #18 on the subject of exegeting and translating John 8:58. You wrote:

<< Rob, in your post 18 you review the broader literary context of John 8:58, making an argument for your interpretation of the significance of Jesus' statement in that verse. From the start of this exchange, I have said that I take a position on the accurate translation of the verse, and that accurate translation is open to more than one possible application to interpretive, theological conclusions. So all I can do is ferret out any possible translational significance to your remarks here. >>

Jason, at the end of my post #18 I explained very clearly what the “translational significance” was to the exegetical observations I made in that post. There was no need to “ferret out” what that significance was.

Translators cannot ignore interpretive issues. However, they can make translational choices that avoid coming down in a heavy-handed way on one particular interpretive reading of the text. You fault those few versions that translate John 8:58 with ‘I AM’ because you see this as promoting a particular interpretation of Jesus’ words that is at the very least open to serious dispute (especially any direct connection to Exodus 3:14). By the same token, those versions that translate EIMI in John 8:58 with a form of the past tense must be recognized as promoting a particular interpretation of Jesus’ words that is at the very least open to question, namely, that Jesus’ statement means nothing more than that he was older than Abraham. The traditional translation, found in the KJV, the Douay-Rheims, the ASV and NASB, the NEB and the REB, the ESV and the NIV, and the RSV and the NRSV, to name only the more significant English versions, avoids both extremes. It neither forces an association with Exodus 3:14 nor casts Jesus’ statement as simply a claim to be older than Abraham. The conventional translation of EGW EIMI as “I am” is therefore the least obtrusively interpretive English rendering on the market.

You wrote:

<< Jesus reveals himself throughout the Gospel. This necessarily involves him declaring and explaining that he is various literal and metaphorical things to people and to the cosmos. It is a convenience to cluster these under the rubric "I am" sayings, because that is their common element. It is not however their significant element; the latter is what it is Jesus says he is in each case, and combining all of these things (light, shepherd, gate, etc.) into a picture of his overall self-revelation. But the use of "I am" is perfectly ordinary, because it is a very common expression, in any language. >>

Yes and No. Yes, the words EGW EIMI and their equivalent in other languages in and of themselves have perfectly ordinary uses, and it is common enough that we should certainly not view each and every occurrence of these two words together as a divine pronouncement. But I have never, ever suggested otherwise. It is the way these words are used in the sayings of Jesus reported in the Gospels, especially John, that warrants interpreting them as divine self-revelations. As you yourself note, it is what Jesus says about himself using these words that is significant, making each of these statements part of “his overall self-revelation.” In putting the matter in this way, you have stumbled into one of the reasons why we should translate EGW EIMI in John 8:58 as “I am” rather than “I was” or “I have been”: the rendering “I am” preserves the association between John 8:58 and these other self-revelatory statements and makes the revelatory function of the saying in 8:58 explicit. And it does this without pushing a particular theological interpretation of the statement.

I had referred to the three EGW EIMI sentences of Jesus in the space of eleven verses in John 8 (vv. 18, 24, 28) as a “series of EGW EIMI sayings of varying forms.” You replied that “the idea of a series here is weak” because the first statement is explicitly copulative while the second and third are implicitly so. In other words, my statement that there is a series of EGW EIMI sayings of varying forms is weak because the EGW EIMI sayings have varying forms. Well, I’m convinced!

I wrote:

“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.’”

You replied:

<< No, this is not correct. The audience understands there to be an implicit "he" predicate complement in this sentence, which is formally absolute, but not semantically absolute. If it was the latter, they would not ask "Who are you," but might say, "Yes, we can see that you exist; so what?" Which might lead into Jesus saying something about his `transtemporal' existence. But that's not the direction the exchange takes. >>

I did not say that EIMI in John 8:24 was “semantically absolute” in the sense you are using. You’re simply not tracking with my argument here. All I said was that it is absolute, that is, predicateless, with no predicate that can be supplied from the context. The listeners’ question, “Who are you?” (v. 25) shows that they heard Jesus’ EIMI as “am” with a predicate expected but not supplied or implied.

Regarding John 8:28, I wrote:

“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).”

You replied:

<< This is all interpretation, not translation. Let me just point out, however, that blasphemy is not explicitly mentioned in v.59. You see, you are interpreting. >>

But of course! I am showing that my translation of verse 58 coheres with the passage as a whole. That is certainly part of what a translation is supposed to do.

You wrote:

<< Because EIMI is such a workhorse in the Greek language (just as the verb to be is in English) it has many uses, and it is simply naive to think that every use of EIMI connects it to every other. >>

I never claimed or implied “that every use of EIMI connects it to every other.” I claimed that Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings in John are self-revelatory statements that should be compared with one another, and specifically that the predicateless EGW EIMI saying of 8:58 should be associated with the predicateless EGW EIMI sayings of 8:24, 28.

I wrote:

“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.”

You replied:

<< This presumes a significance to "I am" rather than to what Jesus actually says he is. It lumps together "I am"s used in quite different ways, different contexts, different meanings. >>

I have already refuted this objection. The EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus in verses 24, 28, and 58 of John 8 are all in the same context; they are all predicateless; they are all statements in which Jesus is revealing his mysterious identity; and they all allude to Isaianic EGW EIMI sayings of similar form.

You wrote:

<< Moreover, as I already pointed out in my book, it ignores the VERY NEXT "I am" in this series you are constructing, that of the blind man in John 9 (only 10 verses from John 8:58, compared to 30 verses away for the last of your series). So I guess the blind man is also "making a veiled claim to deity." That's a fascinating theology you are proposing. >>

This is a straw-man objection, nothing more. Had I claimed that the words EGW EIMI are always veiled claims to deity irrespective of context, you would have a point. But since I have been very clear in rejecting that misunderstanding, your repeated use of this straw-man objection succeeds only in showing how far you are from having come to grips with my argument.

The man healed of blindness speaking in John 9:9 does not say EGW EIMI in any sort of context that might even plausibly be construed as anything more than it is: an affirmation that he is indeed the one whom Jesus had healed.

“Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, ‘Is this not [OUC ESTIN hOUTOS] he who sat and begged?’ Some said, ‘This is he’ [hOUTOS ESTIN]. Others said, ‘No, but he is [ESTIN] like him.’ He said, ‘I am he [EGW EIMI]’” (John 9:8-9).

The man’s words EGW EIMI are clearly a response to the differing comments hOUTOS ESTIN and hOMOIOS AUTWi ESTIN. We have here a different speaker (the man born blind, not Jesus), speaking on a different occasion (John 9 is a separate pericope from John 8:12-59, so that the proximity in number of verses between 8:58 and 9:9 is not significant), clearly and explicitly answering a specific question (whether he was the man whom Jesus had healed), and not making any allusions to the divine EGW EIMI sayings in Isaiah or anywhere else in the Old Testament (unlike John 8:24, 28, 58). I am not the one who is ignoring context here.

You wrote:

<< My point should be obvious: it is not the EGW EIMI that gives any of these statements significance. EGW EIMI is just about the most common thing people say. >>

Although the latter sentence above is sheer overstatement, I agree that EGW EIMI in and of itself does not convey anything auspicious. As I keep pointing out, I have never said or suggested or implied otherwise. However, it is a mistake to reason from the fact that EGW EIMI can have ordinary uses to the conclusion that we should not see any thematic connections among Jesus’ sayings that begin with these words. Careful studies of those sayings by numerous biblical scholars have demonstrated over and over again that there is abundant evidence showing that at least most, if not all, of Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings in John echo divine self-revelatory pronouncements in the Old Testament, especially in

Isaiah 40-66. You have apparently read little if any of these scholarly studies, since, as I documented in my previous post, you wildly misrepresented several of the most notable such works, specifically those by Raymond Brown, Philip B. Harner, and David Mark Ball (pp. 367-68). I have already pointed out the especially clear use of Isaiah 43:10 in Jesus' sayings in John 8:24, 28, which these and other scholars have noted and discussed.

You wrote:

<< The principle of making lexical connections transparent in translation is a good one for key technical terms of the text, but is impossible to apply to commonplace words, like EIMI, that have too many distinct usages to be always translated the same way, particularly if it means ignoring proper tense significance. >>

I have already addressed the matter of “proper tense significance” at length. Like most biblical scholars, I have focused on the EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus, especially those that are “absolute” or unpredicated (that is, that have no subject complement stated), because it is evident from the contexts of these statements that most if not all of them have a revelatory significance beyond “it’s me.” This is reason enough in a formal equivalency version to translate EGW EIMI in John 8:58 as “I am” if at all possible, and of course, it is more than possible.

I had written:

“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.”

You replied:

<< First of all, this is not a defense of the traditional translation. Second, it is about interpretation, not translations. Third, it would in no way get you out of a PPA reading of the main verb, and a corresponding rendering in English. >>

I disagree on all three counts. Let me respond to your first and third points at once. The traditional translation of John 8:58, “I am,” retains the ambiguity of the original (is this an existential affirmation or an identity claim?) in a way that “I was” or “I have been” does not. Yet if one reads “I am” existentially, one will come away *at least* with the same understanding that “I have been” would convey (that Jesus is saying that he had existed since a time antecedent to Abraham). Thus, my argument here contributes significantly to a defense of the traditional translation and does so over against a

translation that construes EIMI as a straightforward instance of the PPA as usually defined. As to your second point, the recognition of a pattern of such deliberate ambiguity or double entendre in John is an exegetical datum of relevance to translating John. Thus the translator who is aware of this pattern will want to retain this ambiguity where possible. For example, “lifted up from the earth” retains the ambiguity in John 12:32 and is therefore preferable to a translation that decides for the reader which way to construe those words (e.g., the NLT rendering “when I am lifted up on the cross”). Regrettably, there seems to be no way to retain the double entendre in a contemporary English rendering of John 1:5 or 3:3 (although the ASV rendering of 1:5, “apprehended it not,” comes as close as any).

You wrote:

<< You continue to imagine that there are special exceptions to English grammar and syntax when applied theologically. >>

No, although I do think that theological statements can sometimes strain grammar and syntax in any language. If my exegesis of John 8:58 implies that this is so in that text, so be it.

I wrote:

“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.”

You replied:

<< This is just a matter of refusing to translate, of refusing to come down on either side of what the statement might mean. >>

As I have explained, this is sometimes what a good translation does, where the text exhibits a double entendre. I note with some interest and satisfaction that you have made absolutely no attempt to refute my claim that this linguistic phenomenon occurs frequently in John’s Gospel and likely occurs in John 8:58.

You wrote:

<< You have now lined up a series of unrelated and even contradictory positions on why the traditional translation should stand. You have failed to construct a coherent position, but simply marshaled any and all possible arguments that might give reason for keeping the traditional translation. This is exactly what I said apologists do, and though you considered that description of apologetic method “insulting and maligning,” your latest

series of four posts goes much further than any previous ones in showing precisely what I meant. >>

I disagree. You try to back up this claim with a couple of summary assertions:

<< You have argued: the verb is absolute and completely independent of the temporal clause; the temporal clause is the most important factor in determining the meaning of the verb; >>

I never argued that the verb is “completely independent of the dependent temporal clause” in the sense of standing in no relationship to it; your argument here is a straw-man that I have thoroughly refuted. You continued by claiming that I had argued:

<< ...the verb is existential; the verb is copulative; the verb is both. >>

I argued that the verb may be a double entendre, deliberately ambiguous so that it could be taken either way. You have not even tried to address this argument.

In my next post, I will respond to your post #22 and so conclude my replies to your series of posts from late October (your posts #17-22).

ROB #32 – 3/11 – #17257

JOHN 8:58 - ROB #32: EXODUS 4:10 AND 21:36 AND THE PPA

Jason,

In this post I will respond to your post #22 and so conclude my replies to your series of posts from late October (your posts #17-22).

In your post #22, you asked me to “take into consideration the following two additional OT PPAs involving the verb EIMI that we have failed to include before now.” You quoted those two texts as follows:

<< Exodus 4:10

"Lord, I have not been fit (OUCH hIKANOS EIMI) before (PRO) yesterday or before the third day [i.e., in the past]."

Exodus 21:36

"But if it is known of the bull that it has been a gorer (HOTI KERATISTHS ESTI) before (PRO) yesterday and before the third day [i.e., in the past] . . ." >>

Yes, I've seen these two texts before. Greg Stafford makes much of these two texts in his book *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* (2d ed., 274). Stafford claims that Brenton's English translation in both texts is “trying to capture the sense of an idiom used in the Greek text,” and of course this claim is implicit in your citation of these texts as examples of the PPA. The idiom in question is really a Hebrew one that the LXX literally, if woodenly, translated. Specifically, the temporal phrase “yesterday and the third day” (“third” counting inclusively, thus referring to the day before yesterday) is a Hebrew idiom that we might translate “yesterday and the day before” but which actually means “previously” or “in the past.” The LXX translates this same idiom literally in Exodus 21:29 (where the verb *Hi* is the present subjunctive) and elsewhere.

Let's take the first of the two texts that you and Stafford cite:

“I am not fit, before yesterday or the day before, or from when you began to speak to your servant; I am weak of speech and slow of tongue” (Ex. 4:10).

Here the LXX, in a somewhat awkwardly literal translation (which I have tried to reproduce in the above English rendering), reports Moses making the general statement that he is not able or worthy to be God's spokesman, and then qualifying that statement temporally in two ways: previously (“before yesterday or the day before”) and since God first started speaking to him. Thus, if we want to convey the full sense in our translation, we might render it as follows: “I was not fit previously, nor am I [or, “have I been”] fit since you began to speak to your servant.” Note that your translation, “I have not been fit

before yesterday or before the third day,” is not grammatically normal English (something that you consider very important in a translation!). In English, one would not say, “I have not been fit before yesterday,” but rather “I was not fit before yesterday.” You might, then, decide that it would be better translated, “I have not been fit since before yesterday.” I would have no objection to such a translation as a way of smoothing out the sentence in English, but only because of the rest of the sentence, not because of the temporal phrases with PRO. It is the final temporal phrase, “since you began to speak to your servant,” that might be construed as marking the verb EIMI as a PPA. Again, though, I think EIMI is temporally qualified in two different ways in this complex sentence.

The statements in Exodus 21 are quite different, though they use the same idiom. Here is the one you quoted in part:

“But if the bull is known that it is a gorer before yesterday or the day before, and if they are warning its master and he did not restrain it, he shall pay back bull for bull, but the one killed shall be for him” (Ex. 21:36).

The present tenses in this sentence appear to be the kind of present one finds in legal texts, a special genre-specific idiomatic use of the present found in English as well. We might translate the sentence like this:

“But if the bull is known to be a gorer previous to the incident, and if those knowing it warn its master and yet he failed to restrain it....”

I think this is a far better translation than something like this: “But if the bull is known to have been a gorer since before the incident” (which, again, is how you would actually need to translate it if you want to construe the verb as a PPA).

However one construes the present-tense verbs in these two texts, I do not think these examples overturn my conclusion that the aorist infinitive clause marks the present-tense main verb as expressing antecedent time in texts like John 8:58.

ROB #33 – 3/11 – #17258

JOHN 8:58 - ROB #33: ONCE AGAIN, WORD ORDER

Jason,

In this post, I will reply to your post #24, which was in turn a reply to my post #23. In that post, I had offered two contemporary examples of the use of indicative forms of the be-verb that are similar to the conventional translations of Psalm 89:2 LXX and John 8:58 (from Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* and Guy Finley's *The Lost Secrets of Prayer*). Both examples happen to italicize the be-verb so used ("Pooh just *is*"; "all already *is*"). I suggested that the italicization was for emphasis and that the wording would have the same force without the italics. You replied:

<< So you knew going in that there's something up with these two texts, something that makes them italicize the "is." That something is the recognition by the authors that they are employing "is" ungrammatically, precisely as you say for emphasis, to make a point; and when the second author wishes to state the same point with the emphasis elsewhere, he employs "exists." So thank you for making my point for me. >> (pp. 296-97)

We have evidence at least in Guy Finley's statement that the italicization does not mark the italicized "is" as ungrammatical, namely, that he italicized other words, INCLUDING "EXISTS":

"_ Everything that ever was or ever will be_ already _exists_.... So in God's world, all already *is*."--Guy Finley, *The Lost Secrets of Prayer* (Llewellyn, 1998), 32, 33 (emphasis in original).

By your reasoning, "exists" must be italicized because it is ungrammatical, but you argue that "exists" is grammatically correct.

You wrote:

<< But whatever you meant, the simple acknowledgment that the "wording" of the English translations as "unusual or odd" irreversibly puts the burden of proof on you to defend it, as I have said all along. No counting up of translations shifts that burden anywhere else, as I said way back at the beginning of all this, because those translations are made within tradition of translation and interpretation that make enumeration an illegitimate source of "evidence" on the question. >>

The burden of proof is a mild one: All I really need to do is to give a plausible, meaningful explanation for why almost all English versions have translated it with this "unusual or odd" wording. I do not have to prove that this wording is the only legitimate translation or that the alternative translations that employ a form of the past tense to

render EIMI are completely without merit. One reason that the burden of proof is light on the side of “tradition” is that theologians throughout the centuries who have dissented from the traditional view of Christ have nevertheless assumed the correctness of the traditional rendering. J. Ernest Davey, whom I quoted in my book (*Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, 88-89), is a twentieth-century example. Regarding John 8:58, he wrote:

“...before Abraham was I am -- the change of tense implies an obvious use of the formula of divinity.... The clearest cases are (1) 8:58, where the tense is significant, as one expects ‘I was’...and (2) 18:5, 6.... In John 8:58 we have probably a deliberate change of tense, i.e. from a claim of preexistence as Messiah to a claim of divinity, made however in the Greek and due to the evangelist, who has also in other places in *John* interpreted words of Jesus in a mistaken way....” -- J. Ernest Davey, *The Jesus of St. John* (London: Lutterworth, 1958), 94, 136, 137.

I can even appeal to the NWT in support of the traditional word order, since it also preposes the dependent clause in violation of your canon of English syntax. The best you say about this counterevidence from the nontraditional NWT is that somehow its translators were unduly influenced in this regard by the tradition of English translation. I don’t find this at all plausible, because the NWT exhibits an almost obsessive penchant for departing from traditional renderings even when they are perfectly acceptable and noncontroversial. In any event, clearly the NWT translators were focused on John 8:58 as a text they chose to translate in a nontraditional way. Yet they retained the same word order that you claim is obviously defective English.

ROB #34 – 3/11 – #17259

JOHN 8:58 - ROB #34: PPA AND OTHER BROAD-BAND PRESENTS

Jason,

In this post I respond to your posts #25-28. These posts reviewed ground covered more than once and were for the most part quite cursory responses to my posts #24-26. Therefore, my replies can be comparatively brief.

JASON'S POST #25: REVISITATION OF THE PPA

You begin this post by taking issue with the following statement from my post #24:

“* There is no consensus in the Greek grammars that would put beyond controversy the claim that John 8:58 is a clear example of a PPA.”

Although you try to show this statement is “disputable,” the fact remains that by your own count two grammars expressly exclude John 8:58 from the ranks of the PPA while four expressly include it (pp. 309-10). That observation alone confirms my assertion as true.

A number of the most renowned English-speaking Greek scholars in modern times have translated John 8:58 in the traditional way, again showing that one cannot claim a consensus of experts in the field in support of translating it as a PPA with a form of the English past tense. I have already mentioned A. T. Robertson and Daniel Wallace. You asked me to supply some context for Wallace's statement on John 8:58; certainly I can. On pages 530-31, Wallace critiques the Jehovah's Witness claim (which Wallace found in a 1971 article) that EIMI in John 8:58 is an historical present. At the end of his critique of that view, he adds a footnote in which he states:

“More nuanced is the view that EIMI is a present tense extending from the past (so McKay, *New Syntax*, 42). However, John 8:58 lacks sufficient parallels to be convincing” (531 n. 42).

One would have liked a more in-depth comment on the question, but the fact remains that Wallace does not agree with McKay.

Let me give you some other examples. Consider William Milligan and William F. Moulton, two of the leading Greek scholars at the end of the nineteenth century. Moulton translated Winer's *Grammar* into English, was the youngest member of the translation committee for the English Revised Version, and co-produced a New Testament concordance. In their *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (T & T Clark, 1898), they state:

“In the clearest possible manner Jesus declares, not only His existence before Abraham, but also the essential distinction between His being and that of any man. Man is born, man passes through successive periods of time: of Himself, in regard alike to past, present, and future, Jesus says ‘I am’” (111).

Please note that Milligan and Moulton, on the same page, caution that there are difficulties with associating Jesus’ statement with Exodus 3:14.

Another great Greek scholar of the late nineteenth century was B. F. Westcott, the co-editor of the first truly modern critical edition of the Greek New Testament. In his book The Gospel according to St. John (Eerdmans, reprint of 1881 ed.), regarding “I am,” he comments:

“The phrase marks a timeless existence. In this connexion ‘I was’ would have expressed simple priority. Thus there is in the phrase the contrast between the created and the uncreated, the temporal and the eternal” (140).

From the late nineteenth century to the present time, then, several of the most famous and widely respected Greek scholars have construed John 8:58 not as a PPA but as an assertion of eternal existence, and they have translated it “I am.” This is not a fallacious appeal to authority since the issue I am addressing is solely whether a consensus exists among experts in Greek that John 8:58 is a PPA. That clearly is not the case.

You wrote:

*****BEGIN QUOTE FROM JASON*****

Now I have criticized in detail problems with your various numerations and scorings of where the grammars fall on the question of the PPA. It was you, not I, who introduced such statistical arguments into the discussion. Now, however, you claim:

"I was not in the least attempting to determine whether a majority of the grammars favored a broad or a narrow definition. I was not attempting to argue for a narrow definition as opposed to a broad one on the grounds that a majority of grammars employed a narrow definition."

Well, then I must apologize on behalf of all of us, or nearly all of us, who thought that counting which grammars you saw as favoring your view versus those you thought could be seen to be in line with mine, was a method of argument on your part. I can't imagine what we were thinking.

*****END QUOTE FROM JASON*****

This attempt to claim that everyone or nearly everyone following the discussion saw my argument in the way that you did is empty rhetoric. The fact is that neither you nor I know what most of the other people observing the debate thought about this matter. Your sarcasm aside, the truth is that my argument was not that some grammars favor my view

while other grammars favor yours. Here you are responding to my explicit denial that this was my claim, and you continue to assert that it was! Nor did I argue that most of the grammars favor a narrow way of defining the PPA. Had I actually said as much, I would think that you would remind me and all those following the debate where. Instead, you resort to the debater's rhetorical trick of appealing to the audience's supposed knowledge of the truth of your claim. That won't fly here, where the debate is written and anyone can turn directly to the portion of the debate in question to see for themselves exactly what it is I really did say. Indeed, in my post #24 to which you were responding, I told you where you could find the specific conclusions for which I was arguing (pp. 169-70) and I repeated them for you (pp. 288-89). Although you quoted three of those points in your post (pp. 310-11), you continue to misrepresent my argument. No wonder this debate is fast approaching four hundred pages in length!

I won't repeat the entirety of those points again. To put the matter very succinctly, my argument was that grammars that identify John 8:58 as a PPA generally employ a relatively broad definition of the PPA while grammars that specify that a PPA must be translated in English with a past tense generally employ a relatively narrow definition of the PPA. I carefully qualified this comparison, noting McKay in particular as an anomaly with regard to the above generalization. My conclusion was that a survey of the grammars does not support your claim that if John 8:58 is a PPA it must be translated in English using a past tense. Again, though, read the points on pages 169-70 and repeated on pages 288-89 for the complete text stating what I was claiming to show with my statistical survey of the grammars.

You wrote:

<< First, you have dismissed as a supposed "straw man" (and therefore avoided answering) my point that whether a grammar happens to remark on how to translate a form is a completely independent variable from what you term "broad" or "narrow" definition or any other thing you score. It has more to do with whether a grammar is written primarily with translators in mind or primarily for those who are studying materials in Greek without thought of producing a translation. >>

The "straw man" that I criticized was your misrepresenting me as arguing for an "exclusive correlation" between narrowness of definition and stipulation of how to translate the PPA (288). I explained that I did not argue for an "exclusive correlation" but rather for a statistically significant correlation. Specifically, I pointed out "that the three grammars that have the broadest definition of the PPA 'happen' to say nothing at all about how to translate it, while four of the five grammars that specify to translate the PPA using an English past tense 'happen' to sit at the narrow end of the spectrum of definitions of the PPA" (288).

Your claim that whether a grammar states how to translate the PPA depends on whether the grammar was "written primarily with translators in mind" is a bald assertion, so far as I can see, unsupported by any evidence. To show that it has some factual basis, you would need to cite evidence showing that Winer, Turner, and BDF were not written with

translators in mind while Jannaris, Dana/Mantey, Burton, and Fanning were written primarily as aids for translators. Good luck! The fact is that some of these grammars fit your speculation while others do not. Dana and Mantey, for example, explicitly state in their preface that their purpose was to supply a grammar for “the average Greek student rather than the technical Greek scholar,” designed for “class-room use” (iii). Their purpose was to give students “a working knowledge of the Greek language” (vii), toward the end that such students may access “the deep mines of religious truth and inspiration which lie imbedded in the original text” (xi). Clearly, the Dana/Mantey grammar does not fit your generalization. On the other hand, Burton does fit, since he states that his work “is designed to assist English-speaking students in the task of translating the Greek New Testament into English forms of thought and expression” (Burton, v). On the other side, Turner, whom you speculate was not written with translators in mind, says, “I have designed volume III [the one in question] specially for three classes of reader: first, the teacher with an interest in exegesis, or the Bible translator...” (Turner, 1; the other two classes of reader are textual critics and comparative philologists). So Turner flatly contradicts your generalization.

You wrote:

<< Second, you avoid any comment on the fact that those who do comment on translation assume a past rendering as the norm, which clearly puts your position against the tide. >>

This is just plain false. In fact, I showed that your claim here that those grammars assume a past rendering as the norm is itself false. I pointed out that “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.”

JASON’S POST #26: BROAD-BAND PRESENTS

Your post #26 was a reply to my post #25, on broad-band presents. In that post, I had written:

“On the broader definitions of the PPA, any present-tense verb that expresses a state that obtained in the past and continues to obtain in the present is a PPA. But not all such verbs are justifiably translated using an English past tense verb. The sentence $\text{hO QEOS AGAPH ESTIN}$ fits this definition, because what it says that God ‘is’ obtained in the past and continues in the present, but it would be unjustifiable to translate this sentence ‘God has been love.’”

You replied:

<< Who has ever defined the PPA as you do here? Who has ever cited 1 John 4:8 as a PPA? You are creating a straw man here. >>

You're kidding, right? Who ever defined the PPA as I do here? Don't you remember Winer's definition of the PPA: "the verb indicates a state which commenced at an earlier period but still continues"? Unless you wish to press "commenced" to mean that all PPAs expressly refer to states as having a beginning (you have said more than once that you do not), what I said is a very close paraphrase of Winer's definition.

No one to my knowledge has ever cited 1 John 4:8 as a PPA, and of course I never said anyone did. I simply said that according to the broadest possible definition (essentially what we find in Winer), 1 John 4:8 could be described as a PPA.

I wrote:

"I am arguing for a translation of the text that preserves the connections between this and other sayings of Jesus utilizing the unpredicated EGW EIMI. I am arguing for a translation of the text that conveys the Old Testament allusions of this and other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus, especially those in Isaiah."

You replied:

<< In other words, you are arguing for an interpretation, a hypothesized doctrinal connection between passages, while bisecting the sentence right in front of you into unrelated segments. This is scarcely a legitimate procedure in translation. >>

I have thoroughly refuted the claim that I bisect the sentence into unrelated segments and need say nothing about it here. With regard to your first claim, as I have pointed out repeatedly, all good translation takes note of such literary associations and connections. You yourself state in your book *Truth in Translation* that translations should take into account the author's "historical and cultural environment" and the "images and ideas available in his or her world" (xvi). You elaborated later: "The books of the New Testament belong to a larger literary context that includes early Jewish and Christian traditions of writing. The Jewish scriptures (the Christian Old Testament), for example, form an essential context for understanding the expression of the New Testament.... The exact nuance of a phrase of argument in the New Testament may depend on this background knowledge" (xviii). Moreover, in your book you endorse the specific association that you now disparage as "a hypothesized doctrinal connection." In your chapter on John 8:58, you acknowledge with respect to certain divine "I am" sayings in Isaiah that "Jesus appropriates this kind of language for himself in the Gospel of John" (111). By using the "background knowledge" of the Isaianic EGW EIMI sayings as one factor (not the only one!) in assessing the merits of competing translations of John 8:58, I am simply taking your statements above seriously. In this particular case, I apparently take those statements more seriously than you do.

I wrote:

“And while obviousness can be a matter of some subjectivity and disagreement (calling into question your own statement), I think it fair to say that it would be quite a stretch to argue that ‘I am’ is not at least *an* obvious choice for translating EGW EIMI.”

You replied:

<< There you go again, dissing poor old Abraham. Rob, please pay attention: the rest of the sentence! >>

Jason, you are the one who is not paying attention. I was referring to EGW EIMI in John 8:58, not merely to EGW EIMI in isolation.

You wrote:

<< So now, if as appears obvious by you continually falling back to it, you are saying that EGW EIMI is a self-standing, independent, absolute clause, then you MUST do two things: >>

Before commenting on those two things, let me just point out that according to the usual grammatical terminology, EGW EIMI *is* an “independent clause.” This is Grammar 101.

But let’s look at your two horns of a supposed dilemma:

<< (1) accept that the verb here is a simple present, with no temporal modification, and so no reference to "eternality" -- Jesus is simply saying "I exist" at the moment. Great news! >>

No, this is not an option. Construing EGW EIMI as an independent clause (as of course it definitely is) does not mean construing it with no regard to the rest of the sentence. The verb EIMI stands in contrast to GENESQAI and connotes, in this context, a beginningless existence in contrast to the coming-into-existence of Abraham.

<< (2) find an alternative way to complete the syntax of the "before" clause, which you will have to combine with the previous clause, I suppose: "Truly, truly, I have been saying (LEGW as a PPA) to you since before Abraham was born, 'I exist.'" Hey, Rob, that's not bad. You might like that. Think about it. It's still not what the traditional translation has done. >>

I construe you to be facetious here, but in any case, I will simply comment that such a way of construing the sentence is clearly wrong.

Finally with regard to your post #26, I cannot resist pointing out that you neglected to comment on the following very telling paragraph from my post #25:

“In the very next paragraph of your book after the one from which I just quoted, you wrote: ‘If the translation given is at least within the realm of possibility for the meaning of the Greek, we must grant that fact and not be too hard on the translators for preferring one possible meaning over another. But if they stretch beyond that rather generous range and reach for the truly novel, rare, or unlikely sense of the Greek, we must be very suspicious of their motives’ (xvi). Yet you violate this ‘generous’ allowance for translators to choose ‘one possible meaning over another’ not only in your chapter on John 8:58, but several times in your book. Thus, somehow we are to gather that ‘worship’ is a ‘truly novel, rare, or unlikely sense of the Greek’ word PROSKUNEW—when it is applied to Christ (chapter 4); ‘God’ is likewise a tendentious rendering of the Greek word QEOS in John 1:1c (chapter 11); and of course ‘am’ is just plain wrong as a rendering of EIMI in John 8:58 (chapter 10). Forgive me, but this is brazen” (294).

Those comments still stand.

JASON’S POST #27: GNOMIC OR STATIC PRESENTS

Toward the beginning of your post #27, you wrote:

<< Whatever the merits of Wallace's presentation on the gnomic, he doesn't identify John 8:58 as one, does he? >>

That’s an argument from silence. All I proposed was that his “universal” subcategory of the gnomic might reasonably be applied to John 8:58.

Regarding the statement, “God is [ESTIN] love” (1 John 4:8, 16), you wrote:

<< This does indeed make a statement about the nature or character of the subject, in the typical Greek fashion of subject + copula + predicate noun. The simple copula is atemporal in such constructs. In other words, if I substitute another subject, such as "A kiss is love," we would agree that what is being said is that it is of the nature of a kiss to have a loving quality. This is gnomic because the statement presents it as true generally, any time. >>

The difference between the above two statements is that “a kiss” is generic, whereas “God” is specific. However, I agree with you that this sentence form expresses a statement about the nature or character of the subject.

You wrote:

<< The statment MAY be true eternally, but that is interpretation, not translation. >>

As I have pointed out before, I have not proposed translating John 8:58 “I am eternal” or “I eternally am.” So your point is legitimate but not relevant.

I also agree with you that many of the biblical examples I quoted can be understood as generic gnomic. As you noted, I said so myself, especially with regard to a text such as Psalm 146:7-8. However, I don't think this category will adequately encompass all of those statements. "The Spirit searches [ERAUNA] all things" (1 Cor. 2:10), for example, explicitly applies the action of the verb universally ("all things"). I also disagree with your view that the statement "God knows [GINWSKEI] all things" (1 John 3:20) is "atemporal"; the sense seems rather clearly to be omnitemporal. On the other hand, I think you had a good point about Acts 7:48, where "the Most High dwells" can, as you argued, be construed as a simple present.

You wrote:

<< So let's cut to the chase. You would like "I am" to belong in this "universal" category of the gnomic, and then we can quibble about the difference between atemporal characterizations of the subject and eternal ones. But we can't even get there, for the simple reason that EGW EIMI does not appear absolutely or in isolation so that we would be brought to read it as gnomic. It exists in a syntactical relation to the dependent clause which is determinative of the significance of EIMI. Until you succeed in prying EGW EIMI apart from the rest of the sentence in John 8:58, you have no other argument to make. This is really the deal breaker for us in this discussion, because you keep wanting to read EGW EIMI apart from the PRIN complement, even though you admit that they are part of the same sentence. You just can't do that in Greek grammar and syntax. >>

This seems to be the main criticism you keep expressing about my view. Again, I don't read EGW EIMI apart from the PRIN clause; I simply read the PRIN clause in relation to the main clause in a different way than you do.

You wrote:

<< I had pointed out your repeated commitment of the fallacy of "postulating a distinct theological grammar." To this you object that it is legitimate to "not base my interpretation of John 8:58 solely on the grammatical features of the text in the abstract but in relation to the immediate context in John 8 and the associations that Jesus' statement evokes in its Jewish theological context."

Absolutely. But Rob, if you can't see that what you are talking about is interpretation, not translation, then I can't help you. >>

As I have explained, such "interpretation" is a proper and necessary component of the process of translation. In your opening comments on translation in your book *Truth in Translation*, you said as much yourself, as I have documented. You also agreed with me in principle on this point in your post #2 (pp. 24-25).

There are enough difficulties in Dana and Mantey's discussion of the "static present" (especially the difficulty of matching their examples with their description of that usage)

that I think our attempts to sort them out are yielding diminishing returns. For sake of time I will simply let stand what we have said on that subject.

JASON'S POST #28: QUESTION OF CLARIFICATION

In this brief post, you asked:

<< Do you mean to argue that the PPA so overlaps with the "universal" gnomic and the "static" that to say that EIMI in John 8:58 can be construed as a PPA is necessarily to leave open its consrual as one of these other two categories of use? Or do you mean to argue that EIMI in John 8:58 is one of these other two categories of use and NOT a PPA? >>

The answer is that neither of these is my argument. My argument is that the PPA is formally similar enough to the universal gnomic, static, and other broad-band presents that a text that in some ways looks like a PPA text might be better construed as a different type of broad-band present. In other words, in some cases which use of the present most exactly fits the text may be a judgment call.

ROB #35 – 3/11 – #17260

JOHN 8:58 - ROB #35: ANTECEDENT TIME, LXX PARALLELS, AND THE MEANING OF EIMI IN JOHN 8:58

Jason,

This post is in response to your post #29, which was a reply to my post #27, and your post #30, which was a reply to my posts #28-29. Thus, the three sections of this post correspond to my posts #27-29.

I. CONFUSION ABOUT ANTECEDENT TIME AND THE PPA?

You began post #29 as follows:

<< In your post #27 you reveal a basic confusion about what you are arguing. You pose the infinitive of antecedent time and the PPA as an either/or choice, decision, or interpretation about John 8:58. But the infinitive of antecedent time applies to the dependent clause of John 8:58 ("before Abraham was born"), while the PPA applies to the main clause ("I have existed"). Since these two categories of analysis apply to different parts of the sentence, and to different verbs in the sentence, it is simply false to suggest that the existence of one precludes the existence of another. >> (348)

You then elaborate on this criticism, noting my reference to “the incompatibility of antecedent time and the PPA” and you reiterate:

<< You can see here that you have falsely made the infinitive of antecedent time something about the main verb, "a verb that expresses an action or state antecedent to some time in the past," rather than something about the infinitive. You say that "an infinitive of antecedent time simply doesn't fit what we mean by a PPA" – exactly, because the infinitive of antecedent time is an INFINITIVE construction, and the PPA is an INDICATIVE construction. >>

This critique is absurdly off the mark. The contrast I drew in my post #27 was between a present-tense indicative main verb associated with an expression denoting duration from the past into the present (the PPA) and a present-tense indicative main verb associated with the infinitive of antecedent time. Your attempt to portray me as confusedly arguing that the infinitive GENESQAI cannot be a PPA is sophisticated obfuscation, nothing more. To support this criticism, you quote from two widely separated paragraphs of my post. Here is the first of those paragraphs:

“You have (unintentionally, no doubt) missed the larger point by isolating this question of whether the PPA is defined as necessarily involving a beginning of its action or state.

That larger point is the contrast between (a) a verb that expresses duration subsequent to some event or time in the past up to the present and (b) a verb that expresses an action or state antecedent to some time in the past. My contention is that EIMI in John 8:58 fits the latter description, not the former one, thus excluding it from the PPA as typically (or narrowly) defined. This is the key point in the exegetical debate, as far as I am concerned, with reference to the proper translation of John 8:58” (p. 323).

By “(b) a verb that expresses an action or state antecedent to some time in the past” I was referring to the present-tense indicative verb EIMI (as I said **explicitly** in the **very next sentence**), not to the aorist infinitive GENESQAI. The aorist infinitive does not express the antecedent action or state; it marks the present indicative verb associated with it as expressing an antecedent action or state. If you genuinely misunderstood this, you completely failed to come to terms with my argument. The “basic confusion about what [I] am arguing” is on your end.

Here is the second statement you quoted, put in its context (p. 327):

BEGIN QUOTE FROM ROB

You wrote that

<< no one has ever said an "infinitive of antecedent time" cannot be used to create a PPA. >> (p. 237)

That is a fallacious argument from silence. If a PPA expresses a state or action from the past into the present, then an infinitive of antecedent time simply doesn't fit what we mean by a PPA. I don't need a grammarian to say this explicitly in order for my observation to be justified. If “the action of the main verb takes place BEFORE the action expressed by the infinitive,” as Young says (Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 166, emphasis added), then the main verb is not being used to express or denote action taking place AFTER the action expressed by the infinitive.

END QUOTE FROM ROB

In context, when I said that “an infinitive of antecedent time simply doesn't fit what we mean by a PPA,” I clearly meant that it did not fit as the kind of temporal marker associated with a PPA. I certainly did not mean that the infinitive could not itself BE the PPA. I was replying to your argument from silence about no one ever saying that such an infinitive could not “be used to create a PPA.” Even in this paragraph I refer twice to “the main verb” in association with the infinitive of antecedent time, so that it is quite clear that it is the main verb that I am saying is not a PPA in such a construction.

You wrote:

<< Now in John 8:58, the main verb is formally in the present. Recognizing that the infinitive used in the dependent clause is temporally neutral, one could translate the sentence as a straightforward present-tense: "I exist before Abraham is born." You have

suggested something like this for one of the LXX examples we have been discussing. >> (349)

I would not object to translating John 8:58, “Before Abraham comes into being, I am”; such a translation would meet your criticisms part way, though I doubt you would consider it acceptable. You continued:

<< But what we find in the main English translations of the Bible, the ones you are defending, is a mixing of tenses that is not acceptable English. This is what I criticized in my book. The dependent clause is put into a past tense, because we know that the event to which it refers is in the past. That in itself is fine. But you can't do that and at the same time leave the main clause in the simple present tense, because there is a relation of antecedence involved, so the two verbs need to be brought into semantic harmony, a harmony that such mixed tenses breaks. >>

Again, although the conventional translation is not elegant modern English, I think it is acceptable in a formal equivalency translation, like the usual translation of Psalm 89:2, “Before the mountains were formed...you are.”

You wrote:

<< If John meant to convey simple, limited antecedence in relation to a past event, he would have to have put the main verb in a past tense. Instead, he uses the present tense in a PPA construction to indicate progressive action or state. >>

If the main verb had been in the past tense, it would have simply meant that Jesus existed before Abraham, without (of course) denying that he still existed at the time of Jesus’ speaking. I will return to this point in my response to your post #30.

I had observed “that using a present-tense Greek verb to denote an action or state that is ‘qualified’ in the sentence by an expression beginning with the word ‘before’ (PRO or PRIN) in reference to a past time or event simply does not look like a usage intended to do any of the above.” You commented:

<< But of course it is completely arbitrary for you to make a subjective "observation" that something "does not look like" something else. >> (350)

Since I specified what it was about such a construction that “does not look like” a PPA, and why, my argument was not subjective as you claim.

You offered some fairly lengthy comments on the infinitive of antecedent time based on Smyth’s grammar. Your comments focused on Smyth’s three example sentences illustrating the use of PRIN:

“I was doing this until Socrates arrived.”

“I was not doing this until (or before) Socrates arrived.”

“I was doing this before Socrates arrived.”

You claim that I construe John 8:58 as parallel to the first sentence:

<< Here the affirmative action is limited to the time antecedent to Socrates' arrival. THIS IS HOW YOU CLAIM JOHN 8:58 IS TO BE READ. But this employs an indicative dependent verb, not an infinitive, and so is not parallel to John 8:58 >> (350).

However, you are mistaken on more than one count. First, I do not construe John 8:58 as parallel to Smyth's first sentence. Second, I do not (for the umpteenth time) claim that the state of Jesus' existence in John 8:58 “is limited to the time antecedent to” the time marked by the infinitive. I simply claim that the verb EIMI in that construction *expresses* existence antecedent to the time marked by the infinitive, without implying that such existence is “limited” to that antecedent time.

Oh, and by the way, the main verb “was doing” in all three of Smyth's example sentences is imperfect (EPOIOUN), not present tense.

I had written:

“With reference to genuine NT example texts of the PPA cited in the NT grammars (leaving aside John 8:58 for sake of argument), all of them have a temporal marker that implies that the action or state expressed by the PPA verb is a temporal one of some limited duration” (324).

You commented:

<< Of course, by changing how you express your point to "some limited duration," you are no longer talking about them all referring "to a period of time beginning at some point" (see your book, pages 109-110). And no one is disputing that all PPAs are limited in their duration at the present end, that is, by the time when the statement is made. This says nothing about when the action may or may not have begun. >>

By “limited duration” I meant exactly what I meant in my book, namely, that the state or action had been enduring for a limited period of time at the time the statement was made. You are twisting what I said yet again.

You wrote:

<< Even you concede that some of these examples (note the contrast to your reference to "all of them" above) do not in fact refer or convey a beginning of the verbal action: "The only texts of those cited above where the qualifying temporal language does not make this immediately obvious are 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 John 2:9, where 'until now' (hEWS ARTI in both texts) in and of itself gives no hint as to how long that is. . . . Even this expression hEWS ARTI, though it gives no indication by itself of the length of time involved, connotes a temporal duration that in context clearly has a beginning." >> (351)

First, I must point out that I did *not* concede that some of my examples do not convey that the verbal action or state were of limited duration in having some beginning. What I said was that this was not “immediately obvious” in two of the examples. The sentence preceding your quote from my post states it this way: “In most of the texts, that the actions or states had a beginning is self-evident from the qualifying temporal language (‘all these years,’ ‘from the beginning,’ and the like)” (324). The limited duration and beginning of the action or state may be implied or otherwise evident even if the sentence does not have qualifying temporal language that makes this “self-evident” or “immediately obvious.”

Second, your ellipsis omits a sentence that makes a point of some significance with regard to those two texts:

“I find it interesting to note that most translations render the verb in both texts with an English present tense. (In fact, *all* of the English versions I have surveyed, including the NWT, do so; I say ‘most’ only because there are too many to check them all.)” (324)

In other words, if these two texts are PPAs, they exemplify the point that a PPA need not always be translated with an English past tense verb. Conversely, if a PPA must always be translated with an English past tense verb, then these two texts are evidently not PPAs.

You made no attempt to rebut the above point. Nor did you make any attempt to refute the point that a beginning is evident in 1 Corinthians 15:6. You did attempt to refute that point with regard to 1 John 2:9, writing:

<< For example, in regard to 1 John 2:9, you say, "the false Christian who professes to be in the light and yet hates his brother 'is in the darkness until now'; this state of darkness in context obtained from the beginning of the false brother's life." You do not know, for a fact, that that is the case. You do not know that that is John's concept of the beginning of individual human existence, whether or not he believes in pre-existence of the soul, whether he has an emanationary psychology, how deeply his dualism runs, not to mention the simple issue of whether any beginning is in view to this dwelling in darkness, which may regress infinitely into the past awaiting the light of Christ. >> (351-52)

Suppose for the sake of argument I grant your point, though we would need to sharpen it to the claim that we don't know that John thought a human being's existence had a beginning. Then I can simply say that 1 John 2:9, if it is a PPA, is an unusual one if it is taken to refer to a state that had no beginning. Or, I can say that 1 John 2:9 might not even be a PPA, at least in the usual sense, since all of the English translations I checked render the verb with the English present tense. So, your objection, even if granted, proves nothing. On the other hand, your objection is refuted in John 8:58, the very verse that is the focus of this debate. Abraham, who is understood in context to have been a human being, albeit a great or even the greatest human being from a Jewish perspective, is said to have had a beginning: “before Abraham came into being [GENESQAI].” This saying

of Jesus is, of course, reported in the Gospel of John, authored by the same person who gave us 1 John. John reports that John (the Baptist) acknowledged that his origin, like that of other human beings, was “of the earth,” whereas Jesus was “from above” and “from heaven” and was therefore “above all” (John 3:31). In these statements, and others implicitly in his writings (e.g., John 1:15), we can see that John affirmed a traditional Jewish anthropology.

I had written:

“You claim that I am guilty of ‘arbitrarily ruling...out’ a beginning ‘for John 8:58,’ and that I ‘can only do [so] because it is not specified there.’ This criticism rather badly misrepresents my argument. It treats my point about the lack of any implied beginning in isolation rather than as part of the larger point, as I have noted, about the difference between temporal language that marks the verb as expressing duration from the past to the present and temporal language that marks the verb as expressing an antecedent action or state. Your criticism further isolates this specific point from the larger argument that takes notice of (a) the predicate absolute use of EIMI, (b) the clear contrast in the sentence between GENESQAI and EIMI, and (c) the evident allusion to Old Testament ‘I am’ sayings of God, especially those in Isaiah” (325-26).

You quoted everything in that paragraph except the first sentence, and then replied:

<< Now Rob, it is simply impossible to respond to or criticize all of your points at the same time. I must assess them one by one, and I have addressed each of these three points, in greater or lesser detail. >> (352)

This opening comment, and what follows, ignores what it was that you had claimed and that I was refuting, namely, your claim that I ruled out a beginning in John 8:58 “arbitrarily” on no other grounds than that “it is not specified there.”

You wrote:

<< (a) On EIMI as a predicate absolute, please keep reading my past posts, which have argued in detail how utterly absurd such an identification is. >>

I have responded to the relevant arguments in those posts.

You continued:

<< (b) The supposed "contrast" of the two verbs comes down to no more than this: (1) since Christ is speaking of his ongoing existence, not his origin (as one who is "the living one" as opposed to "the dead"), he could not use the same verb as is used of Abraham; (2) the EIMI is not in the emphatic position, the PRIN is – hence the contrast rests on "before," while the use of the present form of EIMI preserves the progressive meaning from simple antecedence. >>

And I reply: (1) If Jesus had merely been claiming to have been alive in contrast to the dead Abraham, well, any of his listeners could have made *that* claim! You are here engaged in “interpretation,” as you so often criticize me for doing, with the difference being that your interpretation is without merit. The only way to make your point work would be to broaden it further to a contrast between Abraham, who “came into being” and died, and Jesus, who before and after simply *is* or *lives* (EGW EIMI). But broadening the contrast in this way in effect admits that EIMI connotes beginningless (as well as endless) existence or life. (2) The final position in a Greek sentence is per se not emphatic syntactically, but there is in this instance a clear *semantic* emphasis due to the clear contrast between GENESQAI and EIMI.

Regarding Jesus’ allusion to the “I am” sayings of God in Isaiah, you commented:

<< But I went so far in my book as to say that it is possible that Jesus is invoking this language with reference to himself. Such an invocation does nothing to solve the translational issue of normal English word order and verb tense harmony, nor does it in and of itself settle any interpretive issues because it remains open to interpretation in what way he means to invoke this language. >> (352-53)

As I have explained in a previous post, the allusion to the Isaianic “I am” sayings of God does contribute to the question of the best translation of EGW EIMI in John 8:58, in that the best translation will make it possible to recognize that allusion, and “I have been” fails miserably in this regard whereas “I am” does quite well.

You wrote:

<< So if the parts and steps of your argument are not valid, or fail to establish anything towards building your argument, your argument as a whole is not valid. You want to add up a series of `may-bes', `could-bes', `arguably-bes', `for-the-sake-of-argument-bes' into a final `definitely is'! I can understand your frustration that I won't let you do that. >> (353)

Well, I see nothing wrong with the parts of my argument, and I don't see them as fitting your characterization of “may-bes” or “could-bes” or the like. I didn't argue that John 8:58 “may be” a predicate absolute, that there “could be” a contrast between GENESQAI and EIMI, or that there might “arguably be” an allusion to Old Testament “I am” sayings of God! So you have caricatured my argument once again.

Speaking of caricatures of my arguments, you had badly caricatured my argument as running along the following lines:

- << 1. John 8:58 involves an infinitive of antecedent time.
- 2. Some sentences involving an infinitive of antecedent time contain gnomic, customary, or descriptive presents.
- 3. Ergo John 8:58 contains a gnomic, customary, or descriptive present. !!!! >> (237)

I pointed out (p. 328) that a better enumeration of my argument would look something like the following:

1. John 8:58 involves an infinitive of antecedent time.
2. The definition of the infinitive of antecedent time is incompatible with the PPA as usually defined.
3. Few if any of the 16 occurrences with a present-tense main verb of an infinitive of antecedent time could conceivably be classified as a PPA as usually defined. Besides John 8:58, only three such texts in the LXX speaking of God's wisdom, knowledge, or existence have ever been so classified. One of these (Prov. 8:25) cannot be a PPA, and the other two (Ps. 89:2; Jer. 1:5) are disputable examples of the PPA.
4. On the other hand, most of the present-tense main verbs associated with an infinitive of antecedent time fit into such categories as the gnomic, customary, or broad-band descriptive usage.
5. The use of EIMI in John 8:58 as usually interpreted fits something like the (non-proverbial) gnomic or broad-band descriptive category.
6. Therefore, John 8:58 is better categorized as using the present tense in something like the (non-proverbial) gnomic or broad-band descriptive usage than the PPA (as usually defined).

Now, it would have been nice if you had acknowledged the fact that you had badly caricatured my argument. You didn't. Instead, you tried to refute the above argument by critiquing two of the premises:

<< In regard to your attempt to identify John 8:58 as a "gnomic-like broad-band present" (whatever that is supposed to be), you outline a six-step argument you think you have made. But neither the second step ("The definition of the infinitive of antecedent time is incompatible with the PPA as usually defined") nor the fifth step ("The use of EIMI in John 8:58 as usually interpreted fits something like the (non-proverbial) gnomic or broad-band descriptive category") is valid, and therefore your argument as a whole is invalid. I have further demonstrated the invalidity of the second point above. As to the fifth point, I note your language "something like." Please list for us every grammar that has cited John 8:58 as a gnomic present. You don't have any? Then how can you possibly make this claim? What, then, does "usually interpreted" mean, and are you talking about grammar or theology? >> (353)

What objections you did raise to the second point were peripheral or irrelevant, and I have answered them earlier in this post. With regard to my fifth point, your objection is, once again, a fallacious argument from silence. Every grammarian and exegete who interprets EIMI to connote eternal existence supports my point. These scholars include Greek scholars Milligan and Moulton, Westcott, Robertson (see, e.g., his Word Pictures), and Young (p. 166), numerous biblical commentators, and even unorthodox commentators like Bultmann and Davey.

As an aside, you made the comment regarding Colossians 1:17 that “its temporal reading as a PPA has a lot to be said for it” (353). Let’s look at how various English versions translate AUTOS ESTIN PRO PANTWN in Colossians 1:17:

“he is before all things” (KJV; NKJV; ASV; NASB; ESV; NIV; NRSV; many others)
“He himself is before all things” (NET Bible)
“he is before all” (Douay-Rheims; Darby)
“he is before all [other] things” (NWT)

Even the NWT, despite its controversial addition of “other,” agrees with the other versions in translating ESTIN as “is”. Of the numerous versions I checked, only the NLT, which is a (generally excellent) paraphrase, does otherwise, and it reads, “He existed before everything else began.”

If we construe ESTIN here as a PPA, and translate it as you would indicate from your handling of John 8:58, we would not render it as the NLT did. Instead, we would have to translate it something like, “he has been since before all things.” Well, feel free to go out on that limb and knock yourself out, but the meaning would still be the same. After all, if the Son (the subject here, see vv. 13-14) has been since before all things, then he has *always* existed. We know this because in context “all things” are things God created; Paul draws a line between the all things that were created and the Son, through and for whom those all things were created and who ESTIN PRO all things. In any case, the conventional rendering of Colossians 1:17 is quite defensible and seems best in context.

You closed, oddly, with an entirely irrelevant, though legitimate, example of the PPA not mentioned in the grammars (What? What happened to your argument from silence?). Mark 9:21 (“How long has this been happening to him?”) is indeed a PPA. More curious still, you misidentified the temporal marker in this instance. Here is the sentence:

POSOS CRONOS ESTIN hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi

The temporal marker of the PPA verb ESTIN in the above sentence is not hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi, as you claimed (p. 354), but the temporal expression POSOS CRONOS (“how much time,” i.e., “how long”). This temporal marker is similar to those found in other instances of the PPA, such as “a long time already (POLUN HDH CRONON)” (John 5:6) and “so long a time (TOSOUTWi CRONWi MEQ’ hUMWN)” (John 14:9).

All I can figure is that you were so eager to establish a precedent for “clausally-modified PPAs” that you missed the obvious here.

II. THE “BIG THREE” LXX TEXTS

I now turn to your post #30, which in turn was your reply to my posts #28 and #29. In this section I will focus on your reply to my post #28. You began:

<< In your post #28, you wish to continue to dispute the PPA reading of three LXX sentences (Prov. 8:23-24; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 89:2), even though two of them are recognized by Winer as PPAs closely comparable to John 8:58, in that they are both clausally-modified as is John 8:58. I am quite content to stand on the arguments I have made, and to stand with Winer on the identification of Jer. 1:5 and Ps. 89:2 as PPAs. >> (355)

For the sake of argument, I could agree to “stand with Winer” in that his definition of the PPA (assuming that “commenced” is not pressed) is so broad as to allow for the conventional English translation of John 8:58 as well as the traditional Christian interpretation of that verse. His comparison of John 8:58 with two texts that speak of God’s knowledge and existence (and that are usually translated using a present-tense verb in English) will appear quite compatible with the view that in John 8:58 EIMI connotes beginningless existence or life and not only that Jesus was older than Abraham.

Regarding your attempt to support your understanding of Proverbs 8:23-25 as a PPA using the Dana and Mantey grammar, you wrote:

<< I did a little Rob-like experiment of making a case based on existing recognized uses of the present, but you have not accepted that argument. >>

Are you saying that your argument was a good one, like arguments I have made from the grammars? That doesn’t seem likely to be your meaning. Are you saying that it was an argument that you presented with all seriousness but that you now recognize was a bad argument, supposedly like a bad argument I have made from the grammars? Or are you saying you knew all along it wasn’t a good argument, although you didn’t say so at the time (and still aren’t saying so clearly)? It’s hard to tell what you are saying. My conclusion: The above is a bit of sleight-of-hand rhetoric that you used to avoid making any clear statement at all or responding in a substantive way to the significant points I made in my critique of your argument.

To recap, those significant points were that (1) the categories of usage to which you appealed from Dana and Mantey are normally (i.e., with the exception of a small category of verbs) translated in English with the present tense; (2) your handling of the perfective present yielded no plausible support for a PPA interpretation of GENNAi in Proverbs 8:23-25; and (3) you still have not presented a more cogent exegesis of that passage than the one I offered (pp. 331-36, with the conclusion stated on pp. 334-36).

In a peculiar twist, you then argued that although you agree that EIMI in John 8:58 is not an historical present, GENNAi in Proverbs 8:23-25 might be one, and you cited ESTIN in Revelation 21:1 as a parallel example (pp. 355-56). I don’t think this is a particularly good argument, but if you’re dropping Proverbs 8:23-25 as a PPA and now categorizing it as an historical present, we can leave that part of our debate behind us!

With regard to Jeremiah 1:5, I see nothing in your comments (pp. 356-57) requiring a substantive response. You ignored the first case of misrepresentation I addressed (pp.

336-37) and tried to deflect the second case of misrepresentation (pp. 337-38) by addressing only select bits of my comments. You appear to have conceded my next two points, which were that one cannot assume a one-to-one correspondence between the Hebrew text and the LXX translation and that the Hebrew word in Jeremiah 1:5 is often translated in the present tense (p. 339). You did not address my response to your incoherent accusation of eisegesis or my statement that in Jeremiah 1:5 God's knowledge of Jeremiah is "temporally unbounded" (p. 340).

On Psalm 89:2 LXX, you had objected to my exegesis on the grounds that the third line is not grammatically parallel to the first two lines, and I had replied that the three lines exhibit a semantic "progression backward in time from the creation of the mountains back to the creation of the earth and the world and finally back to the everlasting past. The three lines do not need to be grammatically parallel for that progression to be evident" (p. 31). You replied:

<< Here once again, you are allowing the logic of your construal overwhelm the grammar. You interpret AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS as a period of time broader than, and encompassing the previous periods mentioned. The APO TOU is against you, because it is quite explicitly "from, since," that is, progressive time forward from the previous "before" clauses. The switch from PRO to APO signals a shift of direction in the time under consideration. If the writer wanted to convey what you mean, he could have employed a different, non-contrastive construct, such as an EN or DIA phrase. >>

You are the very first person I have ever encountered that suggested that the period of time denoted by APO TOU AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS is actually circumscribed or limited by the preceding clauses about the mountains and the world. In this case I think I will have to say that you are allowing your overly fussy construal of the grammar to overwhelm the logic of the text. There is nothing in Psalm 89:2 LXX that I can see, even after your explanation, that would indicate that APO refers to a time after the events of the preceding two lines (which seems to be your meaning).

You had written:

<< I maintain that the first two joined clauses represent a "before" statement, that is, an Infinitive of antecedent time construction that marks the event(s) before which God existed, and that the third line, the APO TOU phrase, represents a marker of durative time "and from age to age" of God's continued existence since "before . . ." So this verse is more explicit in its modifying elements than we see in other PPAs with "before" clauses, in which the "since" element is implicit in the modifier; here it is made explicit. >> (247)

Note that in the above comments, you say that "the third line, the APO TOU phrase, represents a marker of durative time 'and from age to age' of God's continued existence since 'before . . .'" Since "a marker of durative time . . . of . . . continued existence since" some past time would seem to be a clear definition of the temporal marker of the PPA, I commented:

“In the above statement, you appear to be claiming that the phrase APO TOU AIWNOS hEWS TOU AIWNOS is the qualifying element that marks the present-tense verb EI as a PPA” (341).

You complained:

<< In other words, if you had taken the care to read all of what I said, there would be no way for you to make the mistake of thinking I was saying the APO TOU is what made the PPA. Something's a bit off with your much-vaunted "contextual" reading here, Rob.... Quite clearly, you have not understood me. >> (358)

I'd take this criticism with some seriousness if you had actually commented on your statement, which I have quoted again for you above, in which you seemed to say that the APO phrase marked the present-tense verb as a PPA. As it stands, my “misunderstanding” seems quite understandable.

You had written:

<< But your resort to "existence at all times" is rooted in your misunderstanding of the gnomic or customary present, which I have already explained does not refer in itself to eternity, but only that something is the case whenever and wherever the specified circumstance occurs. Your interpretation cannot be read into the grammatical forms, but must be read out of them, which you can do. Why is this not satisfactory to you? >> (pp. 247-48)

I replied:

“Your criticism here is utterly beside the point. I have not advocated translating EI as ‘exist at all times’ or ‘exist eternally.’ If I had advocated such a translation, your criticism might have some merit. But I have merely advocated translating EI with the simple present ‘are’” (343).

You ignored the point I was making in response to your unwarranted criticism, quoted only the last sentence, and then commented:

<< Obviously, this would be a non-sequiter in English. The only way to use it here would be to jettison the two "before" clauses as belonging to a separate sentence. You would need to do the same thing with the "before" clause in John 8:58. Since the translations you are defending do not take this drastic step in either case, you have not offered a sound argument in support of your position. >> (359)

You have been doing this over and over in our debate, especially in your January and February posts. You forget or ignore the point you originally made and refuse to acknowledge that I have effectively refuted it. You then take something I said out of that

context that you think you can criticize on its own. This might be effective for those who aren't following the debate closely, but I will call you on it as often as I can.

As for the point you make here, what we have seen is that you have to accuse translators throughout the English-speaking world and over the past many centuries of mistranslating not only John 8:58, but also Psalm 89:2 LXX, apparently also 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 John 2:9, and perhaps Colossians 1:17 as well. There is nothing "obvious" about your position. The conventional translations of these texts work just fine, and in neither Psalm 89:2 nor John 8:58 (nor Colossians 1:17!) require excising the 'before' clauses.

III. DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION OF THE VERB IN JOHN 8:58

Turning to your comments on my post #29, you quote the following sentence from that post:

"I have never 'argued that the aorist *limits* the time of the main verb to before the event of the infinitive,' in such a way that the state is 'locked out' from continuing after that event" (346).

You then reply (359):

BEGIN QUOTE FROM JASON

Oh no? Not only did you before I said that you did, but afterwards, in your post #27, you say:

"If 'the action of the main verb takes place BEFORE the action expressed by the infinitive' (. . . Young . . . emphasis added), then the main verb is not being used to express or denote action taking place AFTER the action expressed by the infinitive." (your emphasis)

"If the main verb denotes an action or state PRIOR TO AN EVENT OF THE PAST, then it does not denote an action or state in its CONTINUANCE UP TO THE PRESENT. Those are two different denotative uses of the verb." (your emphasis)

So you can see that I am hardly putting words into your mouth. Your whole argument for the Infinitive of antecedent time not allowing a progressive verbal sense (which strangely, as I pointed out, would be the only verbal sense not allowed, while every other tense and use is), amounts precisely to this. The problem is that you cannot or will not recognize that that is the case. Don't you understand the meaning of your own words or the consequences of your own arguments?

END QUOTE FROM JASON

I really can't tell if you are being deliberately obtuse or just don't understand the point I was making. Here is the full paragraph from which you quoted only the first sentence above:

“No, I have never ‘argued that the aorist *limits* the time of the main verb to before the event of the infinitive,’ in such a way that the state is ‘locked out’ from continuing after that event. I have argued that the main verb in these constructions *denotes* a state antecedent to the main verb. That the state continues after the event denoted by the aorist infinitive is implicit from the context (e.g., Jesus obviously exists when he speaks the words of John 8:58), but the denotative *sense* is that the state obtains antecedent to the event; in turn, the *meaning* (in context) is that the state is unbounded with respect to the event of the past denoted by the aorist infinitive” (346-47).

The material you quoted from me that you thought proved your understanding of my position to be accurate is perfectly consistent with my explanation here. I speak there of what the main verb expresses or denotes about the action or state, not about whether that action or state actually continues. I *do* understand my own words; the most charitable thing I can say for you is that it is possible you do not understand them.

You wrote:

<< Second, you are wrong to say that the context implies that "the state continues" even though by the grammar "the state obtains antecedent to the event." The fact that Jesus is now speaking a sentence that denotes that the state of his existence obtains antecedent to the event of Abraham's birth in no way establishes continuation of existence. If you are going to ignore the present value of the main verb, and force into a strictly antecedent value, then Jesus could just as well be speaking of reincarnation. That is, the implication could as easily be read as juxtaposing past and present existence, rather than implying continuous existence. >> (360)

First, I am not ignoring the present value of the main verb; I am construing it as denoting antecedent existence but connoting in context omnitemporal existence. Second, your speculation that Jesus' wording might (on my exegesis) be construed to imply or fit with Jesus being reincarnated would fall outside the worldview spectrum of conceivable explanations in John's religious context. Moreover, reincarnationists do not believe that persons exist, stop existing for a period of time, and then resume existing; they believe that the spirit or soul or something of the person exists continually through the series of reincarnations. Thus, even a reincarnationist trying to fit Jesus' statement into his own worldview would not come up with the explanation you suggest.

You concluded:

<< Third, what you are saying here is that John 8:58 is semantically a PPA, even if you will not agree that it is grammatically so. Note your own words "a state antecedent . . . continues." Now, as a principle of translation, are you not bound to provide an English sentence that accurately renders the meaning of the Greek. Wherever you think you are

deriving that meaning, whether from a strict reading of the grammar, or from its modification by its immediate context, that is what you are obliged to do. Now how, in English, do we convey a state that pertains already antecedent to a past event and continues to the present? Do we use a simple present to do that? No. Do we use a simple past? No. We use a progressive form: "I have been, I have existed." Isn't that so? >>

I have **always**, beginning with my book sixteen years ago, agreed that in a broad sense of the PPA the verb EIMI might be construed as one, in that it connotes existence/life in the past that continues into the present. This is nothing new. How do we convey this in English? It depends on a combination of factors, all of which must be taken into account. The grammar is only one factor. When we consider the relation of this saying to other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus, especially those in 8:24, 28, the allusions to EGW EIMI sayings of God in the LXX, and the intentional contrast between EIMI and GENESQAI with its implication of omnitemporal or transtemporal existence and life for the speaker, "I am" appears to be the best translation overall, even if it is grammatically somewhat archaic or odd by some purists' standards.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I have now, I think, replied to all of your posts. You have not had an opportunity to reply to my most recent posts, #30-35, and you may wish to do so. I am attempting to wind my side down (my six posts #30-35 were in response to ten of your posts, #20-22, 24-30) since we have gone back and forth over the whole terrain of the debate a few times now (and we've already exceeded that 400-page mark!). However, you have the option of responding to my most recent posts, if you wish. When we are both ready to conclude our debate, I suggest we each agree to offer one final closing post at about the same time and then open the discussion to the list members. Let me know what you decide.

JASON #31 – 3/24 – #17280

JASON #31: MORE AND MORE PROBLEMS

Rob,

You continue to compound your initial grammatical errors with new ones, taking us deeper into a twilight zone where normal rules of grammar do not apply, where EIMI or `be' are transitive verbs, where there can be "absolute" copulas with nothing coupled to the subject, where present tense action can occur before past events. This might make interesting science fiction, but it simply is beyond the fringe of any generally recognized principles of either Greek or English grammar, and there is no point in me continuing to debate where such fundamental rules of language are simply ignored. It seems to me fairly clear if you must resort to such absurd violations of grammar to defend the traditional English translation of John 8:58, then it cannot be reasonably defended. This abuse of grammar and syntax must be considered alongside of your repeated misuse and misrepresentation of the evidence you marshal in your arguments, as well as your complete failure to hold a consistent position on whether EIMI is used in its existential or copulative function, on the source of its temporal modification beyond the simple present, or on whether it is or is not in temporal relation to the dependent clause of the same sentence.

In your post #30, you continue to try to maintain two contradictory positions at once. You want to argue that EIMI is "absolute" in John 8:58, but you cannot settle on whether you think it an absolute existential, or an absolute copula. I pointed out this trend in your argument in my post #20, to which you only replied with a typical claim that I had missed your point. No, Rob, I think I get your point exactly, which is that you are willing to argue by any means, without concern for consistency or coherence. The fact that you will not even settle upon a position is a classic example of this. You seem to have forgotten that you have entered this debate as a defender of the traditional translation. I intend to hold you to that position, which means disposing of half of your argument as simply irrelevant, because it cannot be made to support that position.

In your post #30 you say that you don't see any implication of `theological grammar' in your statements. I'm not sure how to help you see that when the same verb is rendered in ordinary temporal senses when the subject is something other than what you consider a divine being, but as signifying "a state or action that is constant, perpetual, or simply always so" when the subject is considered by you a divine being, that runs afoul of the "theological grammar" charge.

In your post #30 you say the following:

"What lies behind the `traditional translation' is simply the recognition of EIMI as a present tense indicative first person singular form of the Greek be-verb, which is normally translated `am.'"

Rob, this takes us all the way back to my book, where I point out that such a rote, lexical, 'interlinear' approach to translation is completely invalid, and repudiated by every major English translation of the Bible. I have shown why this is invalid as English, and invalid as an accurate rendering of the Greek. I have pointed out a number of times that your position does not even adhere to this statement of yours, because you infer a transtemporal significance, "something far greater" in your words a few lines later than the simple present tense, and I have shown how your argument for the absoluteness of the verb deprives you of any temporal modification that would make EIMI more than a simple present. You go on to say that, "The traditional interpretation, far from cutting loose the dependent clause from the rest of the sentence, construes it as an integral and crucial element in Jesus' statement." Although we are debating translation, not interpretation, as I need to keep reminding you, I have good news for your "traditional interpretation": it is defensibly grounded in the grammar, which also makes the dependent clause "an integral and crucial element" of the main clause, in fact, as a depictive temporal complement that completes the sense of the verb so that it is "something far greater" than the simple present tense, namely, a PPA. You, of course, understand none of this and think the simple present tense, in and of itself, signifies eternity, which is patently absurd. You need the dependent clause, Rob.

In my post #20 I pointed this out quite emphatically, but you have not come to terms with, nor even directly answered, the point I make here:

"Moreover, the relation between the temporal clause and the main verb actually CHANGES what the verb signifies in terms of tense. If, for the sake of argument, we go along with your proposition that EIMI is absolute, and that its full meaning is established in itself without an obligatory complement from the temporal clause, THEN THERE WOULD BE NO TEMPORAL MODIFICATION OF THE SIMPLE PRESENT IN EGW EIMI, AND IT WOULD HAVE NONE OF THE 'TRANSTEMPORAL,' NOT TO MENTION 'ETERNAL' SIGNIFICANCE YOU TAKE IT TO HAVE. Please note this because it is very important. Either the temporal clause is a complement that alters the significance of the verbal tense, or EIMI is absolute and a simple present. It has to be one or the other. YOU CANNOT SAY EIMI IS ABSOLUTE AND AT THE SAME TIME GIVE IT ANY ELEMENT OF TENSE BEYOND THE SIMPLE PRESENT FOUND IN EIMI ALONE. If we are to propose that EIMI in John 8:58 has any tense significance beyond the simple present, then it necessarily must draw on the temporal clause for that significance, and this drawing upon the temporal clause for significance establishes a relation of obligatory complementarity between the main verb and the temporal clause. If we agree that EIMI means more than that Jesus exists in the moment he is speaking, then we agree that the verb is modified in regard to tense; and if it is modified in regard to tense, then that modification must come from the temporal clause; and if the modification comes from the temporal clause, then the latter is an obligatory complement to the full meaning of the verb. So whether we are arguing for a PPA or an 'eternal' reading of the main verb, we necessarily agree on all these things. That means that your entire argument in your post 17, if it were supportable, would undermine your reading of the verse as much as mine." (JB, post #20)

And please don't tell me again what you think you know about the interpretation and meaning of Jesus' statement. Tell me how you can translate it so that any reader, coming to it without your knowledge and wisdom, would understand that the temporal significance of EIMI is other than the simple present tense. That is what we are debating. You are thinking as a theologian, rather than as a translator, as is evident in every one of your postings. There simply is no "affirmation of existence of an extraordinary kind" in an absolute, unmodified present tense be-verb. If you think there is, I don't know how to help you see that this is theology talking, not grammar or syntax.

You don't even understand what "absolute" means. You state: "To say that EIMI is absolute is not to say that the dependent clause contributes nothing to our understanding of the temporal orientation or significance of EIMI." But that is PRECISELY what "absolute" means. Absolute means self-contained and unmodified in temporal orientation and significance.

In your post #30, you object to the following in my post #20:

Jason: " In my post 1 I already criticized your claim that EIMI in John 8:58 is a 'predicate absolute' – a claim you do not support by argument in your book, other than to cite A. T. Robertson's rather cryptic remark on the matter, which as an appeal to authority is not sufficient."

Rob: "By now, those following this debate closely may be able to guess that the above criticism is factually incorrect. Once again, you make an assertion about my argumentation that is without question factually wrong. You couldn't even bring yourself to refer to the correct page in my book where I cited Robertson. Let me quote part of the relevant material: 'The first [critical observation] comes from A. T. Robertson, who in his extensive discussion of the PPA points out in passing that in John 8:58 `_eimi_` is really absolute,' implying that for this reason it is not a true example of the PPA. What Robertson means by 'absolute' is that in John 8:58 `_eimi_` occurs as what is known as a predicate absolute, a construction in which a copulative verb is used without an object or complement' (`_Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John_`, 107). There it is: Robertson's statement is backed up with a clear explanation of what he meant . . . your assertion that I resorted to mere appeal to authority at this point with no argument at all to back up my claim is patently, factually incorrect."

Thank you, Rob, for quoting for our readers the demonstration that what I said was indeed factually correct. Which means that when you say my "criticism is factually incorrect," you are quite simply employing defensive rhetoric utterly without merit. As everyone can see, patently, in your book you do not make an argument; you simply cite Robertson's remark, which is no more and no less than the words you quote and, for that reason, quite cryptic since he says no more here about what he means by "absolute." But that doesn't stop you. You then presume to explain what you think Robertson means by "absolute":

"What Robertson means by `absolute' is that in John 8:58 *eimi* occurs as what is known as a predicate absolute, a construction in which a copulative verb is used without an object or complement" (*Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, 107).

First, explaining a quote is not making an argument, and does not advance discussion beyond taking the quote as authoritative. Second, Robertson's remark remains 'cryptic' in its original context, no matter what you say. Third, Robertson in fact nowhere defines `absolute' in the way you say, does he Rob? You simply impose that meaning on his use of the word `absolute.' Nowhere does Robertson use `absolute' in connection with a copulative verb, as you say he does. He uses it only in the context of discussing infinitives (1092-1093), and participles in subordinate clauses (1130-1132), and in both contexts he means merely "clauses that stand apart from the rest of the sentence" (1130). So, in other words, you are FALSIFYING what Robertson means by `absolute,' aren't you? You need to retract what your book says, and apologize for its misrepresentation of Robertson and for your completely false claim that my remark was "factually incorrect." Do you see now what comes of casting aspersions before your own house is in order?

You go on in your post #30 to say that what you said in your book is "sufficient to establish that what Robertson said is correct as long as you are aware of the fact that EIMI is indeed a copulative verb and that EIMI is used in John 8:58 with no object or complement."

I must admit that I completely overlooked your reference to EIMI in John 8:58 as a copulative verb in your book, and it is quite instructive for your to reiterate this claim so emphatically in your post #30. If that is what you think, then you cannot defend the traditional translation of John 8:58, which does not translate the verb as a copula, but as an existential, and therefore you have lost this debate in which you have taken the position of defending the traditional translation.

If you wish to propose that EIMI is copulative in John 8:58, you would be forced in translation to provide the implied predicate complement, just as all the major translations do in other examples of copulative EIMI with an implicit complement (see my discussion of this in my post #4). So your citation of definitions and discussion involving a copulative understanding of "I am" sentences in John is utterly irrelevant for your defense of the traditional translation of John 8:58, which is not based in a copulative understanding of the verse.

In your post #17, you cited a set of authorities for regarding EGW EIMI in John 8:58 as an absolute. I dismissed this as an argument from authority that I saw no reason to accept. In your message #21, you state that my dismissal "reeks of ad hominem." As I have explained before, ad hominem applies only when an argument had been presented and, instead of responding to the points of the argument, one attacks the source of the argument. It is not ad hominem to dismiss an argument from authority, since such an

argument deals with nothing else than hominem, so to speak, and you presented it in precisely such a way ("the premier Roman Catholic New Testament scholar of the twentieth century," no less!).

From Brown, you quote as follows: "Grammatically we may distinguish three types of use" of EGW EIMI: "(1) The absolute use with no predicate." You tell us that Brown cites John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19 as examples. This is apparently distinguished by Brown from "(2) The use where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed." Harner likewise identifies 13:19 and 8:58 as, in your words, "unambiguously absolute EGW EIMI sayings that have no predicate expressed or implied," while 8:24, 28 and other verses involve double entendres that include an absolute reading.

Notice that these are just assertions, not arguments. But there's a big problem with these assertions. Most major translations of John 8:24, 8:28, and 13:19 translate them as belonging to Brown's category 2, that is, with an understood predicate complement. The exception in the NAB which has "I AM." As we agreed at the beginning of our discussion back in August, the use of "I AM" points to the erroneous idea that this is a name or designation of God in Exodus 3:14. Hence my conclusion that Brown and Harner "buy into the 'I Am' nonsense." Because, you see, there is simply no such thing as EIMI used as a copula in an absolute construction without an implied complement. Such a thing would be incomprehensible as a sentence.

And here we get to the hub of the problem. There simply is no such thing as an absolute copula. A copula, Rob, copulates. You cannot have a copula without something on the other side of it, so to speak, explicitly or implicitly. Don't you understand this? So your authorities are inadvertently uttering nonsense, IF, that is, they are talking about EIMI as a copula, which you assume and assert that they are. I would tend to doubt that they are guilty of such an outrageous abuse of grammar, and that is why I suspect that they are citing those verses of John as allusions by Jesus of Exodus 3:14, where an absolute EXISTENTIAL is involved. I would guess that if I checked Brown's and Harner's fuller discussion, I would find that you have as wrongly read them as speaking of an absolute copula as you did in the case of Robertson. I can understand how you could make such a mistake, since the verses they cite, with the exception of John 8:58, are usually understood to be copulas with implied predicate pronouns. I agree with this understanding and, as you know, reject as indefensible the idea that Jesus is citing Exodus 3:14 here. And although you have accused me of being unreasonably hard on Robertson for calling his remark about the absoluteness of EIMI in John 8:58 "foolish," I will at least rescue him from the responsibility you falsely place upon him of meaning something as absurd as an "absolute copula."

So your book is in error in referring to EIMI in John 8:58 as an absolute copula, because there is no such thing. If there is an implicit predicate complement ("he"), then it is not an absolute. And if there is no implicit predicate complement, EIMI cannot be a copula. If you intend to read EIMI in John 8:58 copulatively, you must realize that (a) that is not how it is translated in the traditional translation, which you have taken the position of defending, and (b) such a reading will require you to translate it with the implicit

complement made explicit, as all the major translations do in such cases. Either way, you break with the traditional translation which you have taken the position of defending, and so lose the debate.

You went on in your post #17 to cite a set of definitions for 'absolute,' identifying John 8:58 as fitting these definitions, all of which involve the textual absence of an implied object of the verb. These definitions do not, then, involve grammatical, syntactical, or semantic absoluteness, but what one might call orthographic absoluteness. In my reply (post #20), I pointed out two faults in your attempt to define EIMI's absoluteness. The first is that you are citing English grammatical definitions in a discussion of Greek grammar, something we had an exchange on early in our debate, where we decided this could not be allowed. Second is that these definitions involve transitive verbs, not intransitives, and the be-verb is an intransitive, so the definitions are not at all applicable to the case of John 8:58. Since you had made a rather impolite suggestion in your post that I was in need of some basic grammatical education, I turned this language back on you in pointing out such a basic error of grammar as confusing transitive and intransitive verbs.

In your message #30, rather than admitting that you were wrongly arguing the case for the absoluteness of EIMI on the basis of definitions that referred to transitive verbs, whereas EIMI is an intransitive verb, you responded, "All this [i.e., my critical remarks about your misunderstanding of the intransitive be-verb as a transitive] because the first two dictionary definitions of 'absolute' I quoted both mention that the term applies to a 'transitive' . . . or 'normally transitive' . . . verb." Well, yes, the fact that the definitions you were using apply to transitive verbs shows that they have nothing to do with the be-verb which we are discussing. So it is an error on your part to regard them as supportive of your argument. But you then add, "You might have had a point – if only I had claimed that EIMI in John 8:58 was transitive. But I did not make that claim."

I cannot imagine, Rob, how you thought you could get away with that denial, given that your prior message is on public display for all to check. If the definitions of absolutes you are quoting involve transitive verbs, and you are not making the claim that EIMI is transitive, then what are these definitions doing in your post? In your post #30, you say you only meant that "the definition of 'absolute' underlying its usage by biblical scholars . . . was similar or analogous" to these definitions. Let's see if that's true. You came to cite the definitions in the context of saying to me, "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," ("practically every New Testament scholar on the planet," of course, referring to the six you mention). To inform me what is meant when "they say that EIMI in John 8:58 is absolute," you quote from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (which is, of course, a dictionary not a grammar):

"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."

[This, by the way, is probably what Robertson meant by his remark. (JB)]

"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."*

On which you comment:

"Clearly, the applicable definition here is (b), according to which a verb is `absolute' if it is a transitive verb with no object expressed."

The definition is "applicable" to what? To saying that EIMI in John 8:58 is absolute, of course. That is what you explicitly said you were explaining to me. Later in the same post, you reiterate:

"In this respect, its being `absolute' corresponds with the dictionary definitions of an absolute verb as a normally transitive verb that is used intransitively."

"Its being `absolute'," of course, refers to John 8:58 being absolute according to your claim, and this being absolute "corresponds with the dictionary definitions" which, again explicitly involves "a normally transitive verb." So when you say in your post#30, "if only I had claimed that EIMI in John 8:58 was transitive. But I did not make that claim," this is clearly an untruth. There are your own words to show that you did make such a claim in your post#17, and to show that in denying that you did so, in your post #30, you are not being truthful. Nowhere in your post#17 did you qualify the identification of EIMI with these definitions involving transitive verbs, nor did you use the words "similar" or "analogous" in making this identification. So, once again, rather than acknowledge error, you attempt a dodge that only makes things worse by entangling yourself in more convoluted dodges and false statements. After more than seven months of this I am losing my generous attitude towards this sort of conduct, a generous attitude you counted on to defend you against harsher criticisms of your conduct of the debate voiced by others who have been following it.

In your post#30 you go on to try to suggest that some grammarians classify the be-verb as neither transitive nor intransitive. But your definitions in post#17 involve transitive verbs, not verbs that are neither transitive nor intransitive. In any case, the suggestion makes no sense, since a verb either expresses an action which is not confined to the agent and which is capable of governing a direct object, or does not. The be-verb does not. As the Greek grammars show in their discussion of EIMI, when there is an implied predicate noun, pronoun, or adjective, the verb is a copula, and so by definition intransitive; when there is no implied predicate noun, pronoun, or adjective, but the verb (with all its adverbial modifications) forms a complete predicate, it is existential, and so by definition intransitive.

You went on to say in your post#17:

"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)."

No one has ever said that it is, obviously, since it is an adverbial clause. From this you conclude:

"In this sense, EIMI is 'unpredicated' or 'absolute.'"

What rubbish. This is like saying, "The be-verb is not a transitive verb; in this sense, it is not a verb." You are saying that the PRIN clause is not an adjectival or nominal complement, and "in this sense" it is not a complement. This is meaningless, because in another sense, in a valid sense, it is a complement. The "sense" which you are denying to PRIN only applies when the be-verb is a copula, not when it functions existentially. Only when the be-verb is a copula can it have an adjectival or nominal complement, and without one be 'absolute.' But it cannot be really 'absolute' and a copula at the same time, because to be a copula it must have at least an implied complement. When the be-verb is a copula, and is written without an explicit complement (and so is orthographically absolute), the implied complement is to be found in the immediate context. When such a construct is translated in the Bible, the implied complement is typically rendered explicit, otherwise the copula might be mistaken for the existential. Now in other occurrences of EGW EIMI in John that you have been citing as comparable there is no nearby noun, pronoun, or adjective that the reader can latch onto as the implied reference, and so translators supply a generic "he." That this seems to be the correct solution in a passage such as John 8:24 is supported but the response of the crowd. If you read John 8:58 in the same way, however, there is a contextual noun which can be referenced, which is "Abraham." So by this reading of the sentence, you come up with "I was Abraham before Abraham was born." Now if we want to avoid that (although if ancient readers took EIMI copulatively, they could hardly have avoided such an understanding), then we would have to take this as another example of the mysterious, unidentified implied "he" found also in 8:24. I have no problem with that. But in that case we would need to recognize that John supplies the missing reference of the implied "he" of 8:24 in 8:28, where he makes it explicitly "the Son of Man." How that reference would work in John 8:58 I don't pretend to know. But in any case it would not be the traditional English translation, and so you would be venturing down a new path and abandoning your defense of that translation. Hence my remark that this whole effort at identifying EIMI as in some sense 'absolute' is not in any sense applicable or relevant to our debate.

If you would like to adopt this position, you may do so, and concede that the traditional translation is wrong. I would not object to this position, and we could conclude the debate with both of us holding defensible, though different views of the best translation of the verse:

Jason: "I have existed since before Abraham was born."

Rob: "Before Abraham was born, I am He."

Already in my post #1, in response to your mention of 'absolute' in your book, I pointed out that there is not a single clear-cut case of a true absolute use of the be-verb in the whole of John. Some sort of predicate complement is typically implicit, unless we take it that Jesus is saying repeatedly simply "I exist." But I have already pointed out how John 8:24 shows, by the response of those who hear Jesus' remark, that this is not the case. In John 8:58, on the other hand, there is an explicit adverbial complement, and none of your "absolute" parallels involve an adverb, adverbial phrase, or adverbial clause, so they are not close parallels at all since none involve a temporal modification of the verb, and so are true present tense uses, whereas John 8:58 is so modified and so is properly rendered as a PPA.

To conclude, an increasing amount of your argument over time has drawn on grammatical points that would be involved only if EIMI in John 8:58 is a copula. This reading is contradictory to all aspects of your argument that assumes EIMI is an existential. You are free to change, or "clarify" your position to adopt a copulative reading, and such a position would seem to me on first examination to be defensible, and to avoid many of the objections I have made to the part of your argument involving an existential reading. You would be able to maintain this as a possible translation of the verse alongside of the PPA reading, which you also accept as possible. The copulative option is not the traditional translation, however. Since our debate has been framed in terms of your defense of the traditional translation against my criticisms of it, the debate would be at an end as soon as we both acknowledge that the traditional translation is not valid, but either the copulative or the PPA translations are possible.

II. ROB'S SECOND POSITION: EIMI AS EXISTENTIAL

You said, in your post #17:

"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."

This would be fine, Rob, if we were speaking about a hypothetical absolute sentence – "I exist." – that by being given that way we are to understand is the whole sentence. But we are not dealing with a hypothetical sentence, but with an actual sentence that has more words in it. Doesn't the sentence in John 8:58 have more words in it, Rob? Sorry if it sounds like I'm talking to a fifth grader, but that's exactly how I feel. I had cautioned, in my message #20, that one needs to be clear about what we mean by the be-verb's "existential function," and cautioned that one cannot simply equate that function with, and limit it to, the absolute existential statement "I exist." Rather than accept that caution with good will, you objected to it, saying I was creating problems "out of thin air," and proceeded to make exactly the same mistake again (in your post #30): "What I said was that if EIMI is existential (meaning 'I exist') then if it has a complement it will not be an obligatory one." Now notice what you do here: you give the grammatical term "existential" the meaning 'I exist' in an absolute form. This is precisely the equation I

said you were committing in your post#17 confusing different meanings of the term 'existential,' an observation that you protested in your post#30 as something you had "never suggested or implied," and that you challenged me to point out in what you had said.

Now I note two shifts in your position here. First, you follow the suggestion I made back in post #4 that in absolute existential statements, English abandons the be-verb for an alternative, such as "exist." This shift in itself recognizes the validity of my criticism of the traditional English translation in one respect. Second, you shift your argument from saying that the PRIN clause in John 8:58 is an adjunct to saying that, while it may be a complement as I have contended, it is at least not an OBLIGATORY complement. But there are a number of problems with your contention as you have stated it.

First, it is circular. You postulate a use of EIMI where its meaning and point is primarily "exist," that is, an absolute use, and on the basis of that postulate say in such a use it will not have an obligatory complement. But by these conditions it will not have any complement at all. You have simply ruled out, as a premise, existential functions that involve depictives, that is, qualifications and modifications of the character of being in existential statements.

Second, it is overstated. You claim about EIMI that "if it has a complement it will not be an obligatory one." This is wrong. Consider, for example, the negative complement, which is an obligatory one in any sentence where it occurs. In the hypothetical sentence "He never existed," it is patently false to say that the complement "never" is not obligatory. Let me know if you do not understand why.

Third, although you speak here in terms of complements, at the end of your post #30 you speak as if there is an either/or between obligatory complements and adjuncts. You deliberately omit optional complements, which form an essential and integral part of the discussion on the pages of the Cambridge Grammar that you cite. This is to give a false impression about the possible relations of the dependent clause to the main one, artificially limiting the options in order to suggest that if it is not obligatory, it is not a complement but an adjunct. This is completely false.

I readily acknowledge that we could go round and round on whether depictives are obligatory or optional, as we have on so many other issues, with no prospect of agreeing. In English, the complement of a be-verb is generally obligatory, in its existential as well as its copulative and auxiliary functions, as the Cambridge Grammar states. You have wisely chosen a rendering that avoids the be-verb, as I have suggested all along, for EIMI in John 8:58, and thus dodged this character of the English be-verb. I would argue that depictives are equally obligatory for Greek EIMI. But whether they are obligatory or optional, they are complements, and that means they complete the meaning of the verb in the sentence in which they occur.

The simple sentence "I exist," of course, has no complements, so that doesn't help us see what sort of complements existential verbs have. Take, for example, "I existed

yesterday." Is "yesterday" in this sentence an optional, or an obligatory complement.? In "In the beginning was the Word," is "in the beginning" an optional or obligatory complement? One might argue that these are both examples of optional complements, since it remains true that "I existed," and "The Word was" with or without the specifics of when.

But once one concedes that the PRIN clause is a complement, not an adjunct, regardless of whether it is obligatory or optional you have recognized that what the sentence is conveying is not the mere fact of existence, but existence in relation to other conditions. In John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word," is not saying just that "The Word was." The meaning and point of the sentence is that the Word was in a particular point of time. In John 8:58, the semantics of the predicate is not Jesus' mere existence, but existence in relation to a temporal depictive, just as in the sentence "Jill is in her study," it is not the mere existence of Jill, but her existence in relation to a locative depictive that is the meaning of the predicate.

This is the point I made in a part of my message #20 that you decided not to reply to. You had quoted once again a familiar set of examples:

"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 these I replied: "Precisely. Note how in each case the full meaning of the statement is not 'I am serving you' or 'I am with you' or 'You are thinking' or 'You know the sacred writings' or 'The devil is sinning.' In each case, the temporal modification provides the complete significance of the verb, which is in the duration of the action or state, not the mere facticity of action or state. This is precisely the case with John 8:58, where it is not the existence of Jesus on the day of his remark that is significant, but the duration of that existence over supernaturally long time. Don't you agree?"

Will you answer this question now? By reverting to talking about the PRIN clause as an adjunct at the end of your post #30, you deliberately avoid conceding its complementary character, and give the false impression that if it is not an obligatory complement, then it must be an adjunct. This is simply an incomplete, and therefore false, set of choices.

In my post #20, I had pointed out that you were using an English grammar to argue something about the Greek, and asked which language you were intending to make a point about. You reply, in your post #30, "I was making a point about the Greek." So,

do I need to remind you that we agreed long ago that this is invalid? Or do those rules only apply to me?

Here again, you chose not to reply to my comment:

"Now it seems to me you are ignoring a crucial point I made in the passage you quoted from my post 4 about the English of John 8:58 based on the Cambridge Grammar, which says: 'Most obviously, the verb be almost always requires an internal complement' (page 222). Notice 'requires' and about the be-verb, too. You instead are citing material and examples from the Cambridge Grammar not specifically about the be-verb. As you well know, many of the things we can say about transitive verbs we cannot say about intransitives, and vice versa. Many of the rules and characterizations that apply for other verbs are different for the be-verb. So you are not even citing particularly relevant English grammar here, not to mention anything at all about Greek. I cited from the Cambridge Grammar be-verb sentences closely parallel to John 8:58 that clearly illustrate the place of complements in them: 'Jill is in her study' -- 'in her study' is a complement, not an adjunct, because the statement is not that Jill exists, but that she presently exists in a particular place. 'The meeting was on Monday' -- same comments. What the verb indicates is fundamentally different with or without its complement." (JB post #20)

Can you please defend the meaningfulness, as part of these sentences, of "Jill is" and "The meeting was"? Can you please explain to us how the speakers of these sentences were conveying, in an absolute sense, the existence of Jill and the meeting, rather than the specific temporal or spatial existence of Jill and the meeting? Do you agree that these are existential uses of their respective verbs? Are "in her study" and "on Monday" adjuncts or complements? Are they obligatory or optional?

With regard to Proverbs 8:22-25, we have been debating whether or not it involves a PPA in the verb GENNAi. In my post#20, I pointed out that you made a mistake in asking rhetorically (in your post#17) "How can God 'beget' wisdom before the beginning?" since the passage does not say that God "begat" (or "begets") wisdom "before the beginning," but rather that he "ESTABLISHED" wisdom "IN the beginning." Your rhetorical question was part of an argument that we are forced away from a PPA reading of the verb because there is not a logical temporal relation here, but rather "paradox." I stated that the actual reading of the verse is simply temporal priority, "in the beginning" (compare John 1:1) without paradox. Replying to my observations in your post #30 you acknowledge that it does indeed read "in the beginning" rather than "before the beginning," but, you add, God "begets" wisdom "before his various acts of creation." Well, this is not the same as what you asserted in your post #17, and it also leaves out the prior clause, as I have already pointed out in our discussion of this passage (in my post #8), namely, "The Lord created (EKTISE) me as a beginning of his ways for his works." This is perfectly clear and unambiguous: wisdom is created, in a past tense. So then, according to your reading, God creates wisdom in the past, but begets wisdom always. Well, that's interesting, but I think rather cumbersome when you have aspects of the present tense that would bring these two verbs into closer harmony in meaning. I stated that I had seen examples where a present tense has the sense of an ongoing condition of a past action or state, and suggested that this is for all intents and purposes

indistinguishable from the PPA. You objected to this rather undeveloped observation as not established in the grammars. But this usage is of course simply the perfective present, which Dana & Mantey includes with the PPA within the Progressive Present category (182-183). Brooks & Winbery say that the perfective "has something in common" with the PPA, but whereas the PPA "emphasizes the fact that the action is still in progress," the perfective emphasizes "the result or state of being of the action" (90). They point out that the perfective present "is not limited to verbs whose stem expresses perfective Aktionsart . . . Context as well as root meaning can produce the perfective idea of existing results" (89-90). But acknowledging that my argument collapsed two types distinguished, however finely, in the grammars, I recognized that you were not obliged to go along with my explanation. So already in post #8 I said, "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." That was post #8, so it is hardly correct to say that I "have backed away" from the classification of GENNAi as a PPA in my "more recent posts." Already in post #8 I indicated that I did not insist on it, and did not need it to make my argument. Since then I have only commented on your continuing efforts to translate it using a simple present, and to associate that translation with John 8:58. I have continued to maintain that it cannot be translated that way, because it has a perfective aspect, as the context clearly shows, and that perfective aspect is created by the same temporal modification as is found in cases of the PPA. So the distinction is a semantic one, not a grammatical one, and a very narrow semantic one at that, since it still involves a past aspect.

It must also be noted that your discussion of this verse is part of a discussion of supposed "contrast" between clauses and verbs within a single sentence. For your other examples in this discussion, you "contrast" verbs of being with verbs of becoming. But as I have pointed out, GENNAW is a verb of becoming, so what is it being "contrasted" to in its sentence? Other verbs of becoming. So much for "contrast." The "contrast" you have in mind, of course, is the Christian theological contrast of being begotten to being created; but that's not in the Greek grammar itself, but is imposed on it by a tradition of later interpretation. And do note that wisdom is said to be both created and begotten in this passage. You obscure the arbitrariness of your distinctions by calling them "semantic," and claim that there is no comparable contrast between the two verbs in one of my extrabiblical examples, "I have been a friend of yours a long time, before I saw you" (your rendering). But we see here the same degree of contrast as in your own preferred biblical examples, namely between a being-verb and an action-verb. This highlights the arbitrariness of your distinctions, which are under the influence of extra-grammatical forces.

best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #32 – 3/28 – #17298

JASON #32: EXEGETIC AND TRANSLATING JOHN 8:58

Rob,

In your message #31, all of your discussion is in support of a reading that would make EIMI in John 8:58 a copula. As I have already pointed out, this position may be defensible, but it requires an abandonment of the defense of the traditional translation that you have undertaken to mount in our discussion. The traditional translation found in the majority of major modern English translations does not render EIMI as a copula in John 8:58, as one can plainly see by comparing how the verse is rendered with how the same translations render John 8:24, 28, where EIMI is understood to be employed as a copula. Therefore, this line of argument on your part, while interesting in itself, does not make a defense of the traditional translation. Since you have favored the copula argument more and more as the debate has proceeded, I think it can be fairly said that the defense of the traditional translation, which creates an ungrammatical rendering of EIMI in its existential use, has failed. I still think it is an existential in John 8:58, and think that a stronger case can be made for this reading. But I do not consider the copulative reading impossible. So we may be able to reach a speedy conclusion on this basis.

You say:

- > Translators cannot ignore interpretive issues. However, they can make
- > translational choices that avoid coming down in a heavy-handed way on
- > one particular interpretive reading of the text.

We agree on this principle, and I have simply maintained that ignoring the Greek verbal idiom employed in John 8:58, and translating the verse in a manner that violates normal English grammar and syntax, qualifies as such a heavy-handed, interpretive manner of translation. Since you have not been able to prove that the idiom in question (the PPA) is not involved here, or that the grammar and syntax of the traditional English sentence is in any sense usual for English expression, I find absolutely no validity in your claim that "The conventional translation of EGW EIMI as 'I am' is therefore the least obtrusively interpretive English rendering on the market." It is quite obtrusive, in that it offends normal English expression. And if you were, as you have so disingenuously claimed, merely defending rendering a formally present tense noun as present tense, you could never suggest that "Jesus' statement means nothing more than that he was older than Abraham." Present tense existence is not "more than" any temporal extent of existence. But I have labored this point enough, and if you're not going to get it, you're not going to get it. "I am" would certainly be an obtrusive and heavy-handed translation if one meant to convey a copulative use of "am" as you now seem to be arguing. I pointed out way back at the beginning of the discussion that a copulative "am" requires a complement in English. So "I am" would be wholly ungrammatical in a copulative expression.

On including John 8:58 in a supposed series of "I am" statements in the Gospel, you have quite simply missed my point (isn't that a familiar phrase in this debate?). The series is made up of statements in which EIMI is a copula, with a predicate complement ("I am the light," "I am the shepherd," etc.). Often included in the series are passages such as John 8:24, where EIMI is again a copula, and the predicate complement is implied, "I am he," and supplied by the context (John 8:28, the Son of Man). Other examples of the implied complement are not as clear. John 8:58 does not belong to any such series because it is generally agreed that EIMI here is not a copula with either an explicit or implicit complement, but in an existential function. Therefore it is simply untrue that, "the rendering 'I am' preserves the association between John 8:58 and these other self-revelatory statements and makes the revelatory function of the saying in 8:58 explicit." Please review how the other verses in the series render EGW EIMI in its copulative function, and how the translations you cite make the implicit predicate complement explicit. The translations you cite do not render these statements as "I am," but as "I am he." If you believe that John 8:58 belongs to this series of expressions, you must render it likewise. If you wish to argue that it is a copula, and should be included in the series to which you have referred, you can make such an argument and, I think, even make a defensible argument for this. But that means abandoning all those translations you like to list, none of which translate it this way. Those are your choices: PPA, or copula with implicit complement which one would make explicit in English translation as is the norm with the rest of your series. Both are defensible translations. The traditional one found in so many translations is not defensible. So you can walk away from this debate with your interpretation defended, but only at the cost of the defeat of the traditional translation, which is ungrammatical and inaccurate as it stands, which is all I have ever argued.

You had written,

"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.'"

When I criticized this statement in my reply, you responded:

- > I did not say that EIMI in John 8:24 was "semantically absolute" in
- > the sense you are using.

Then you go again, Rob, denying what is there in the previous post for all to see. If you say that Jesus said "I am" plain and simple, you are saying he made a semantically absolute statement. If you don't understand this, please review your basic grammar. What you seem to miss is that the Greek statement EGW EIMI in a copulative use literally means "I am he" or "I am she" or "I am it." You are ignoring the Greek idiom in which the predicate complement can be implicit in the actual words, and so be heard as if the complement were uttered. If Jesus was depicted saying EGW EIMI absolutely, the verb would be understood as an existential, not a copula, and then, as I pointed out, the

crowd would not ask him to be more specific about the "he" he was saying he was, but about what his claim of existence was supposed to signify.

We can probably skip going down the whole ANI HU road together, since it is tied to your reading of John 8:58 as a copula, which I have already said is an acceptable position for you to take, abandoning the traditional translation as illegitimate. But you must give up saying things like:

- > The EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus in verses 24, 28, and 58 of John 8
- > are all . . . predicateless . . .

If these three verses all employ EIMI as a copula, then they are not predicateless, they have implicit predicates, which the Greek employers of the idiom would hear and recognize just as much as they would understand the subject "I" in cases where someone said EIMI without an explicit subject. If EIMI in verse 58 is existential, then it has a predicate complement in the adverbial clause.

I had pointed out that your supposed series leaves out the very next "I am" in the immediate context, that of the blind man in John 9. To this you reply:

- > This is a straw-man objection, nothing more. . . . The man healed of
- > blindness speaking in John 9:9 does not say EGW EIMI in
- > any sort of context that might even plausibly be construed as
- > anything more than it is: an affirmation that he is indeed the one
- > whom Jesus had healed.

Oh, you mean the context supplies the reference of the implicit pronominal complement 'he'? The same is true in John 8:28, where the context supplies "Son of Man." Why do you accept a contextual reference in the case of the blind man, and ignore it in the case of Jesus in order to appeal to a reference in Isaiah? This differential grammar and semantics on your part is what I mean when I speak of theological grammar.

You say:

- > I have already addressed the matter of "proper tense significance" at
- > length. Like most biblical scholars, I have focused on the EGW EIMI
- > sayings of Jesus, especially those that are "absolute" or
- > unpredicated (that is, that have no subject complement stated),
- > because it is evident from the contexts of these statements that most
- > if not all of them have a revelatory significance beyond "it's me."
- > This is reason enough in a formal equivalency version to translate
- > EGW EIMI in John 8:58 as "I am" if at all possible, and of course,
- > it is more than possible.

Precisely NOT. Read your statement above again. If 8:58 belongs to the set you are now claiming it does, where the complement is implicit but unstated (whatever you want to call it), then you are reading EIMI in 8:58 as a copula, and so you must translate it

EXACTLY as the other statements in the series have it, with the implicit complement made explicit. Otherwise, you are differentiating 8:58 from the series with which you wish to associate it. You cannot have it both ways. If it's a copula, you need to add the "he," and you have lost this debate. It cannot be both a copula and an existential. Your effort to have it both ways is utterly illegitimate, and violates all norms of grammar, syntax, and semantics. There is no comparison at all between such indeterminate grammar as you are proposing and double entendre.

best wishes,
Jason B.

JASON #33 – 3/31 – #17307

JASON #33: GRAMMAR MUST RULE OVER WHIM

Rob,

For the sake of wrapping things up, I will let the record stand on my past criticisms of your argument and your objections to those criticisms. Readers can best judge that aspect of the debate for themselves. Here I will confine myself to a couple of reiterative points about the specific grammatical constructs we have debating in relation to John 8:58, as well as respond to your readings of the three new PPAs I introduced in January in the hope of clarifying how a PPA works, and why EIMI in John 8:58 is a PPA.

In your book, you acknowledge that a PPA reading of John 8:58 is possible. Your argument consists in seeking not to refute it, but to make it less probable than some other reading that could be construed as justifying the traditional translation. Neither in your book nor in our 400+ pages of debate have you settled on one particular reading, and neither of your readings justify the traditional translation. Therefore, I maintain, you have lost this debate.

In your post #35, you spend several pages seeking to deny that you have been confusing the distinct parts of the sentence involved in the infinitive of antecedent time and in the progressive present, without acknowledging that because they do involve distinct parts of the sentence, they are not an either/or choice, and so, contrary to what you have argued, they can both appear in the same sentence. It is irrelevant that you can cite sentences from your post where you accurately state the respective formation of the infinitive of antecedent time and of the progressive present (you seem to keep wanting me to quote back your entire previous post, which is scarcely efficient for the progress of the debate). The fact remains that in the crucial passages, where you conclude that the infinitive of antecedent time and the progressive present are mutually exclusive, you are guilty of such confusion, and that is why I quoted back to you those specific passages. If you want to prove that you are not guilty of such confusion, then you must acknowledge that it is perfectly possible for an infinitive of antecedent time to appear in the same sentence with a PPA. This is true, whether you acknowledge it or not.

You have gone to great lengths in this debate to question the formation of a PPA by means of an adverbial clause. Although you wish to avoid the obvious fallacy of outright denying it, you have sought to relegate such constructs to only the most loosely defined fringe of grammatical discussion of the subject, and you have rejected every example of a clausally-modified PPA listed in the grammars, either trying to ascribe their modification to something in the sentence other than the adverbial clause, or simply rejecting them outright when you cannot bend them to your position. This has been an egregious error on your part that you must now come to terms with, as I will show.

In your post #35, referring to my post #29, you write:

"You closed, oddly, with an entirely irrelevant, though legitimate, example of the PPA not mentioned in the grammars . . . Mark 9:21 ("How long has this been happening to him?") is indeed a PPA.

Note that you have acknowledged that Mark 9:21 is a legitimate example of a PPA. As for it being "entirely irrelevant," we shall see that you missed the boat. You continue:

"More curious still, you misidentified the temporal marker in this instance. Here is the sentence: POSOS CRONOS ESTIN hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi. The temporal marker of the PPA verb ESTIN in the above sentence is not hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi, as you claimed (p. 354), but the temporal expression POSOS CRONOS ("how much time," i.e., "how long")."

You are quite wrong about that, Rob. POSOS CRONOS is the SUBJECT of the sentence, not an adverbial phrase. As usual, your decision to correct me simply entangles you in more and more error. You continue:

"This temporal marker is similar to those found in other instances of the PPA, such as `a long time already (POLUN HDH CRONON)' (John 5:6) and `so long a time (TOSOUTWi CRONWi MEQ' hUMWN)' (John 14:9). All I can figure is that you were so eager to establish a precedent for `clausally-modified PPAs' that you missed the obvious here."

Your parallels are not apt, and your added comment typically self-damaging. In both of these examples, the phrase in question is not the subject of the sentence, and actually functions as an adverbial. POSOS CRONOS is not an adverbial, but the subject of the sentence. I would think it was fairly obvious that POSOS CRONOS is the subject, and not the adverbial, but you never can tell what someone might miss, no matter how obvious.

Nor can POSOS CRONOS possibly form a PPA, since it does not contain any past reference. The pronoun POSOS, of course, appears with the regular present tense as well as the future tense verb (e.g., Mt 7:11, Lk 11:13, Rom 11:24, Heb 9:14). And although we happen not to have any other example of POSOS CRONOS in the NT, it is very easy to recognize that such a phrase could be used with a present or future tense without any temporal conflict: "How long a time will it be before these things come to pass?"

So, since you have acknowledged that Mark 9:21 is a PPA, and now see that POSOS CRONOS cannot be the modifying element that makes it a PPA, we come together to the inevitable conclusion that Mark 9:21 is yet another example, in addition to those cited in your grammars that we have discussed before, of a clausally-modified PPA. We then see that far from being "entirely irrelevant," this example confirms once and for all that PPAs are regularly formed by adverbial clauses, that you have been wrong to deny what the grammars affirm, and that your effort to undermine the PPA reading of John 8:58 has failed. So much for your argument from Greek grammar.

I had come across two other PPAs in the OT by laborious effort (how I wish I had known Stafford had already found them!). The first was Exodus 4:10: "Lord, I have not been fit (OUCH hIKANOS EIMI) before (PRO) yesterday or before the third day [i.e., in the past]."

You offer in place of my rendering the following translation:

"I am not fit, before yesterday or the day before, or from when you began to speak to your servant; I am weak of speech and slow of tongue."

What sort of gibberish is this? Here you demonstrate exactly what is wrong with your grasp of English grammar and syntax. "I am not fit before yesterday or the day before, etc." is not an English sentence, because you cannot use the present tense in an expression of a state or action in the past. This precisely shows why your argument about John 8:58 is worthless, because you have no interest in adhering to normal English usage, and are willing to violate it in making your defense. Your attempt to sneak a comma in after "fit" does not succeed in obscuring the fact that both the adverbial phrase and the adverbial clause are past references, and so it is not possible to construe the main verb as a simple present; it must be a PPA. You translate the main clause independently, leaving the adverbials dangling with no connection to it. So to what do they refer, since obviously they cannot refer to Moses' present unfitness? You arbitrarily and fallaciously bisect this sentence just as you do John 8:58. You have consistently sought to divorce the main verb, in Greek and in English, from its temporal adverb. But since Greek tense forms do not have a one-to-one correspondence with English tense forms, temporal adverbs are absolutely essential to determining what English tense appropriately conveys the meaning of the Greek. And in English, the harmony of the verbal tense to the referred time of the state or action is mandatory.

You yourself abandon your initial fallacious translation and admit a PPA semantics to this sentence:

"Thus, if we want to convey the full sense in our translation, we might render it as follows: 'I was not fit previously, nor am I [or, 'have I been'] fit since you began to speak to your servant.'"

You are exactly right in saying so. But of course, we have a much more succinct way "to convey the full sense," namely, "I have not been fit . . ." Isn't that so? Isn't the full sense you acknowledge precisely how the PPA is defined, and precisely what the English past progressive meant to convey?

You continue:

"Note that your translation, 'I have not been fit before yesterday or before the third day,' is not grammatically normal English (something that you consider very important in a translation!). In English, one would not say, 'I have not been fit before yesterday,' but rather 'I was not fit before yesterday.' You might, then, decide that it would be better

translated, 'I have not been fit since before yesterday.' I would have no objection to such a translation as a way of smoothing out the sentence in English . . ."

Again, I agree completely. Good English expression in such a case really requires us to add the "since," just as I have proposed for John 8:58. You continue:

"I would have no objection to such a translation as a way of smoothing out the sentence in English , but only because of the rest of the sentence, not because of the temporal phrases with PRO. It is the final temporal phrase, 'since you began to speak to your servant,' that might be construed as marking the verb EIMI as a PPA. Again, though, I think EIMI is temporally qualified in two different ways in this complex sentence."

I simply note that here you identify an adverbial CLAUSE (not a 'phrase' as you call it) as the likely modifier of the verb to make a PPA, something you have refused to acknowledge any example of up until now. But of course the main verb would still be a PPA if the sentence had only the PRO phrase.

My second OT example was Exodus 21:36: "But if it is known of the bull that it has been a gorer (hOTI KERATISTHS ESTI) before (PRO) yesterday and before the third day [i.e., in the past] . . ."

To this you reply:

"We might translate the sentence like this: 'But if the bull is known to be a gorer previous to the incident, and if those knowing it warn its master and yet he failed to restrain it....'"

This, of course, is paraphrase. You continue:

"I think this is a far better translation than something like this: 'But if the bull is known to have been a gorer since before the incident' (which, again, is how you would actually need to translate it if you want to construe the verb as a PPA)."

Once again, I thank you for confirming the need in English of "since" to make a smooth PPA with a "before" phrase or clause. This controverts your initial objections to the introduction of "since" to my renderings of the PPA in 8:58.

It has been rather amusing to me that you have faulted me for being a stickler about grammar. God forbid that we should be very careful and precise about the actual grammar of the Bible! Regarding my position on Psalm 89:2 (LXX), you say: "you are allowing your overly fussy construal of the grammar to overwhelm the logic of the text" (!). Whose logic would that be, Rob? My point in my book, and from the beginning of our discussion, has been that modern logic, even modern 'Christian' logic, is not necessarily the logic of the writers of the Bible or of its original audience. Rather than assume we know what they meant, I argue, we should pay very close attention to what they actually wrote, and build any understanding of the Bible out of that, rather than imposing our own beliefs and tendencies of thought onto the Bible. Sometimes the

grammar is not as unambiguous as we would like. So, for example, I must acknowledge that EIMI could be functioning as a copula in 8:58, as it seems to be in proximate verses of John. But we would then have to translate as such, supplying the implicit predicate pronoun. It cannot be both an existential and a copula. The existential reading is still, in my opinion, the more probable one, the one an ancient reader is more likely to have seen or heard, given the rest of the predicate. The copulative reading is more contrived, and yet, as a possible reading, cannot be ruled out. In either case, the traditional English translation cannot be saved, no matter how many great men of the past have followed it. Their authority must yield to grammatical facts, and to the purpose of translation, which is to convey to the reader exactly what the original meant as it was written, no more and no less. Theological interpretation and application must come after, not before.

Best wishes,
Jason B.

ROB #36 – 4/23 – #17355

ROB #36: MORE AND MORE MISREPRESENTATIONS

Jason,

In this post, I will reply to your last three posts (#31-33). I apologize in advance for its length; I actually went through and cut quite a bit of material in an attempt to keep it to a single post.

You began your post #31 as follows:

<< You continue to compound your initial grammatical errors with new ones, taking us deeper into a twilight zone where normal rules of grammar do not apply, where EIMI or `be' are transitive verbs, where there can be "absolute" copulas with nothing coupled to the subject, where present tense action can occur before past events. This might make interesting science fiction, but it simply is beyond the fringe of any generally recognized principles of either Greek or English grammar, and there is no point in me continuing to debate where such fundamental rules of language are simply ignored. >> (p. 410)

At least one Jehovah's Witness on our list found this "masterful," and I would agree—it is masterful use of rhetoric to ridicule and caricature arguments you are increasingly forced to misrepresent in order to criticize them.

I. THE "THEOLOGICAL GRAMMAR" CHARGE REVISITED

You wrote:

<< In your post #30 you say that you don't see any implication of `theological grammar' in your statements. I'm not sure how to help you see that when the same verb is rendered in ordinary temporal senses when the subject is something other than what you consider a divine being, but as signifying "a state or action that is constant, perpetual, or simply always so" when the subject is considered by you a divine being, that runs afoul of the "theological grammar" charge. >>

You have failed to provide a single counterexample of the same verb EIMI used in the same way with a non-divine subject, that is, with no complement (unless one counts an aorist infinitive clause with PRIN) and where the present-tense EIMI denotes existence prior to an actual event of past time (from the perspective of the speaker) marked by that aorist infinitive. Two of your big three examples from the LXX do not use the same verb (GENNAi in Prov. 8:23-25; EPISTAMAI in Jer. 1:5) and all three refer to the divine being of the Lord God and his wisdom (Prov. 8:23-25), knowledge (Jer. 1:5), and existence (Ps. 89:2 LXX). All three of these can plausibly be interpreted as expressing a constant, perpetual state that is always so. (That's stating the matter weakly; I think all

three of them clearly should be so interpreted, and in context Psalm 89:2 *must* be.) Neither of the two extrabiblical examples you gave is an effective counterexample, either. Menander's *Dyscolos* 615-16 has a subject complement ("friend"), an indirect object ("to you"), and a typical PPA adverbial marker (PALAI), with the aorist infinitive clause PRIN IDEIN easily interpreted as giving further definition to the adverb PALAI. This grammatical and semantic analysis, not theology, makes the difference. Testament of Job 2:1 has a subject complement (IWBAB), cannot be interpreted as a PPA, and therefore cannot serve as a nontheological example of this construction meaning what you claim it means in John 8:58 (existence from the past extending to the present). Further, my exegesis of John 8:58 does not rest on grammar alone but also considers the broader context, including the Old Testament allusions. So your accusation that I employ a question-begging "theological grammar" is false.

You tried this charge again in your post #32. I had refuted your claim that my analysis of Jesus' EGW EIMI sayings in John 8 is faulty because it overlooks John 9:9. You made no attempt to counter the points I made about John 9:9. Instead, you commented:

<< Oh, you mean the context supplies the reference of the implicit pronomial complement 'he'? The same is true in John 8:28, where the context supplies "Son of Man." Why do you accept a contextual reference in the case of the blind man, and ignore it in the case of Jesus in order to appeal to a reference in Isaiah? This differential grammar and semantics on your part is what I mean when I speak of theological grammar. >> (p. 426)

I don't ignore the context in the case of Jesus in John 8:28. Although the immediate reference is arguably to the Son of Man (as you point out), the language of John 8:24, 28 just as clearly alludes to Yahweh in Isaiah 43:10:

hINA GNWTE KAI PISTEUSHTE KAI SUNHTE hOTI EGW EIMI (Is. 43:10)
PISTEUSHTE hOTI EGW EIMI... GNWSESQE hOTI EGW EIMI (John 8:24, 28)

I think both are intended; and this conclusion rests on exegetical grounds, as I have explained, not on "theological grammar."

II. THE "SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE" AND THE CONNOTATION OF ETERNITY

You wrote:

<< You, of course, understand none of this and think the simple present tense, in and of itself, signifies eternity, which is patently absurd. >> (p. 411)

I must be doing something right; you keep repeating assertions about what I think that are not only "patently absurd" but patently not what I think. I stated very clearly that the simple present tense "am" in and of itself does not signify eternity. In my post #30, to which you were responding, I wrote:

“If Jesus’ entire statement had been merely EGW EIMI, we might have construed it to mean merely ‘I exist’ and that would indeed have seemed an oddly banal thing for Jesus to say in that context. But the adjunct dependent clause makes it clear that this statement is not a mere affirmation of existence but an affirmation of existence of an extraordinary kind.” (p. 373)

In my next post, #31, I stated:

“...I agree that EGW EIMI in and of itself does not convey anything auspicious. As I keep pointing out, I have never said or suggested or implied otherwise” (p. 378).

But you knew this from the very beginning of the debate. Thus, in your opening post, you acknowledged that I had made this point years ago in my book:

<< Rob and I agree that “By itself, of course, the word eimi does not connote eternal preexistence” (114)... >> (p. 9).

Yet now you claim, in direct contradiction to your earlier acknowledgment and my recent statements, that I think the simple present tense EIMI in and of itself “signifies eternity.” The more you repeat such flat-out falsehoods regarding my position, the worse you make your line of argument appear.

You asked:

<< Tell me how you can translate it so that any reader, coming to it without your knowledge and wisdom, would understand that the temporal significance of EIMI is other than the simple present tense. >> (p. 412)

Your question appears to be worded in a somewhat sarcastic way, although it is sometimes difficult to discern a person’s tone from his writing. The rendering found in most English versions seems to convey the idea to a lot of folks:

“Before Abraham came into being, I am.”

I’m pretty sure that most people reading this translation will get the idea that Jesus was not merely asserting that he existed at the time he was speaking. I know that when I was barely 17 years old and not yet a Christian, I realized that Jesus’ statement as translated in the English versions available to me expressed some sort of omnitemporal or transtemporal existence. Ironically, at the time I tried to find some way around the obvious implications!

III. DEFINING “ABSOLUTE” YET AGAIN

A. THE DEFINITION PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED, NOW FORGOTTEN

You wrote:

<< You don't even understand what "absolute" means. You state: "To say that EIMI is absolute is not to say that the dependent clause contributes nothing to our understanding of the temporal orientation or significance of EIMI." But that is PRECISELY what "absolute" means. Absolute means self-contained and unmodified in temporal orientation and significance. >>

I thought we had settled this question, but evidently I was mistaken. The term “absolute” as a grammatical term is capable of being understood in varying ways. Remember, I had explained that when biblical scholars say that EIMI is ‘absolute’ they mean that it lacks a subject complement. You had even commended me for “some good detective work” in explaining their usage (p. 259). Yet somehow, while continuing to maintain the same position, I’ve gone in your eyes from doing “some good detective work” on this point to not even understanding what “absolute” means. Perhaps the debate has simply gone on too long and you forgot!

B. ROBERTSON ON THE “ABSOLUTE” USE OF EIMI

You wrote:

<< Nowhere does Robertson use ‘absolute’ in connection with a copulative verb, as you say he does. He uses it only in the context of discussing infinitives (1092-1093), and participles in subordinate clauses (1130-1132), and in both contexts he means merely “clauses that stand apart from the rest of the sentence” (1130). >> (p. 413)

You are partly right: Robertson never uses the term “absolute” to refer to a verb that *he identifies as* copulative. However, you are dead wrong when you say that he uses it only in discussing infinitives and participles. Perhaps you have forgotten the very statement in Robertson’s grammar in question: the one in which he says that the indicative EIMI in John 8:58 “is really absolute” (Robertson, *Grammar*, 880)! You know – the one that you claim was a “foolish” statement on his part! How could you forget that?

Elsewhere Robertson indicates that although EIMI normally functions as a copula, “Sometimes it does express existence as a predicate like any other verb, as in EGW EIMI (Jo. 8:58) and hH QALASSA OUK ESTIN ETI (Rev. 21:1)” (Robertson, 394). He then adds, “But more commonly the real predicate is another word and EIMI merely serves as a connective or copula.” So the explanation I gave in my book of Robertson’s comment on page 880 of his *Grammar* will have to be amended or at least qualified: by “absolute” Robertson meant the use of a verb that normally has a “predicate” expressed with it (which for EIMI would be a *typically* copulative verb) without any such predicate expressed. (By “predicate” in association with EIMI, remember, I mean a subject complement.) This is really what I meant when I used the expression “copulative verb”; I was well aware that EIMI could have a non-copulative usage. Perhaps there is an even better way of explaining what Robertson meant. However, clearly he had to mean

something roughly along these lines when he referred to EIMI in John 8:58 as absolute. Your assertion that he only used the term with reference to infinitive and participial verb forms betrays the fact that you had already dismissed his use of that term with reference to John 8:58.

As I said, by referring to EIMI as a “copulative verb” I meant simply that EIMI typically or usually has this function; I did not mean that a subject complement is always implied in every occurrence of the verb EIMI. Perhaps I could have been clearer on this point. In any case, having cleared up this misunderstanding, I trust you can now see that my reference to EIMI as a copulative verb did not commit me to supplying “the implied predicate complement,” as you asserted (p. 413).

C. MISCONSTRUING THE MAJOR TREATMENTS THAT YOU DIDN'T READ

You had written:

<< Brown, Harner, and Ball all buy into the great "I AM" nonsense (that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like "Hi, it's me," and "I'm the one you're looking for"), and this dictates their supposedly grammatical analysis. >>

I replied:

“Absolutely false. All three writers relate some or many of Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings in John to the ‘I am’ sayings of God in Isaiah. However, they nuance even this association, and they do not claim that Jesus is alluding to, let alone invoking, Exodus 3:14 in *any* of those sayings.... It might be a good idea to READ these scholars before accusing them of ‘nonsense.’” (p. 368)

You pointed out that one of these scholars, Raymond Brown (as I had quoted him), distinguishes the absolute use of EGW EIMI with no predicate (John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19) from usages where a predicate is understood but not expressed. You then commented:

<< Most major translations of John 8:24, 8:28, and 13:19 translate them as belonging to Brown's category 2, that is, with an understood predicate complement. The exception in the NAB which has "I AM." As we agreed at the beginning of our discussion back in August, the use of "I AM" points to the erroneous idea that this is a name or designation of God in Exodus 3:14. Hence my conclusion that Brown and Harner "buy into the 'I Am' nonsense." Because, you see, there is simply no such thing as EIMI used as a copula in an absolute construction without an implied complement. Such a thing would be incomprehensible as a sentence. >>

I didn't claim that Brown or Harner said that EIMI was “used as a copula in an absolute construction without an implied complement.” I cited them as examples of scholars who agree with Robertson that EIMI in John 8:58 is “absolute.” Their identification of EIMI as absolute in John 8:24, 28 does not preclude an English translation choosing to translate EGW EIMI in those texts as “I am (he),” as many do. It is a judgment call whether this is

the better rendering, and context and associations with Old Testament texts (specifically those in Isaiah) have to be considered in making that judgment call. But for all your wiggling here, the fact remains that you misrepresented Brown, Harner, and Ball, because you didn't read them.

D. NO SUCH THING AS AN “ABSOLUTE COPULA”?

You wrote:

<< And here we get to the hub of the problem. There simply is no such thing as an absolute copula. A copula, Rob, copulates. You cannot have a copula without something on the other side of it, so to speak, explicitly or implicitly. Don't you understand this? >>

Again, a copulative verb can be used non-copulatively (as EIMI can be used existentially). It can also be used with no recognizable or discernible predicate expressed or implied, even though its usage appears to be copulative. This is how many exegetes understand John 8:24, because after Jesus says, “unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins,” his critics reply, “Who are you?” (v. 25). As I have explained before, their question presupposes that they understood EIMI in verse 24 copulatively, not existentially, but at the same time no specific predicate was expressed or implied that they could discern. Hence, in response to Jesus' words “I am,” their question “Who are you?” was another way of saying, “You are *whom*?” They are in effect asking him to “fill in the blank” of his unpredicated or absolute “I am.” As you pointed out, most English versions do smooth out the wording of verse 24 by adding “he” after “I am.” This doesn't mean that in Greek EIMI isn't “absolute” in the sense typically used in these contexts. The addition “he” is justifiable, though, given the evident allusion to the Isaianic sayings of God, particularly Isaiah 43:10, which in Greek reads EGW EIMI but in Hebrew reads ANI HU (“I [am] he”). The point is that a lot is going on here; the matter is rather complex because the English translator has to take into account the Greek text itself, its allusion to a Greek translation of a Hebrew text, as well as how best to word the English rendering in order to balance readability with fidelity to the text.

You wrote:

<< Second is that these definitions involve transitive verbs, not intransitives, and the be-verb is an intransitive, so the definitions are not at all applicable to the case of John 8:58. >>

From my perspective, this isn't worth debating. I offered a clarification on the matter, you disputed that clarification at some length (pp. 415-17). I see no value in hashing this side issue out any further. You may ignore those quotations I gave from English reference works that referred to transitive verbs. My case works without them, since I went on to cite works by Greek scholars using the term “absolute” with reference to New Testament Greek texts.

I wrote:

“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.’”

You replied:

<< What rubbish. This is like saying, "The be-verb is not a transitive verb; in this sense, it is not a verb." You are saying that the PRIN clause is not an adjectival or nominal complement, and "in this sense" it is not a complement. This is meaningless, because in another sense, in a valid sense, it is a complement. The "sense" which you are denying to PRIN only applies when the be-verb is a copula, not when it functions existentially. Only when the be-verb is a copula can it have an adjectival or nominal complement, and without one be ‘absolute.’ But it cannot be really ‘absolute’ and a copula at the same time, because to be a copula it must have at least an implied complement. >> (p. 417)

The problem here is that you are insisting that grammarians and exegetes conform their use of technical terms to your narrow dictates, rather than simply seeking to understand what they mean. It is quite common for scholars to use the term “absolute” (or the term “unpredicated”) to describe the verb even if there is an adverbial associated with it. And what I said is precisely correct: if one defines ‘absolute’ to mean lacking a subject complement, then EIMI in John 8:58 is ‘absolute.’

E. ENGLISH REFERENCE WORKS AND GREEK TEXTS

You wrote:

<< In my post #20, I had pointed out that you were using an English grammar to argue something about the Greek, and asked which language you were intending to make a point about. You reply, in your post #30, "I was making a point about the Greek." So, do I need to remind you that we agreed long ago that this is invalid? Or do those rules only apply to me? >> (p. 421; see also p. 415)

No, we never decided or agreed that this couldn’t be allowed. Your quotation from my post #30 cuts me off in mid-sentence. I won’t go over that entire portion of the post, but here’s the whole sentence:

“I was making a point about the Greek, as I stated very clearly in a previous paragraph that you seem to have missed” (p. 372).

I encourage those interested in this point to go back and read my answer there.

As for your claim that we had an agreement not to use an English grammar to make a point about the Greek, no, we never had such an agreement. I’m guessing that you are referring to an exchange where I asked you for clarification because you were discussing

the Greek text and citing an English grammar. In that particular instance, I found your discussion somewhat hard to follow and so asked for clarification (my post #5, p. 51). Again, I won't quote the whole thing here for sake of space. At no time did I fault you for using an English grammar to elucidate the use of certain technical terms in grammar that are used in discussing the Greek text. The confusion that I noted was that throughout the paragraph you kept referring to English ("The English be-verb... This fact of English... an English speaker") and quoted an English grammar, and yet ended with a reference to "the prin clause" in its relation "to eimi." So I simply asked for clarification and made a clarifying distinction of my own (distinguishing the grammatical structure of the Greek from the grammatical structure of the English translation, which may or may not be precisely the same). We never had any sort of agreement of the kind you describe. Nor would it have been prudent of me to agree not to use English grammar reference works to understand technical terms used in the grammatical analysis of multiple languages. There is absolutely nothing wrong with making that sort of use of a reference work.

F. CALLING A NEUTRAL WITNESS: GREEK SCHOLAR CHARLES KAHN

Since you insist on dismissing the use of such terms as 'absolute' and 'unpredicated' by biblical scholars as supposedly tainted by their theological perspective, let me introduce a scholarly work that focuses on the be-verb in Greek and that is concerned entirely with extrabiblical Greek. Charles Kahn's book *The Verb "Be" in Ancient Greek* draws examples primarily from Homer and secondarily from other Greek writings, all of which predate the New Testament:

Kahn, Charles H. *The Verb "Be" in Ancient Greek*. Foundations of Language. Supplementary Series 16. The Verb "Be" and Its Synonyms: Philosophical and Grammatical Studies 6. Dordrecht and Boston : D. Reidel, 1973.

Kahn defines 'absolute' as follows:

"By an absolute construction I mean that there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner. An absolute construction may, however, admit adverbs of time" (240).

Please notice that Kahn defines "an absolute construction" as one in which "there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner," and that he then explicitly notes that such an "absolute construction" may have associated with it "adverbs of time." This definition agrees nicely with the usage of the term 'absolute' in biblical scholarship with regards to John 8:58.

IV. ON ADDING "HE" TO WIN THE VERSE BUT LOSE THE DEBATE

You went on to argue that if I take EIMI in John 8:58 to be functioning 'copulatively' then I must either construe the subject complement to be "Abraham" (which of course is

absurd, but is also grammatically and contextually out of the question) or supply the subject complement “he,” as translators commonly do in John 8:24, 28. You commented:

<< If you would like to adopt this position, you may do so, and concede that the traditional translation is wrong. I would not object to this position, and we could conclude the debate with both of us holding defensible, though different views of the best translation of the verse:

Jason: "I have existed since before Abraham was born."

Rob: "Before Abraham was born, I am He." >> (p. 418)

You suggest that if I took this route I would be abandoning the claim I set out to defend and so would “have lost this debate” (pp. 418, 427).

This argument is easily refuted. In English, a sentence in which the intended subject complement of the be verb is ‘he’ can express it or not, with the meaning unchanged:

EXAMPLE A

Jason: “Are you Rob?”

Rob: “I am he.”

EXAMPLE B

Jason: “Are you Rob?”

Rob: “I am.”

To anticipate a possible red herring, I am not claiming that either of these sentences is identical in grammar to John 8:58 (which is not an answer to the same sort of question). I am simply using them to illustrate the point that in English the subject complement ‘he’ can be expressed or implied with no difference in meaning.

Thus, I can defend the conventional translation and take the view that if one construes it as using “am” copulatively, the implied predicate ‘he’ can be understood even though it is not expressed. I do not have to agree to “abandon” the conventional translation in order to add “he” to the sentence. Moreover, since all I have ever claimed was that the conventional translation was **better** than the translations that render EIMI using a form of the past tense, I would in no sense “lose the debate” even if I agreed that those translations would be improved by adding “he.” In other words, I can argue that the translations “I am” and “I am he” are both superior to the translations “I was” and “I have been.”

By the way, you were five months and a couple hundred pages too late to be suggesting that I forfeit the debate by adding the word ‘he’ to the translation. I suggested that ‘he’ might be implicit in John 8:58 back in October in my post #17 (p. 201).

Finally, there is something quite odd about your suggestion that the translation “Before Abraham was born, I am He” is defensible. I see how it avoids your criticism that the

clauses are in the wrong order. However, your other main criticism of the conventional translation is that it fails to coordinate the verbal tenses of the two clauses properly. I fail to see how this alternative translation avoids your criticism in a way that the conventional translation does not.

V. ON EGW EIMI NOT BEING THE WHOLE SENTENCE

You quoted the following from my post #17:

“...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.”

You replied:

<< This would be fine, Rob, if we were speaking about a hypothetical absolute sentence – “I exist.” – that by being given that way we are to understand is the whole sentence. But we are not dealing with a hypothetical sentence, but with an actual sentence that has more words in it. Doesn't the sentence in John 8:58 have more words in it, Rob? Sorry if it sounds like I'm talking to a fifth grader, but that's exactly how I feel. >> (pp. 418-19)

And I am accused of being the polemicist who will say anything to win a debate!

The words “I exist,” like EGW EIMI, *can* be a whole, complete sentence, but they can also of course be part of a larger sentence, as EGW EIMI are in John 8:58. You know that, I know that, and you know that I know that. So knock off your outrageous attempt to fabricate this straw man version of me as if I were arguing as though I were ignorant of the fact that EGW EIMI does not constitute the entire sentence in John 8:58.

A part of a sentence can express a “meaningful statement” (that was how I worded it, please note) without *being* the whole sentence. In the sentence, “I lived in Alabama before moving to California,” the words ‘I lived in Alabama’ (the main clause) are meaningful without the adverbial clause ‘before moving to California.’ That is, the words ‘I lived in Alabama’ express a meaningful statement and *could* function just fine as a sentence without the adverbial clause. In making this observation, I am not denying that the adverbial clause contributes something to our understanding of the main clause. In this instance, it tells us when the action of the verb in the main clause took place. However, it is simply a fact that the dependent clause ‘before moving to California’ is not a grammatically obligatory element of the sentence. It is, of course, ‘needed’ to convey the entirety of the meaning that the whole sentence expresses, but it is not ‘needed’ grammatically in order for the main clause to express a meaningful statement. It is this latter sense that is meant in grammar when describing the dependent clause as not being ‘obligatory.’

You elaborated on your criticism, claiming that later in my post #30 I had given “the grammatical term ‘existential’ the meaning ‘I exist’ in an absolute form” (p. 419), by which you mean treating “I exist” as a complete sentence. However, I did no such thing. As I explained above, a main clause can have a certain meaning, and can be quoted as such, without it being the whole sentence. When I wrote, “If EGW EIMI means something like ‘I exist,’” I was not saying or implying that either EGW EIMI or ‘I exist’ is a complete sentence. Nor did I “limit” the existential function to the simple ‘I exist,’ as though the words could mean no more than that. I was simply using the translation “I exist” for EGW EIMI to distinguish the existential interpretation explicitly from the non-existential, ‘copulative’ interpretation.

VI. OBLIGATORY COMPLEMENT, OPTIONAL COMPLEMENT, OR ADJUNCT

You wrote:

<< Third, although you speak here in terms of complements, at the end of your post #30 you speak as if there is an either/or between obligatory complements and adjuncts. You deliberately omit optional complements, which form an essential and integral part of the discussion on the pages of the Cambridge Grammar that you cite. This is to give a false impression about the possible relations of the dependent clause to the main one, artificially limiting the options in order to suggest that if it is not obligatory, it is not a complement but an adjunct. This is completely false. >>

Your criticism is completely false. My comments in post #30 were more abbreviated on this point because I had already discussed the difference between optional complements and adjuncts thoroughly in a previous post (#17; see pp. 198-201). In fact, I was the one who first introduced the distinction between an optional complement and an adjunct into our discussion. I certainly did not “deliberately” omit anything. Had you merely said that I overlooked or missed something, I would have responded that you were merely mistaken. However, since you falsely asserted that I omitted something “deliberately” in order “to give a false impression,” I think I am justified in saying that your comment was malicious.

You wrote:

*****BEGIN QUOTE FROM JASON (PP. 420, 421)*****

But once one concedes that the PRIN clause is a complement, not an adjunct, regardless of whether it is obligatory or optional you have recognized that what the sentence is conveying is not the mere fact of existence, but existence in relation to other conditions....

I cited from the Cambridge Grammar be-verb sentences closely parallel to John 8:58 that clearly illustrate the place of complements in them: ‘Jill is in her study’ -- ‘in her study’ is a complement, not an adjunct, because the statement is not that Jill exists, but that she presently exists in a particular place. ‘The meeting was on Monday’ -- same comments.

What the verb indicates is fundamentally different with or without its complement." (JB post #20)

Can you please defend the meaningfulness, as part of these sentences, of "Jill is" and "The meeting was"? Can you please explain to us how the speakers of these sentences were conveying, in an absolute sense, the existence of Jill and the meeting, rather than the specific temporal or spatial existence of Jill and the meeting? Do you agree that these are existential uses of their respective verbs? Are "in her study" and "on Monday" adjuncts or complements? Are they obligatory or optional?
*****END QUOTE FROM JASON (PP. 420, 421)*****

I have said numerous times now that EGW EIMI is not “conveying...the mere fact of existence,” and that the PRIN clause makes this clear. However, that doesn’t mean that EGW EIMI would be meaningless without the PRIN clause; it means that the full import of EGW EIMI would not be expressed without it.

It is a fact that one *can* in some instances say something like “Jill is,” as in answer to certain questions, such as “Who is in the study?” In such a sentence there is an implicit complement that has already been expressed in the question and is therefore tacitly implied in the answer. So I agree that in the sentence “Jill is in the study” the prepositional phrase “in the study” is an obligatory complement. However, PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI EGW EIMI is not that sort of sentence. Here is a summation of my argument that the PRIN clause is not an obligatory complement:

“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” (p. 201).

Your position (now) seems to be that PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is an optional complement rather than an obligatory complement. This would explain you chewing me out for supposedly limiting the choices to obligatory complement or adjunct. However, your usage here seems to differ from that of the Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (which you introduced into the discussion). The Grammar states that with optional predicatives, “there are grounds for saying that while resultatives are complements, the depictives are adjuncts” (262). Since the temporal dependent clause is (as you stated repeatedly) depictive, I can only conclude that it is better classified as an adjunct. Nevertheless, I don’t think it matters to me how one classifies the dependent clause. Remember, in my post #17, after explaining that biblical scholars call EIMI in John 8:58 ‘absolute’ in the sense of lacking a subject complement, I commented:

“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” (p. 198).

So, although I still think my conclusion that the dependent clause is an adjunct was correct, my case for the traditional translation of John 8:58 simply doesn't depend on that conclusion.

VII. TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING JOHN 8:58

The first sentence of your post #32 is as follows:

<< In your message #31, all of your discussion is in support of a reading that would make EIMI in John 8:58 a copula. >> (p. 424)

Since I expressly stated otherwise in my post #31, the above statement is just plain false. I think I will leave it at that and trust that those concerned about this point can go back and read that post for themselves.

You wrote:

<< Since you have not been able to prove that the idiom in question (the PPA) is not involved here, or that the grammar and syntax of the traditional English sentence is in any sense usual for English expression, I find absolutely no validity in your claim that "The conventional translation of EGW EIMI as 'I am' is therefore the least obtrusively interpretive English rendering on the market." It is quite obtrusive, in that it offends normal English expression. >>

You are equivocating here. The issue is which rendering is the most obtrusively INTERPRETIVE English rendering. Your claim that "it offends normal English expression," which is prima facie suspect given the number of English-speaking scholars who have translated it that way, is in any case irrelevant to the issue of which rendering is the more interpretive. This is because a translation is more interpretive the more its rendering narrows the range of interpretive possibilities for the observant reader. I explained how this is so more than once, as for instance in the following comments:

"The traditional translation of John 8:58, 'I am,' retains the ambiguity of the original (is this an existential affirmation or an identity claim?) in a way that 'I was' or 'I have been' does not. Yet if one reads 'I am' existentially, one will come away *at least* with the same understanding that 'I have been' would convey (that Jesus is saying that he had existed since a time antecedent to Abraham)" (p. 380).

You wrote:

<< And if you were, as you have so disingenuously claimed, merely defending rendering a formally present tense noun as present tense, you could never suggest that "Jesus' statement means nothing more than that he was older than Abraham." >> (p. 424)

There you go again, baselessly accusing me of being disingenuous. There simply is no warrant for such an accusation.

I think your comment here is a bit confused. I did not suggest that “Jesus' statement means nothing more than that he was older than Abraham.” I said that this is what is indicated by translations that render EIMI in John 8:58 using a form of the past tense:

“By the same token, those versions that translate EIMI in John 8:58 with a form of the past tense must be recognized as promoting a particular interpretation of Jesus’ words that is at the very least open to question, namely, that Jesus’ statement means nothing more than that he was older than Abraham” (p. 375).

Furthermore, and ironically, you are the one who is guilty here of confusing translation with interpretation. My point was that rendering a Greek present-tense verb with an English present-tense verb hardly needs any defense as a matter of translation choice; I can certainly make this point and still maintain that the *meaning* of the text when properly *interpreted* is something more than a simple affirmation of present existence or being older than Abraham.

VIII. INFINITIVE OF ANTECEDENT TIME AS PPA TEMPORAL MARKER

In your post #33, you wrote:

<< In your post #35, you spend several pages seeking to deny that you have been confusing the distinct parts of the sentence involved in the infinitive of antecedent time and in the progressive present, without acknowledging that because they do involve distinct parts of the sentence, they are not an either/or choice, and so, contrary to what you have argued, they can both appear in the same sentence. It is irrelevant that you can cite sentences from your post where you accurately state the respective formation of the infinitive of antecedent time and of the progressive present (you seem to keep wanting me to quote back your entire previous post, which is scarcely efficient for the progress of the debate). The fact remains that in the crucial passages, where you conclude that the infinitive of antecedent time and the progressive present are mutually exclusive, you are guilty of such confusion, and that is why I quoted back to you those specific passages. >> (p. 428)

I can refute this whole line of justification for your failed criticism with one observation: I showed that you misunderstood me, not by resorting to other sentences from my post where I didn't have that misunderstanding, but by showing that you had misconstrued the very sentences that you quoted (see p. 396).

You wrote:

<< If you want to prove that you are not guilty of such confusion, then you must acknowledge that it is perfectly possible for an infinitive of antecedent time to appear in the same sentence with a PPA. This is true, whether you acknowledge it or not. >>

You have not framed the issue here correctly. The issue in this matter is whether it is plausible or probable for an infinitive of antecedent time to function as the temporal marker of a PPA. I maintain that it is not.

IX. MARK 9:21

The rest of your post #33 was devoted to Mark 9:21 and the two Exodus texts that you argued are examples of the PPA. Your criticisms of my handling of the Exodus texts (your post #33, pp. 430-31) is characteristically off-base and unfair, so I don't think I need to address those texts again. However, I will address your comments on Mark 9:21. Here is the sentence in Mark 9:21 again:

POSOS CRONOS ESTIN hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi

How much time (it) is since this has happened to him (interlinear)

“How long is it since this has happened to him?” (literal translation, compare ASV, Darby, KJV, Young's)

“How long has this been happening to him?” (so most contemporary versions)

The point at issue here is whether POSOS CRONOS or hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi is the temporal marker of the PPA. I asserted the former, you the latter. Your stated reason for rejecting POSOS CRONOS as the temporal marker is that it is the subject of the sentence. Although this verse is of tangential interest to our debate, you have made much of it, so I will comment on it more fully. Before I do, though, I wish to apologize for my comment previously that you had “missed the obvious.” I think I was correct on the substantive issue, but I don't think I was justified in criticizing you as I did.

According to Robertson, hWS in Mark 9:21 means “since.” He adds, “The examples in the N. T. are usually in the aorist or imperfect indicative as in Jo. 6:12, 16; Ac. 8:36 and chiefly refer to definite incidents” (Robertson, 974). In Mark 9:21, GEGONEN is perfect, and one might take it to refer to a ‘definite incident’ introduced by hWS meaning “since.” Dana and Mantey also take it this way, and they translate the sentence, “How long is it since this happened to him?” (Dana and Mantey, 281). This translation understands the subject of the verb GEGONEN to be the condition suffered by the boy (namely, his demonic possession). Older versions, including the KJV and ASV, took the sentence in this way (see also Darby, Young's). However, most contemporary versions translate the sentence, “How long has this been happening to him?” (ESV, NASB, NKJV, NLT, NRSV). Evidently, these versions understand the subject of GEGONEN to be the set of phenomena mentioned in the preceding verse (the convulsions and other symptoms that the boy was experiencing). The father's answer, “From childhood,” fits either understanding of the text. On the other hand, the tense of GEGONEN seems to fit the

older rendering better. The NIV supports the older interpretation but is worded in more idiomatic English: “How long has he been like this?” I find it difficult to be dogmatic as to which way to construe GEGONEN is best. Tentatively, I suggest the following as a literal translation: “How long has it been since this happened to him?”

Our disagreement as to the ‘temporal marker’ may be resolved by noting that the main clause can stand on its own to express the question:

POSOS CRONOS ESTIN

“How long has it been?”

In my view, POSOS CRONOS is a predicate nominative, i.e., a subject complement, not the subject of the sentence. It looks like the subject at first blush because it is nominative and comes first in the sentence, and no other subject noun is expressed. In actuality, though, the subject is “it” (implicit in the verb ESTIN). The confusion arises because the sentence is actually a question. To understand the grammatical relations in the question properly, it is helpful to convert it into a statement with the answer supplied:

Question: POSOS CRONOS ESTIN: “How long has it been?”

Converted to statement: “It has been a long time.”

Answer: (ESTIN) EK PAIDIOQEN: “(It has been) from childhood.”

In the expanded or full form of the answer, the subject is “it” and the predicate nominative POSOS CRONOS, “how long,” has been replaced with a prepositional phrase, EK PAIDIOQEN, “from childhood,” that specifies just “how long” it had been. Just as EK PAIDIOQEN functions predicatively as a temporal expression completing the implied ESTIN in the father’s answer, POSOS CRONOS functions predicatively as a temporal expression completing ESTIN in Jesus’ question. Since it functions predicatively as a temporal expression, it qualifies as a potential marker of a PPA. As I pointed out previously, the meaning and significance of POSOS CRONOS in the sentence is comparable to undisputed PPA temporal markers in other NT texts, “a long time already” (POLUN HDH CRONON, John 5:6) and “so long a time” (TOSOUTWi CRONWi, John 14:9). This is so, even though the grammatical form of POSOS CRONOS is nominative rather than accusative or dative.

We can include the dependent hWS clause and see the same grammatical relations:

Question: POSOS CRONOS ESTIN hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi

“How long has it been since this happened to him?”

Converted to statement:

“It has been a long time since this happened to him.”

Answer: (ESTIN) EK PAIDIOQEN (hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi)

“(It has been) from childhood (since this happened to him).”

We see here that the dependent clause hWS TOUTO GEGONEN AUTWi actually restates or elaborates on the question posed in the main clause. The dependent clause can

be converted into a question that is synonymous with the question posed in the main clause: “Since when did this happen to him?” This question asks for the same information as the actual question of the main clause, “How long has it been?” Thus, rather than serving as the temporal marker of ESTIN as a PPA, the dependent clause further specifies the time period already expressed in the interrogative POSOS CRONOS.

You objected to identifying POSOS CRONOS as a PPA marker on the grounds that it doesn't refer to the past and could, in another context, refer to the future:

<< Nor can POSOS CRONOS possibly form a PPA, since it does not contain any past reference. The pronoun POSOS, of course, appears with the regular present tense as well as the future tense verb (e.g., Mt 7:11, Lk 11:13, Rom 11:24, Heb 9:14). And although we happen not to have any other example of POSOS CRONOS in the NT, it is very easy to recognize that such a phrase could be used with a present or future tense without any temporal conflict: "How long a time will it be before these things come to pass?" >> (p. 429)

By this reasoning, “so long a time” (TOSOUTWi CRONWi) cannot function as a temporal marker for the PPA, and yet we have both agreed all along that it does so function in John 14:9. I think this is sufficient refutation of your objection. When such expressions are used with a present tense verb, in context it is clear that these expressions refer to past time. Therefore, I see no reason why POSOS CRONOS cannot function as a temporal marker of ESTIN as a PPA.

Lastly on Mark 9:21, the importance of this text to your argument is that you want to claim it to be clear proof that a dependent clause can function as the temporal marker of a PPA. If it is proof of such, it is hardly a clear or indisputable example, as best I can determine. I have expressed similar objections to most of the other examples you have marshaled. However, it is not at all crucial to my argument to deny that a dependent clause could ever function as the PPA temporal marker. Even if dependent clauses can perform this function (as for example I agreed that one might in Exodus 4:10, although that occurrence is also rather complex), it remains true that the type of dependent clause found in John 8:58, namely, an infinitive of antecedent time clause (PRIN + aorist infinitive) is not the right kind of dependent clause.

X. LOGIC AND GRAMMAR

You closed your last post with the following comments:

<< It has been rather amusing to me that you have faulted me for being a stickler about grammar. God forbid that we should be very careful and precise about the actual grammar of the Bible! Regarding my position on Psalm 89:2 (LXX), you say: "you are allowing your overly fussy construal of the grammar to overwhelm the logic of the text" (!). Whose logic would that be, Rob? My point in my book, and from the beginning of our discussion, has been that modern logic, even modern 'Christian' logic, is not

necessarily the logic of the writers of the Bible or of its original audience. Rather than assume we know what they meant, I argue, we should pay very close attention to what they actually wrote, and build any understanding of the Bible out of that, rather than imposing our own beliefs and tendencies of thought onto the Bible.... Theological interpretation and application must come after, not before. >> (pp. 431-32)

These comments, like so much that you have written in the last stretch of this debate, are based on misrepresentation and caricature of my position. I have never faulted you for being a stickler for grammar. I faulted you for treating the exegesis of a particular text as a matter of grammar **alone** instead of giving full justice to the fact that grammar, semantics, literary structure and style, thematic connections, and logical sequence all play a part in the communication of meaning. Moreover, by “the logic of the text” I clearly meant what I said; I was referring to the logical relations of the elements in the text, “the logic of the writer” (in this case of Psalm 89:2 LXX), not some “modern ‘Christian logic’” that I am somehow trying to justify imposing on the text. There was nothing unclear about what I said in this regard; on this point, as on so many others, you have for whatever reason simply failed to come to terms with my argument.

JASON #34 – 5/23 – #17738

JASON #34: AND FINALLY . . .

Rob,

In your post #36, you once again, and repeatedly, accuse me of misrepresenting your argument. What argument? Incredibly, you have posted for nine months, and responded to all of my posts, without ever stating a definite position. You have refused to take a stand on whether EIMI in John 8:58 is used existentially or copulatively. You have refused to acknowledge that it must be one or the other usage, and cannot be both. Of course, you might have attempted to actually demonstrate that any of my characterizations at the beginning of my post #31 misrepresent you. But you wisely do not attempt this since, in fact, every characterization can be matched to things you have found yourself saying in the course of this debate.

I. BASICS

As for your inability to take a position, let me just recap:

1. You undertook to defend the traditional English translation of John 8:58.
2. That traditional translation construes EIMI existentially, as can be seen by comparing 8:58 in the KJV, etc., with verses where EIMI is construed as a copula (as in John 8:24, 28), and the predicate complement implicit in the Greek is rendered explicit in English. I pointed all this out in my post #4 nine months ago.
3. Therefore, none of your argument that construes EIMI as a copula can be considered a defense of the traditional translation. You now take the position, in your post #36, that, "by referring to EIMI as a 'copulative verb' I meant simply that EIMI typically or usually has this function . . ." This would seem to retract all of your argument that depends on it actually having a copulative function, including any comparison to John 8:24, 28 or Isaiah 43:10. Either it is a copula, or it is not. Much of the argument you have made treats it as if it is a copula. If it is not one, dozens if not hundreds of pages have been beside the point, including much of the discussion of "absolutes."
4. Your remaining argument in defense of the traditional rendering as an existential has offered no sound grammatical basis on which to retain a present-tense rendering when EIMI is modified by a temporal adverbial clause. I have argued that you are only able to take this position by ignoring the verb's modification by the adverbial clause. Since in your latest post you insist that my characterization is unfair, and that you fully recognize the modifying role of the adverbial clause, it remains only a matter of coming to terms with in what manner an adverbial clause of past time may modify the main verb. My

position is that it modifies the verb in the direction of the past, making the present progressive from the past. What is your position on this modification?

In my post #28, I pressed you to make clear one of your lines of argument:

JASON: "Do you mean to argue that the PPA so overlaps with the 'universal' gnomic and the 'static' that to say that EIMI in John 8:58 can be construed as a PPA is necessarily to leave open its construal as one of these other two categories of use? Or do you mean to argue that EIMI in John 8:58 is one of these other two categories of use and NOT a PPA? These are two distinct, irreconcilable arguments, but I can't quite tell which of them you are making. In either case, I think you have insurmountable obstacles to making your case. In the first line of argument, you have not been able to demonstrate that any grammars support the idea that the PPA overlaps with these other categories of use (and for good reason, because the progressive temporal quality of the PPA is exactly what is lacking in "universal" or "static" states or natures). In the second line of argument you face the challenge that none of your grammars identifies John 8:58 as belonging to these other categories of use. Four of your grammars consider it a PPA, and to the best of my knowledge none of them cite it under any other category of use."

To this you replied in your post #34:

ROB: "The answer is that neither of these is my argument. My argument is that the PPA is formally similar enough to the universal gnomic, static, and other broad-band presents that a text that in some ways looks like a PPA text might be better construed as a different type of broad-band present. In other words, in some cases which use of the present most exactly fits the text may be a judgment call."

In other words, Rob, you are introducing "a different type of broad-band present" not identified or recognized in the grammars. Well, we decided back last fall that this was out of bounds, and that any grammatical argument must be based in recognized grammatical categories. Your "different type" of present here is quite simply your "eternal present" slipped back into the argument after you agreed to retract it. Meanwhile, have already shown how what you wished to include under 'broad-band presents' can be divided into those that are recurrent or constant, and those modified by specific past-time events. This is a clear point of differentiation that does not leave any room for a 'judgment call.'

In your post #35 you resorted to the following ploy:

"As for the point you make here, what we have seen is that you have to accuse translators throughout the English-speaking world and over the past many centuries of mistranslating not only John 8:58, but also Psalm 89:2 LXX, apparently also 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 John 2:9, and perhaps Colossians 1:17 as well. There is nothing 'obvious' about your position. The conventional translations of these texts work just fine, and in neither Psalm 89:2 nor John 8:58 (nor Colossians 1:17!) require excising the 'before' clauses."

If you bothered to read my book with anything but a jaundiced eye, you would realize that what I have said is that both unconscious theological bias as well as strong traditions of translation have shaped modern translations of the Bible. When people are used to hearing a particular rendering of a passage ringing in their ears, it shapes how they think of it, and how they will themselves render it when given the opportunity. That is why English archaisms survive in Bible translations far more than in other literature. All of these translators are interconnected by common religious and literary heritage. So just counting up how many of them agree is a circular argument. Let's take 1 Cor. 15:6 for example. I have said that proper modern English would translate a clause of this verse as something like "The majority have remained (MENOUSIN) until now," rather than "remain until now," because there is a progressive element in the verb's meaning, rather than a static one, with a clear duration from a past event to the time of sentence is uttered. Now the verb here means "remain, continue" as is translated that way by the KJV, NASB, and NW. But along came the Revised Standard Version, where the translators thought it better rendered paraphrastically as "are still alive." And then, lo and behold, this rendering suddenly pops up everywhere, in the NIV, NAB, AB, LB, TEV, English Standard, etc., where "still alive" or "still living" replaces the literal "remain until now." All this shows is the interdependence of Bible translation, and the rote way established phrasing gets carried over, both where it is very theologically significant and where it is fairly innocuous.

Or how about Colossians 1:17? Here again we are supposed to believe that the whole assembly of translating saints stands opposed to me in rejecting a rendering of the formally present tense ESTIN with an English past tense. Really? What about the TEV (Good News) "Christ existed before all things"; the AB "And He Himself existed before all things"; the LB "He was before all else began"; the NLT "He existed before everything else began"; the New Century "He was there before anything was made"; the Message "He was there before any of it came into existence"; and so forth? Apparently all these translators need to have defended to them what you claim "hardly needs to be defended," namely, that an English present tense is supposedly always the proper way to render a Greek present tense form of a verb. To do so in Colossians 1:17 actually produces an ungrammatical English sentence. Note the coordination of the first clause with the second, in which a perfect tense is used of how these same "all things" have related to Christ since the time referred to in the first clause, when he was "before" them.

In conclusion, then, if "I am" cannot be defended as a copulative rendering (since those translations that have "I am" in John 8:58 have "I am he" in what they take to be copulative cases, which is the necessary form of such copulative sentences in English), and it cannot be defended as an existential rendering (because modern English favors "exist" for this function, as you yourself have conceded by recently switching to "exist" in defending the possibility of an "absolute" expression of existence), then "I am" simply cannot be defended.

II. AN END TO ABSOLUTES

We have spent an inordinate amount of time arguing over your use of "absolute." I have objected that your use of "absolute" derives from grammatical discussions that have nothing to do with the grammatical features of John 8:58. The "good detective work" for which I praised you was identifying a sense of "absolute" that would explain how some biblical scholars have used the term that has nothing to do with our debate over John 8:58, because it involved the presence or absence of nominal, pronominal, or adjectival complements. This is simply not an issue between us for John 8:58, and your "good detective work" demonstrated the irrelevance of the remarks about "absolutes" you were citing. You have cited definitions or grammatical discussions of "absolute" that refer to transitive verbs lacking an explicit complement – this has nothing to do with John 8:58, which does not have a transitive verb. You have cited and made comparisons to sentences in which EIMI functions as a copula – this has nothing to do with the traditional translation of John 8:58, which does not render EIMI as a copula.

In my post #20, I said that one cannot refer to EIMI in John 8:58 as a predicate absolute "in any sense relevant to the issues we are debating, since obviously we agree that it does not involve a predicate noun or adjective." In other words, this sense of "absolute" has nothing to do with EIMI in John 8:58, which is an intransitive verb, not a transitive one as in the definitions you cited, and it has an adverbial complement, although not a nominal or adjectival one, and so is by no means "absolute" in the sense of uncomplemented. Despite this, you have continued to claim that EIMI is "absolute" because it does not have a nominal or adjectival complement. The only response to this is, "So what?" Isn't our argument about the semantic tense of the main verb? Nominal or adjectival complements have nothing to do with this issue. It does have an adverbial complement, the only sort of complement relevant to our debate. I have said that because it is complemented, it is not "absolute" in the sense most grammarians mean by the term when used generically, and in the sense you would need it to be to support your position on the semantic tense of the verb. In fact, in an existential verb, we would not normally have a nominal or adjectival complement, and so we would never speak of an existential verb as "absolute" for lacking such kinds of complements. Rather, its absoluteness would be determined by the lack of other sorts of complements typical of existentials, namely, adverbials.

Up to now, you have dodged this problem by citing discussions and comparisons that involve the be-verb in its copulative rather than existential function. To this I objected that there is no such thing as an absolute copula, since a verb cannot be a copula without at least an implicit predicate complement. Notice that Kahn, whom you cite on the subject of "absolutes" in your post #36, likewise affirms that an absolute use of the Greek be-verb and a copulative use of it are mutually exclusive (He says that a particular use of EIMI he calls the 'veridical' "cannot in general be identified with a copula use because the syntax of the veridical is typically 'absolute', with no nominal or locative predicate expression," Kahn, p. 333). Even if sentences such as John 8:24 and 8:28 may be, by some stretch of expression, described as formally absolute, they are not semantically absolute. They have implicit predicate complements, and must have such implicit predicate complements to be complete sentences. But in your post #36 you say:

"a copulative verb . . . can also be used with no recognizable or discernible predicate expressed or implied, even though its usage appears to be copulative. This is how many exegetes understand John 8:24 . . ."

You go on to read this verse as an incomplete sentence. Now, of course, in an incomplete sentence, grammatical requirements can go unfulfilled. If I am interrupted mid-sentence, I cannot be held accountable for failing to provide all that grammar requires of a complete sentence. But of course John 8:24 is not an incomplete sentence, and to treat it that way is just silly. Jesus does not say "I am . . ." and leave a pregnant "blank" to elicit an inquiry from his audience. He says, in perfect idiomatic Greek, a complete sentence whose actual meaning is equivalent to the English sentence "I am he." The ambiguity of the implicit predicate complement ("he") evokes the further questioning of his audience. All you need to do is compare his expression here to the same expression used several times in John 18 to see that this is a recognizable complete sentence. It is translated as a complete sentence, with the implicit predicate complement supplied, in most major translations, the same ones that translate John 8:58 without supplying the pronoun because they do not construe it as the same sort of sentence. Even your comparison to Isaiah 43:10 shows that Greek EGW EIMI has the meaning "I am he," not "I am . . ."

In your post #36, you say:

"The words 'I exist,' like EGW EIMI, *can* be a whole, complete sentence, but they can also of course be part of a larger sentence, as EGW EIMI are in John 8:58. You know that, I know that, and you know that I know that."

Yes, Rob, what you say is true in modern English of "I exist," but not of "I am." The latter only appears in modern English in a very specific context where the verb is a copula with an implicit predicate complement supplied by the immediate context of communication. In your post #36 you observe this usage (as I did in my post #4 nine months ago), that in answer to the direct question "Are you x?" – it is acceptable in English to answer "I am." Here again, while formally absolute this sentence is certainly not semantically absolute; the "x" is implicit. And if you remove the sentence from the specific circumstance of the direct question, it becomes meaningless without the "x" being provided. Note as well that neither John 8:58, nor in the other occurrences in John 8 or 18, is there this specific circumstance of the question "Are you x?" Therefore your citation of this English idiom is irrelevant. Your tacit acknowledgment that "exist" is more usual or normal in modern English usage than "am" when we are dealing with an existential rather than a copulative expression supports what I have been saying all along, and what you admitted months ago, that the traditional translation of John 8:58 is "unusual" and not a standard English sentence. Nor is there any legitimacy to the notion that this oddness of expression needs to be used in order to make clear connections to other EGW EIMI sentences in the gospel, when the sweeping inclusion within a single category of every occurrence of EGW EIMI despite quite distinct grammatical uses of this pronoun-verb combination, is a claim open to dispute and debate.

To defend your use of "absolute" to characterize EIMI in John 8:58, you cite from Charles Kahn's book on the Greek verb `be,' which I am sure we both wish was more helpful for the issues we are discussing. But here, once again, you have cited a comment on EIMI in one usage (namely, existential) for an argument on a different usage (namely, copulative), continuing your habit of misusing the grammars. But let's take a closer look at Kahn. You quote him as follows:

"By an absolute construction I mean that there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner. An absolute construction may, however, admit adverbs of time" (240).

You go on to comment: "Please notice that Kahn defines `an absolute construction' as one in which `there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner,' and that he then explicitly notes that such an `absolute construction' may have associated with it `adverbs of time.' This definition agrees nicely with the usage of the term `absolute' in biblical scholarship with regards to John 8:58." You say elsewhere, "It is quite common for scholars to use the term `absolute' (or the term `unpredicated') to describe the verb even if there is an adverbial associated with it."

So then, Rob, what advance of your position does it make to use "absolute" in this sense, since such a use of the term does not disassociate the verb from its adverbial modification? I can't imagine how you thought this would help you. It apparently was of such importance to you to be vindicated for referring to EIMI in John 8:58 as "absolute" that you would resort to a use of that term that, when applied to John 8:58 actually defeats you. Going back to my point in my post #20, the question is not whether someone uses the term "absolute," but what they mean by it. You have cited a number of different references to "absolute" that employ the term in different ways, and I have kept challenging you to say something relevant to John 8:58 with regard to "absolute" and to show how what others mean by the word applies to what you are claiming "absolute" means. You have in fact talked of EIMI as an "absolute" in the context of arguing that it stands alone from any temporal modification by the adverbial clause, so that it remains present tense. But Kahn clearly does not use "absolute" in that sense. You go so far as to emphasize the correlation of what he calls an "absolute construction" with John 8:58 in that such a construction "may admit adverbs of time." In other words, temporal adverbials are so closely connected to the verb they modify that they do not count as predication, but as part of the verb, just as in the sentence on which he was commenting in the passage you cited from him, where EISI does not appear alone with a subject, but together with the adverb ETI, `yet, still.' Kahn himself reiterates this on p. 281, where he says that a construction of a particular type "is `absolute' (in the sense that there is no nominal or locative predicate and no `complement' such as the possessive dative or the predicate genitive, ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE A TEMPORAL MODIFIER like NUN `now')."

Kahn's definition of "absolute," then, would encompass EIMI with its adverbial modification in John 8:58, so that "have been" is the proper "absolute" rendering of the

verb by this definition. By calling EIMI in John 8:58 an "absolute" in Kahn's terms, you do not make it independent of its temporal modification. So by all means, call it an "absolute" if you want to. It was unfair of me to say that you didn't understand the meaning of the word. What you don't understand is how calling EIMI an "absolute" by any of the definitions of that term you have cited fails to provide even the slightest support for your position.

Which brings us back to Robertson. I have pointed out how in your book you foisted your own assumption about what "absolute" means onto Robertson's terse statement that EIMI in John 8:58 is absolute, by claiming to provide what Robertson means by the term. Your reader would naturally assume that you derived that meaning from other things Robertson says about "absolute." I demonstrated that by actually looking at what else Robertson says about "absolute," the meaning you claimed he gave it was nowhere to be found. In your post #36, then, you concede, "You are partly right: Robertson never uses the term 'absolute' to refer to a verb that HE IDENTIFIES AS copulative" (you used star marks for emphasis where I have made all caps), trying to suggest by your emphasis that he had simply failed to explicitly identify John 8:58 as copulative when he remarked on it being "absolute." Your suggestion is false, of course, as you well know because you go on to cite his remark on page 394 where he explicitly identifies EIMI in John 8:58 as existential. What you go on to say about how you would now qualify what you said in your book is as illegitimate as the original statement. What Robertson means by "absolute" in reference to John 8:58 must have something to do with why he hesitates to identify it as a PPA, since that is the context in which he makes the reference. It would be nonsensical to say a verb is not a PPA because it does not have a subject complement. The presence or absence of a subject complement has nothing to do with whether a verb is or is not a PPA. One might suggest, then, that Robertson meant what Kahn means by "absolute," since Kahn's remark has to do with existential usages of EIMI and we know that Robertson construes EIMI in John 8:58 as an existential. But if he had the same definition of "absolute" as Kahn, this would not be a reason why the verb could not be a PPA, since Kahn says that his meaning of "absolute" includes temporal adverbial modification. So we are left with the only remaining possibility, that Robertson meant "absolute" in its general sense of completely unmodified, which as I have said, is a foolish claim to make about EIMI in John 8:58 and we must regard as a mistake on Robertson's part, influenced by the traditional translation which does indeed treat the verb as "absolute" in this sense, as completely unmodified.

You correctly point out that at the beginning of the discussion we both seemed to be in agreement that, "By itself, of course, the word EIMI does not connote eternal preexistence." I don't like to contradict myself, but what I thought we agreed on has been challenged by your effort in the course of our discussion to somehow detach EIMI from its temporal modification so as to defend what in English is a simple present form of the be-verb. The incoherence in your argument has been that you want EIMI to be "absolute" in the sense of not modified in tense by the adverbial clause, and so properly translated as "am," and yet on the other hand modified in tense by the adverbial clause so that it is an eternal "am," rather than a simple present. You can't have it both ways. Either EIMI is temporally modified, or it is not. If it is not, then it is a simple present

(and in this sentence a non sequiter). If it is, then it is modified toward the past, and that is what we call a progressive present or PPA. Those are your only choices on the issue of adverbial modification here. You have to take a position one way or another.

In my post #20 I commented on your list of examples of temporally modified clauses:

JASON: "Note how in each case the full meaning of the statement is not 'I am serving you' or 'I am with you' or 'You are thinking' or 'You know the sacred writings' or 'The devil is sinning.' In each case, the temporal modification provides the complete significance of the verb, which is in the duration of the action or state, not the mere facticity of action or state. This is precisely the case with John 8:58, where it is not the existence of Jesus on the day of his remark that is significant, but the duration of that existence over supernaturally long time. Don't you agree?"

Since you didn't answer in any of your subsequent postings, I block quoted the whole section again, and asked, in my post #31, "Will you answer this question now?" Apparently not.

In my post #31, I went on to ask regarding old familiar examples from the Cambridge English Grammar:

JASON: "Can you please defend the meaningfulness, as part of these sentences, of 'Jill is' and 'The meeting was'? Can you please explain to us how the speakers of these sentences were conveying, in an absolute sense, the existence of Jill and the meeting, rather than the specific temporal or spatial existence of Jill and the meeting? Do you agree that these are existential uses of their respective verbs? Are 'in her study' and 'on Monday' adjuncts or complements? Are they obligatory or optional?"

You replied in your post #36:

"I have said numerous times now that EGW EIMI is not 'conveying...the mere fact of existence,' and that the PRIN clause makes this clear. However, that doesn't mean that EGW EIMI would be meaningless without the PRIN clause; it means that the full import of EGW EIMI would not be expressed without it. It is a fact that one *can* in some instances say something like 'Jill is, as in answer to certain questions, such as 'Who is in the study?' In such a sentence there is an implicit complement that has already been expressed in the question and is therefore tacitly implied in the answer. So I agree that in the sentence 'Jill is in the study' the prepositional phrase 'in the study' is an obligatory complement. However, PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI EGW EIMI is not that sort of sentence."

To get away with this subjective distinction, you went on to repeat a claim from an earlier posting, that an existential use of EIMI cannot have an obligatory complement. As I already pointed out long ago, the negative is an obligatory complement of ANY verb, including the be-verb. Also, by Kahn's own definition, a temporal modification

would always be obligatory, since he construes it as part of the verb. So your claim seems to be poorly thought through.

In my post #30 I pointed out: "what you are saying here is that John 8:58 is semantically a PPA, even if you will not agree that it is grammatically so. Note your own words `a state antecedent . . . continues.' Now, as a principle of translation, are you not bound to provide an English sentence that accurately renders the meaning of the Greek. Wherever you think you are deriving that meaning, whether from a strict reading of the grammar, or from its modification by its immediate context, that is what you are obliged to do. Now how, in English, do we convey a state that pertains already antecedent to a past event and continues to the present? Do we use a simple present to do that? No. Do we use a simple past? No. We use a progressive form: `I have been, I have existed.' Isn't that so?"

To this you replied in your post #35:

"I have *always*, beginning with my book sixteen years ago, agreed that in a broad sense of the PPA the verb EIMI might be construed as one, in that it connotes existence/life in the past that continues into the present. This is nothing new. How do we convey this in English? It depends on a combination of factors, all of which must be taken into account. The grammar is only one factor. When we consider the relation of this saying to other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus, especially those in 8:24, 28, the allusions to EGW EIMI sayings of God in the LXX, and the intentional contrast between EIMI and GENESQAI with its implication of omnitemporal or transtemporal existence and life for the speaker, `I am' appears to be the best translation overall, even if it is grammatically somewhat archaic or odd by some purists' standards."

And as I have *always* said, what you are talking about is interpretation and commentary, not translation. You simply presume these connections. You cannot prove them. The grammar is there; it is certainly connected to the meaning of what is said. The stuff you are talking about MAY be connected to it, but that is a matter of argument. You propose to elevate your interpretation to biblical status, to make your interpretation canonical by inserting it into the Bible's text. Whether your commentary and the connections its purports to find is right or not, it cannot justifiably be added to the biblical text. That is my stance, and if it is a "purist" one, so be it. I can live with being that sort of a purist.

III. MARK 9:21

On Mark 9:21, you have again read the Greek through English. I pointed out in my post #4 how English employs dummy subjects in certain circumstances with the be-verb ("there is" "it is"). A sentence such as "How long has it been since this happened to him?" is a perfect example of this English idiom. "It" refers to nothing whatsoever. It is not the semantic subject of the sentence. In a sentence "How much time has passed?" the subject is obviously the noun "time," modified by "how much." What has passed? Time has. But when we replace "pass" with the be-verb, what should be "How much time has been?" becomes "How much time has it been." The dummy subject slips in with the be-verb. So with the English rendering of Mark 9:21. You have translated it as "How long

has it been," but this is actually slightly paraphrastic, isn't it? Actually, it should be "How long a time has it been," or "How much time has it been." The subject here is clearly "time" (KRONOS). What has been? Time has. Even in the English sentence "How long has it been," "time" is implicit as the subject: "How long a time."

You say that, "the meaning and significance of POSOS CRONOS in the sentence is comparable to undisputed PPA temporal markers in other NT texts, 'a long time already' (POLUN HDH CRONON, John 5:6) and 'so long a time' (TOSOUTWi CRONWi, John 14:9)."

Here again, you assume that these phrases are the temporal markers in these PPA sentences, working with your arbitrarily narrow and restrictive notion of what can make a PPA. What you fail to notice is how in both examples the noun phrase works with other elements of the sentence to create a past time sense. In John 5:6, POLUN CRONON alone does not have a past time sense, but gains it with the addition of the adverb HDH. In John 14:9, the noun phrase carries no past time sense in its own right, but gains it from the coordination with the past tense verb EGNWKAS. This can be seen if we simply substitute a non-past tense verb in the coordinated position: "For so long a time I am with you, and then I will depart." We would understand the main verb in such a sentence to be "futuristic" or "tendential," rather than a PPA.

IV. ONE LAST TIME: INFINITIVE CLAUSES MODIFYING PPAS

In your post #36, you say:

"However, it is not at all crucial to my argument to deny that a dependent clause could ever function as the PPA temporal marker. Even if dependent clauses can perform this function (as for example I agreed that one might in Exodus 4:10, although that occurrence is also rather complex), it remains true that the type of dependent clause found in John 8:58, namely, an infinitive of antecedent time clause (PRIN + aorist infinitive) is not the right kind of dependent clause."

And again:

"The issue in this matter is whether it is plausible or probable for an infinitive of antecedent time to function as the temporal marker of a PPA. I maintain that it is not."

But here again, you are taking a position unsupported by any Greek grammar even within your own set of selected titles. Winer expressly identifies Jer. 1:5 and Ps. 89.2 as PPAs, and these both involve modification of the main verb by infinitives of antecedent time. So does Menander, *Dyscolos* 615-616. We have seen the wide variety of modification accepted by the grammars for PPAs, including non-adverbial phrases that simply have content with past time references within them. Now an infinitive clause is recognized even by you to function adverbially. So how arbitrary do you have to be to rule out this one type of adverbial modification, one that you recognize to contain past time reference, from the ability to make a PPA? You are simply making a denial based on the

conclusion to which you want to come, rather than basing your position in any legitimate fact about the Greek language. Time and again we see that when the present tense of the Greek be-verb either appears together with a phrase of past time reference, or stands in some sort of relation to a dependent or coordinated clause containing a past time reference, it gets shifted into a past sense that a PPA rendering most effectively balances with the choice of the present tense form by the writer:

Phrases:

John 15:27 "You have been (ESTE) with me from the beginning (AP' ARChHS)."

Exodus 4:10 "Lord, I have not been (EIMI) fit before (PRO) yesterday or before the third day."

Exodus 21:36 "it has been (ESTI) a gorer before (PRO) yesterday and before the third day"

Colossians 1:17 "And has existed (ESTIN) since before (PRO) all things, and all things have stood together (SUNESTHKEN) in him."

Clauses:

John 10:8 "Everyone who came (HLTHON) before (PRO) me have been (EISIN) thieves and bandits."

Mark 9:21 "How much time has it been (ESTI) since (hWS) this has happened (GEGONEN) to him?"

Clauses containing an infinitive of antecedent time:

Menander, Dyscolos 615-616: "For assuredly I long have been (EIMI) your friend since before (PRIN) I saw (IDEIN) you."

Psalms 89:2 LXX: (we all know it by heart by now)

Sometimes we see dual modification of the main verb. As you have pointed out, in the sentence from Menander's *Dyscolos*, we have both an infinitive of antecedent time and the adverb PALAI. Since the infinitive of antecedent time is a dependent clause, it must modify the main verb, and therefore we know that it serves to shift the tense of the verb in the direction of "before seeing you," i.e., into the past, creating a PPA. As an adverb, PALAI does the same thing redundantly.

The same dual modification might at first glance be argued for Psalm 89:2 LXX. Here we have, first of all, two "before" clauses involving infinitives of antecedent time. Since these are dependent clauses, they must serve to adverbially modify the main verb, thus shifting its temporal reference into the past time to which they refer. But on the other hand we appear to have the APO phrase redundantly doing the same thing. But notice that this phrase reads "from the age until the age," and so in itself does not have a specific past time reference. One could couple this exact phrase with a future tense verb and speak of what will be "from age to age" in the future. But when it is combined with the past tense references of the two "before" clauses, it takes on a past connotation complementary to theirs. This is similar to those cases discussed in my post #33 where what you have assumed to be the modifying phrase often does not have in itself a past time sense, and so can only make a PPA by appearing in conjunction with some other

element in the context which supplies the past time sense. I would suggest translating this as "from one age to the next." Now you have said, in your post #35:

"There is nothing in Psalm 89:2 LXX that I can see . . . that would indicate that APO refers to a time after the events of the preceding two lines . . ."

But of course APO precisely denotes "from," and you yourself have argued that it marks a specific beginning of the action of the verb in such PPAs as John 15:27, 2 Peter 3:4, 1 John 3:8, and 2 Timothy 3:15 (your post #27). Now suddenly in the case of Psalm 89:2 LXX you deny that it has this same significance you have so strenuously argued that it has elsewhere. Hmmm. Well maybe there is some important difference between those other occurrences where you say APO does denote a defined beginning of the verbal action, and Psalm 89:2 LXX where you say it does not. Oh, of course, how silly of me. There is an important difference. Psalm 89:2 is speaking of God, while those other verses are not. As I said in my book, Rob, bias is detected by inconsistent application of principles of understanding or translating the same grammar. Your inconsistent understanding of the significance of APO is a classic example of this, and yet another reason why I maintain that you are guilty of working with a "theological grammar" that adjusts how you read and translate things depending on the theological stake of a particular passage.

V. FAULTS OF OMISSION AND COMMISSION

I am sorry if you felt that my criticism of your omission of optional complements was malicious. The fact is that you did omit this third category, and by doing so you gave the false impression that there are only two ways to construe a dependent clause, as either an obligatory complement or as an adjunct. I am not mistaken about that omission.

Therefore, you have no grounds to say, "Your criticism is completely false." To say that you had already discussed optional complements in your post #17 does not in any way justify your omission of that category in making an argument for the PRIN clause to be an adjunct if it is not an obligatory complement in your post #30. You say that for me to say you "deliberately" omitted the third category is malicious. Presumptive maybe, but not malicious. You are right that I do not for a fact know that the omission was deliberate, and therefore I retract the word "deliberately" as presumptive on my part. In the end, you say your case for the traditional translation does not depend on identifying the PRIN clause as an adjunct. If we count up all the things you say your case does not depend on, however, you are left with no case at all.

You also found it unfair that I would characterize as disingenuous your claim to be merely arguing for a simple present tense rendering of EIMI in John 8:58. The latest version of this claim, in your post #36 is:

"My point was that rendering a Greek present-tense verb with an English present-tense verb hardly needs any defense as a matter of translation choice . . ."

Hardly needs any defense? Then please explain to us, Rob, why the Greek grammars recognize categories of using the Greek present tense that are NOT best rendered by an English present tense? Why do translators not consistently follow this simple one-to-one rote manner of translation you say needs no defending? The answer, of course, is that there is no one-to-one match of the Greek and English present tenses. They overlap considerably, but in some places a Greek present tense form of a verb does not correspond to what would have present tense meaning in English. And vice versa. That's what all those grammars spend dozens of pages explaining and sorting out, in case you didn't notice.

I had written:

JASON: "you avoid any comment on the fact that those who do comment on translation assume a past rendering as the norm, which clearly puts your position against the tide."

To this, you replied (post #34):

"This is just plain false. In fact, I showed that your claim here that those grammars assume a past rendering as the norm is itself false. I pointed out that `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.'"

Uh, Rob, read your own quoted statement back to yourself. "Some say . . . ALWAYS in the past tense . . . others say NORMALLY, USUALLY, OR OFTEN" in the past tense. Please explain to me, then, how it can be true that the claim "that those grammars assume a past rendering as the norm is itself false." What else is `the norm' than what "normally, usually, or often" is the case?

In your post #36 you dismissed without answer my criticism of your handling of the Exodus passages which I offered as more PPAs to consider in comparison with John 8:58, by saying that my criticisms were "off-base and unfair." What were these "off-base and unfair" criticisms? That you resorted to paraphrase and ungrammatical English in your translations to avoid PPA renderings. How is it off-base or unfair to point to non-literal translation and English ungrammaticalities? Are such things present in your translations?

Yes. So on-base. Would literal and grammatically sound translations produce PPA sentences? Yes. So fair. Readers, please refer back and see for yourself.

Now let's return to an issue that you have made much of. In your post #17, you sought to justify your use of the term `absolute' by citing biblical scholars whose authority you contended was sufficient to prove your usage. Two of the four you cited are obscure figures, while the other two were Philip Harner and Raymond Brown. Let's take Brown as representative. You wrote:

ROB: "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.]"

I replied to this in my post #20:

JASON: "Rob, citing authority is not making an argument. You can cite authorities from now to doomsday, but you can't make a non-absolute construction absolute. Never mind that many of the people you cite are as "unknown" as you say I am (Thatcher? Lincoln?), and all of a particular theological persuasion and interpretive bent when it comes to the `I am' expressions in John. Brown, Harner, and Ball all buy into the great `I AM' nonsense (that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like `Hi, it's me,' and `I'm the one you're looking for'), and this dictates their supposedly grammatical analysis."

You replied to me in your post #30:

ROB: "Absolutely false. All three writers relate some or many of Jesus' EGW EIMI sayings in John to the `I am' sayings of God in Isaiah. However, they nuance even this association, and they do not claim that Jesus is alluding to, let alone invoking, Exodus 3:14 in *any* of those sayings. Raymond Brown barely mentions Exodus 3:14 once in his appendix on the `I am' sayings (Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:533-38), and only part of the OT background to the sayings (536). He does not even mention Exodus 3:14 in his comments on John 8:58 (360, 367-68). In Philip Harner's *The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel*, the primary OT source for Jesus' sayings is identified as the ANI HU sayings in Isaiah (6-15). Regarding Exodus 3:14, Harner argues that it `can hardly be considered a direct source for an absolute use of *ego eimi* in the Fourth Gospel,' although `we should not entirely exclude the I AM of Exodus 3:14 as part of the more general background' (17). . . . It might be a good idea to READ these scholars before accusing them of `nonsense.'"

Note that you claimed my association of Brown et al. with "the `I AM' nonsense" to be "absolutely false." As everyone knows who has read my book and followed our debate, I was referring to the idea that "I AM" is a name of God, introduced to Moses in Exod. 3:14, and extractable as an invocation of that name from sentences where the pronoun and verb otherwise serve normal grammatical functions. As I said in my post # 31:

JASON: "As we agreed at the beginning of our discussion back in August, the use of `I AM'" i.e., this capitalized form, "points to the erroneous idea that this is a name or designation of God in Exodus 3:14. Hence my conclusion that Brown and Harner `buy into the "I Am" nonsense.'"

If you look back to the quote from Harner, page 17 that you supplied in your post #30, you will see that he uses precisely this all capitalized form "I AM" that treats it as a divine name. Of this all capitalized form you had said in your post #5, "I agree that the versions using such capitalization have tipped their hand" as to their "understanding" of John 8:58 in connection with Exod. 3:14 as a divine name. So we can see that by that criterion, Harner does indeed "buy into the 'I AM' nonsense," even though you said it was "absolutely false" for me to say that he did. Nevertheless, you replied to me on the subject of Brown and friends again in your post #36, under the heading "Misconstruing the Major Treatments that You didn't Read," by saying:

ROB: "But for all your wiggling here, the fact remains that you misrepresented Brown, Harner, and Ball, because you didn't read them."

You should have stopped goading me about not reading them, Rob, because now I have gone down to the library and pulled Brown off the shelf. And of course I have found, in a consistent pattern we have seen throughout this debate, that you have misled us about what he says also. First of all, in your original citation from him, you listed the verses he cited in the category of the "absolute use": John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19. If you had actually quoted the verses as he gives them in this discussion (page 533), we all would have seen that in every case he translates "I AM" in all capitals, which you agreed back in your post #5 "tips (his) hand" as to associating the verse with "I AM" as a divine name supposedly given in Exod. 3:14. He uses the same all capitalized form, I AM, in the main body of his translation at 8:58 (page 354). In his comment on this verse (page 367), he refers to "the divine name, 'I AM'" and when we return to Appendix IV, from which you quoted, we see that there, too, he refers to "EGW EIMI employed as a divine name in the OT" (page 533). The analysis of various uses of "I am . . ." in the OT and in Jewish and pagan literature includes discussion of where the verb functions as a copula with a predicate, which Brown also regards as divine revelation, even though the pronoun and verb do not function as a name in these many cases. This leads him to discussion of the ANI HU passages, which he understands as "I am he," and so not a divine name, even though rendered in the LXX as EGW EIMI (page 536). He goes on to suggest that it was through the medium of the Greek of the LXX in Isaiah that EGW EIMI might have come to be seen as a title. He includes Exod. 3:14 in his discussion as "the all-important text for the meaning of 'Yahweh': its Hebrew meaning as 'He who causes to be' is part of the background, and its LXX rendering as 'I am the Existing One' part of the development of a shift or "tendency" in the reading of EGW EIMI away from identity in a copulative expression and towards a stress on "existence" (page 536). Thus to claim that Brown "barely mentions" the Exodus passage is at best shows a poor grasp of the significance it has in his discussion.

It quickly becomes clear, as I suggested in my earlier comment on Brown, that there are problems with his categories. Even though he says "grammatically we can distinguish three types of use," his categories 1 (absolute) and 2 (implicit predicate) are written exactly the same way: EGW EIMI. So obviously by "grammatically" he means not just in terms of lexical form but, as he explicitly says, "use" or meaning. Fine so far. Then

how do we distinguish between identical lexical forms which are `absolute,' and which have an implicit predicate, since lexically everything in both categories is `absolute'? As I said before, Brown's division does not match that of the KJV, etc. (most of the major translations), which understand nearly all of his category 1 examples as belonging to his category 2. Those translators rightly saw that the syntax of 8:28 demands that it be read with an implicit predicate, that the immediate context of 8:24 (i.e., the response of the audience in 8:25) demands the same thing, as it does in 13:19 (i.e., reference back to the subject of the quote in 13:18). They also rightly saw that to take the pronoun and verb as a name destroys the syntax of the sentences involved, as we can see if we substitute a name for EGW EIMI in these sentences:

8:24: "Unless you come to believe that Fred, you will surely die in your sins."

8:28: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that Fred."

8:58: "Before Abraham even came into existence, Fred."

13:19: "When it does happen, you may believe that Fred."

We see, then, that Brown sees I AM where the major translations do not, and that he sees it as a name of God where grammatically it cannot possibly be a name. Since it is handling EGW EIMI as a name, and imposing it as a name on sentences where it would destroy the actual grammar of the sentence, that I consider the "I AM nonsense," as I stated on more than one occasion, Brown is guilty of this, as I originally charged, even though you declared my charge "absolutely false." This fits a well-worn pattern in your debate with me, in which I point out or suggest that you are misrepresenting a source, you lash back with overheated rhetoric about my criticism being "malicious," or "unfair," or "absolutely false," and then I painstakingly demonstrate how my criticism is fully justified.

So that's enough, I think. Nine months is long enough to give birth to anything worthwhile. Your original position was that the New World translation of John 8:58 is a possible accurate rendering of the Greek, but that the traditional translation could be defended as better. If that were true then the position I take in my book on John 8:58 would be unfair, since I criticize the traditional translation even though on principle I allow for any translation that can reasonably be defended in the original Greek, sorting renderings into possible and probable, and reserving strong criticism for translations that cannot be so defended. But you have failed to marshal a single cogent argument to support that traditional translation, or to undermine my argument that the traditional translation ignores a clear idiomatic use of the verb recognized in the Greek grammars and as a result produces an ungrammatical English sentence that skews the meaning of the underlying Greek.

I see no need to compose a summary of the entire debate here at the end. Such an undertaking by either of us would be simply an exercise in trying to control the reading of what has gone before. I am content to stand on what I have written on this subject. Thank you, Rob, for the mental exercise. I will try my best to answer questions and comments from our audience, but cannot commit to a particular turn-around time on

doing so. Obviously, the text of our debate will be there to stimulate such comment for a long time to come. Okay, did we reach 500 pages?

Best wishes,
Jason B.

ROB #37 – 6/1 – #17935

ROB #37: FINAL CLARIFICATIONS AND ANSWERS

Jason:

I wrote a complete response to your last post, but I have decided not to post about half of that response due to its length. Instead, in this post I am going to offer some final comments on just a few select issues from that post, leaving aside such matters as your continuing to misunderstand or misrepresent my arguments. The issues that I will address here are those about which I think I have something fresh and instructive to say.

EIMI IN JOHN 8:58 AS ‘ABSOLUTE’

Your position earlier in the debate was that I and the many biblical scholars who have described EIMI in John 8:58 as ‘absolute’ were just plain wrong. In your opening post, regarding my citation of Robertson on this point in my book, you wrote:

<< 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. >> (pp. 8-9)

Please note: your position was that “it is SIMPLY FALSE to call eimi IN ANY SENSE a predicate absolute”; nothing could be “more OBVIOUS ON THE PAGE OF THE TEXT in front of us than that”; and Robertson, though a renowned Greek scholar, made a “FOOLISH assertion” in saying that EIMI is absolute.

After I documented that describing EIMI in John 8:58 as ‘absolute’ is pervasive in Johannine scholarship and explained what it meant, you wrote:

<< So now, thanks to your good detective work, I must admit to a mistake since, as you point out, I had said that EGW EIMI was not “in any sense” a predicate absolute.... I should have said “in any sense relevant to the issues we are debating,” since obviously we agree that it does not involve a predicate noun or adjective. So feel free to make any ground you can in your argument by celebrating my free admission that the main clause of John 8:58 does not contain a predicate noun or adjective. >> (p. 259)

As stated above, your position now is that EIMI is not ‘absolute’ in any sense relevant to the question of whether EIMI is a PPA, or more broadly to the question of how the verse should be translated. Later, though, you asserted that I didn’t even understand the meaning of the word ‘absolute,’ to which I replied by (among other things) quoting a neutral source, ancient Greek scholar Charles Kahn’s book on the Greek be-verb, whose definition agreed with my own. In response, you wrote:

You wrote:

<< It was unfair of me to say that you didn't understand the meaning of the word. What you don't understand is how calling EIMI an "absolute" by any of the definitions of that term you have cited fails to provide even the slightest support for your position. >>

However, this claim that my rather standard definition of ‘absolute’ doesn’t support my position is based on your caricature of my view as completely dissociating the main verb EIMI from the temporal dependent clause:

<< So then, Rob, what advance of your position does it make to use "absolute" in this sense, since such a use of the term does not disassociate the verb from its adverbial modification? I can't imagine how you thought this would help you. >>

I have answered this same old tired misunderstanding of my argument many times. I do not ‘disassociate’ EIMI from the dependent clause; I simply argue that the function of that clause is not to modify the verb EIMI in the way that you claim, namely, to modify it to express past action still in progress (the PPA).

You wrote:

<< Which brings us back to Robertson. I have pointed out how in your book you foisted your own assumption about what "absolute" means onto Robertson's terse statement that EIMI in John 8:58 is absolute, by claiming to provide what Robertson means by the term. Your reader would naturally assume that you derived that meaning from other things Robertson says about "absolute." >>

Maybe *you* would “naturally assume” that to be the case, but a better reader would have checked the endnote at the end of the sentence in which I defined what ‘absolute’ meant. There he or she would find that I explained that the major NT grammars (which of course would include Robertson) did not have a section specifically on absolute constructions, and that I cited in that endnote three representative secondary sources that offered a discussion of the absolute use of the verb (Appold, Barclay, and Brown).

You wrote:

<< What you go on to say about how you would now qualify what you said in your book is as illegitimate as the original statement. What Robertson means by "absolute" in

reference to John 8:58 must have something to do with why he hesitates to identify it as a PPA, since that is the context in which he makes the reference. It would be nonsensical to say a verb is not a PPA because it does not have a subject complement. The presence or absence of a subject complement has nothing to do with whether a verb is or is not a PPA. One might suggest, then, that Robertson meant what Kahn means by "absolute," since Kahn's remark has to do with existential usages of EIMI and we know that Robertson construes EIMI in John 8:58 as an existential. But if he had the same definition of "absolute" as Kahn, this would not be a reason why the verb could not be a PPA, since Kahn says that his meaning of "absolute" includes temporal adverbial modification. So we are left with the only remaining possibility, that Robertson meant "absolute" in its general sense of completely unmodified, which as I have said, is a foolish claim to make about EIMI in John 8:58 and we must regard as a mistake on Robertson's part, influenced by the traditional translation which does indeed treat the verb as "absolute" in this sense, as completely unmodified. >>

I think you dismissed too easily the possibility that by 'absolute' Robertson meant the same thing, or essentially the same thing, as Kahn. Some sort of 'temporal adverbial modification' is consistent with Robertson's point as long as it is not construed as modifying the tense from present tense to past tense. ('Modification' is quite a broad term.) It is surely an illicit procedure to argue that Robertson must have meant something foolish and obviously nonsensical in order to make sense of his statement.

The definition of 'absolute' given by Kahn is broader than excluding merely subject complements. Let me quote it again:

"By an absolute construction I mean that there is no nominal or locative predicate and no other complement such as the possessive dative, nor even an adverb of manner. An absolute construction may, however, admit adverbs of time" (Charles H. Kahn, *The Verb "Be" in Ancient Greek*, 240).

With this definition in mind, I think it will be helpful to advance the discussion by addressing further the relevance of the absolute use of EIMI in John 8:58 to the question of whether or not it is a PPA. Let's review quickly the texts you have cited using a form of EIMI as grammatical parallels to John 8:58.

"For assuredly I have long been [EIMI] your friend, even before I saw you" (Menander, *Dyscolos* 615-16).

"For I was (EIMI) Jobab before the Lord named me Job" (Testament of Job 2:1).

"Lord, I have not been (EIMI) fit before yesterday or before the third day [i.e., in the past]" (Ex. 4:10, Jason's translation).

"But if it is known of the bull that it has been (ESTI) a gorer before yesterday and before the third day [i.e., in the past]..." (Ex. 21:36, Jason's translation).

“Before the mountains were brought into existence,
And the earth and the world were formed,
Even from everlasting to everlasting,
You are (SU EI)” (Ps. 89:2 LXX).

“I have been (EIMI) with you so long a time” (John 14:9).

“...you have been (EIMI) with me from the beginning” (John 15:27).

“The one saying he is in the light and yet hating his brother has been (ESTIN) in the darkness up to now” (1 John 2:9).

There is only one instance of EIMI or one of its forms being used in an absolute construction in the above texts: Psalm 89:2 LXX. I have already explained why EI is best translated here using the present tense “are.” Despite our disagreement as to whether EI is a PPA (you say yes, I say no), we agree that in this particular text the present tense EI is being used to express everlasting existence. Furthermore, to my knowledge no one (besides you) has ever translated SU EI in this verse as “you have been” (nor has the underlying Hebrew ever been translated that way; all of the English versions I checked, including the NWT, have “you are God”). So Psalm 89:2 LXX is not really any help in establishing your view of John 8:58; the more you press Psalm 89:2 LXX as a parallel, the better I like it.

Setting Psalm 89:2 LXX aside, then, not one of the other texts you have cited as supposed grammatical parallels to John 8:58 has a form of EIMI used in an absolute construction. These other texts all have subject complements (“friend,” Menander; “Jobab,” Testament of Job; “gorer,” Ex. 21:36) or adjectival complements (adjective, “fit,” Ex. 4:10; prepositional phrase, “with you/me,” John 14:9; 15:27; “in the darkness,” 1 John 2:9). The prepositional phrases fall into the category of “locative predicates” mentioned by Kahn. Now, why is it significant that none of these texts have EIMI used in an absolute construction? I think my answer, given in my book 16 years ago, is still on target:

“A study of the relevant passages [using the PPA in the usual, narrow sense] shows that none of them occur with predicate absolutes. Nor, apparently, could a predicate absolute be a PPA, since a predicate absolute does not express an action or ongoing event, nor even an ongoing specific condition, but rather simply existence” (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John, 107).

Note, not “SIMPLE existence,” but “SIMPLY existence”: that the existence is not ‘simple’ is evident from the adverbial clause, which makes Jesus’ present existence antecedent to and contrast with the coming into existence of Abraham. But the point is that the verb EIMI does not express a specific action, ongoing event, or condition. The sentence does not say that Jesus has been doing this or that, or that he has been located here or there, or that he has been in some condition or other, extending from the past into

the present. The ‘absolute’ use of EIMI is a distinct verbal phenomenon and cannot be treated like any other present-tense verb.

Now, when one puts together the fact that the absolute use of EIMI in a PPA is both unprecedented and linguistically questionable with the fact that the dependent clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is not the usual sort of PPA temporal marker expressing extension from the past into the present, but instead marking a point in the past to which the state expressed by the absolute EIMI is denotatively antecedent, we have a very strong case against construing EIMI as a PPA, at least as usually understood.

“I HAVE BEEN” VERSUS “I AM”: AN UNNOTICED SIMILARITY

We have had so much on the table to discuss over the past ten months that I have yet to bring up a point that so far has not been noticed. Several times in this debate you argued that EIMI in John 8:58 should be construed ‘existentially’ and for that reason the translation “am” is not grammatically proper English. Modern English, you have insisted, requires us to say “I exist” rather than “I am” to express the existence of the subject. Toward the end of the debate, you suggested that I might construe EIMI copulatively but then I would have to add “he,” thereby abandoning the conventional translation. If I construe it existentially, though, you have argued that I still lose the debate because “am” is an improper rendering of EIMI used existentially; I should have to adopt “I exist” instead of “I am,” once again abandoning the conventional translation.

I have rejected the above dilemma and argued that “I am” is suitable for expressing the ambiguity of the original, in which both the copulative (“I am [he]”) and the existential (“I exist”) are possible connotations. However, here I wish to make a supplementary observation of some significance. The fact is that ‘have been’ is just a different tense form of ‘am.’ To be specific, it is the present perfect tense of ‘am,’ formed from the auxiliary verb ‘have’ and ‘been,’ the past participle form of ‘am’ (or of ‘be,’ the lexical form). If ‘am’ cannot be used to express existence, then neither can ‘have been.’ (The same applies to the verb ‘was,’ which is the simple past tense form of ‘am.’) And this leads me to the observation that the NWT rendering, “I have been,” would be just as faulty English in this respect as “I am.” In fact, your proposed translation, “I have been (since) before Abraham came to be” (Truth in Translation, 106; “...before Abraham was born,” our debate, pp. 216, 418), would also have to be judged defective in this respect.

Fortunately for both of our translations, the be-verb, including the forms “am” and “have been,” can be used to express existence in modern English. This usage is still treated as legitimate, non-archaic English in contemporary English references:

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th edition (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), under ‘be,’ lists the following as its first definition: “To exist in actuality; have life or reality: I think, therefore I am” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=be>).

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary under ‘be’: “*2 a :* to have an objective existence : have reality or actuality : LIVE <I think, therefore I am >” (<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=be&x=19&y=15>).

Both of these works under ‘be’ have another usage that they do identify as archaic, but not this usage.

Now, I suppose you could quibble with these two dictionaries. You might complain that both of them use the same example and that the example is in some respects archaic (which is what you said when I used the same example). But really, I think that’s a losing proposition. If these two contemporary English dictionaries list this usage as a legitimate modern usage (and again, in the same entry they mark out other usages, but not this one, as archaic), then I think we’ll have to give the NASB and NRSV and other modern English versions of the Bible a passing grade on this point of grammar.

On a related point, your claim that the conventional translation is poor English because it leaves “am” hanging without a complement actually applies equally to your proposed translation. You have argued that reversing the clauses, that is, having the dependent clause follow the main clause (“I have been” followed by “since before Abraham was born”), is essential to “comprehensible, good quality English” (Truth in Translation, 107, and several times in this debate). You argue that translators follow this rule in other verses but because of theological bias “suddenly forget how to translate” (cf. Truth in Translation, 109). However, even assuming for the sake of argument that the function of the dependent clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI is exactly what you have claimed all along, namely, as the temporal adverbial marker of EIMI as a PPA, reversing the clauses does nothing to keep “have been” from ‘hanging’ grammatically.

You may remember that toward the very beginning of the debate I pointed out that the temporal words and phrases that mark the PPA are in the NRSV (for example) often placed before the main verb rather than after. You had an answer to that point, which I will address shortly. But first, I think it will be helpful to expand on the point I had made. Below I list a number of verses that we agree use the PPA (and a few that I have disputed, just for good measure, which for sake of argument I will here treat as PPAs). In each case, we can translate the verse with the temporal marker of the PPA before or after the main verb and the sentence will be acceptable English in either case. In what follows, the first sentence places the temporal marker before the PPA verb; the second sentence places it after the PPA verb. While in some instances one word order may be more stylistically pleasing than another, in all of these examples the sentences are grammatically acceptable.

Jeremiah 1:5 LXX

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”

“I knew you before I formed you in the womb.”

Luke 13:7:

“Look, for three years I have been coming searching for fruit.”

“Look, I have been coming searching for fruit for three years.”

Luke 15:29:

“Look, all these years I have been serving you.”

“Look, I have been serving you all these years.”

John 5:6:

“Jesus...knowing that (for) a long time already he had been that way”

“Jesus...knowing that he had been that way (for) a long time already....”

Acts 15:21:

“For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him.”

“For Moses has had from ancient generations in every city those who preach him.”

2 Corinthians 12:19:

“All this time, have you been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you?”

“Have you been thinking all this time that we are defending ourselves to you?”

2 Timothy 3:15:

“...and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings.”

“...and that you have known the sacred writings from childhood.”

2 Peter 3:4:

“For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have remained the same from the beginning of creation.”

“For all things have remained the same from the beginning of creation, ever since the fathers fell asleep.”

1 John 3:8:

“...from the beginning the devil has been sinning.”

“...the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”

When I gave a few examples like these from the NRSV early in our debate, you admitted that your criticism of the conventional word order for John 8:58 as worded in your book was flawed and explained that the problem applied particularly to sentences using 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 it [sic] this general flexibility of placement of a subordinated predicate complement is not found in connection with the English be-verb. >> (p. 38)

However, if we ‘compare apples with apples,’ that is, if we look at putative PPA texts using the Greek be-verb and translated using a form of the English be-verb, we find the same “flexibility of placement” of the temporal marker of the PPA:

Exodus 4:10:

“Lord, in the past I have not been fit.”

“Lord, I have not been fit in the past.”

Exodus 21:36:

“But if it is known that the bull has been a gorer in the past....”

“But if it is known that in the past the bull has been a gorer....”

John 14:9:

“(For) so long a time I have been with you.”

“I have been with you (for) so long a time.”

John 15:27:

“And you testify, because from the beginning you have been with me.”

“And you testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

1 John 2:9:

“The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother up to now has been in the darkness.”

“The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother has been in the darkness up to now.”

Menander, *Dyscolos* 615-16:

“For assuredly for a long time, even before I saw you, I have been your friend.”

“For assuredly for a long time I have been your friend, even before I saw you.”

“For assuredly I have been your friend for a long time, even before I saw you.”

Testament of Job 2:1:

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

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

Notice that this flexibility applies even in Testament of Job 2:1, where the temporal marker “before the Lord named me Job” is exactly the same kind of grammatical unit (an aorist infinitive dependent clause of antecedent time) as found in John 8:58.

Where English truly does exhibit a lack of flexibility in word order in relation to the be-verb is when the be-verb is used as a linking verb or copula. Thus, using the above examples, the following sentences would obviously be ungrammatical:

Exodus 4:10:

“Lord, in the past FIT I have not been.”

Exodus 21:36:

“But if it is known that in the past the bull A GORER has been ...”

John 14:9:

“(For) so long a time WITH YOU I have been.”

John 15:27:

“And you testify, because from the beginning WITH ME you have been.”

1 John 2:9:

“The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother up to now IN THE DARKNESS has been.”

Menander, *Dyscolos* 615-16:

“For assuredly for a long time, even before I saw you, YOUR FRIEND I have been.”

Testament of Job 2:1:

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

All of these sentences are ungrammatical because the subject or adjectival complement improperly precedes rather than follows the verb. The position of the temporal adverbial is *not*, however, ungrammatical. Testament of Job 2:1, which you introduced into the discussion, nicely illustrates the point: placing “before the Lord named me Jobab” before the verb “was” is not ungrammatical, but placing “Jobab” before “was” clearly is ungrammatical. Thus, your correspondent’s description (which you endorsed) of the conventional translation of John 8:58 as “Yoda English” is incorrect (p. 53). The above sentences do sound like “Yoda English” because they place the subject or adjectival complement prior to the copulative be-verb. The placement of the adverbial words or phrases prior to the copulative be-verb, on the other hand, is not ungrammatical. Thus, in the sentence, “Before Abraham came into being, I am,” there is nothing grammatically wrong with placing the dependent clause prior to the main verb. Your mistake is in thinking that the dependent clause has the same sort of grammatical function as “Jobab” in Testament of Job 2:1, whereas of course the grammatical function of the dependent clause “before Abraham came into being” is instead identical to the grammatical function of the dependent clause “before the Lord named me Jobab.”

The only way to salvage your criticism of the word order of John 8:58 is to argue that “am” cannot be used existentially and must be followed by some sort of complement. This is precisely the claim that you made early in our debate:

<< 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. >> (p. 38)

Your statements here are mistaken in a couple of respects. Let me focus first on the use of the English be-verb as a copula. As the above examples illustrate, adverbials, and particularly adverbials of time such as “from the beginning” or “before the Lord named me Jobab” or “before Abraham came into being,” do not function as such complements of the English copulative be-verb. That function is performed by nouns, adjectives, locative prepositional phrases, and the like. When the be-verb is used copulatively, some such complement must be expressed, either explicitly in the sentence itself or implicitly in the immediately preceding context (“Is anyone here a doctor?” “I am.”). The fact is that such a complement is lacking both in the NWT rendering of John 8:58 and in the rendering you have proposed:

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

“I have been (since) before Abraham was born.”

Moving “I have been” to the front of the sentence does not change the fact that “(since) before Abraham was born” does not function as the obligatory complement required if “have been” is understood to function as a copula or linking verb. That is, “before Abraham was born” is not linked or copulated to the subject by the verb “have been.” You can see this from the example of Testament of Job 2:1, as discussed above. Here are additional examples of English sentences that illustrate the point:

“I am at home today.” (okay)

“Today I am at home.” (okay)

“I am today.” (problematic)

“Today I am.” (problematic)

“Jason has been a member of this group for almost a year.” (okay)

“For almost a year Jason has been a member of this group.” (okay)

“Jason has been for almost a year.” (problematic)

“For almost a year Jason has been.” (problematic)

“I have been in California since the beginning of 2001.” (okay)

“Since the beginning of 2001, I have been in California.” (okay)

“I have been since the beginning of 2001.” (problematic)

“Since the beginning of 2001, I have been.” (problematic)

In each group of sentences, the first two sentences are both grammatically “okay” regardless of where the adverbial is placed in the sentence. The third and fourth sentences in each group are “problematic” because the sentences are formally incomplete: they are missing the obligatory complement that normally should follow the linking verb. This is just as true of the sentences in which the be-verb precedes the adverbial as it is of the sentences that end with the be-verb. Informally, of course, we use such sentences in ordinary speech when the complement is understood from what has immediately preceded. Thus, in answer to the question, “Are you working at home?” one may reply, “I am today” or “Today I am.” It is not the position of the adverbial (in this case, “today”) that is problematic; what is problematic is the fact that a linking verb has nothing to link

to the subject (again, unless it is implied in the immediately preceding context, in which case the sentence is formally incomplete but informally acceptable). And here's the point: This grammatical condition of being formally incomplete when such a complement is missing applies equally to the present perfect "have been" as it does to the present "am," when either is used copulatively.

Now, what about the existential use of the English be-verb? You asserted that even when it is used existentially, the English be-verb requires an explicit or implicit complement. This is an odd assertion, given your other claim that the English be-verb in modern English cannot be used existentially. In any case, I see no evidence to support your assertion. When either "have been" or "am" is used existentially, there is nothing formally incomplete or ungrammatical about the verb occurring in a sentence without such an obligatory complement following it. The be-verb can come at the very end of the sentence when it is not functioning as a linking verb or copula. There is nothing grammatically wrong with such a sentence. I have documented this point from the two dictionaries quoted earlier, which give an example sentence fitting this description. Thus, both the NWT rendering ("...I have been") and the conventional rendering ("...I am") are perfectly correct from the standpoint of formal grammar, given that the function of the verb is existential rather than copulative.

In this section, then, I have shown that the existential use of "am" or "have been" in modern English is perfectly legitimate. If you say "am" cannot be used that way, then neither can "have been" (as it is so used in the NWT and your own proposed translation), but in fact either can be so used according to contemporary standard dictionaries. I have also shown that the placement of the adverbial clause prior to the main verb is perfectly acceptable grammar in modern English, whether the verb is a form of the English be-verb or not. Furthermore, I have shown that the adverbial does not function as an obligatory complement to the English be-verb, whether used copulatively or existentially. When the be-verb is used copulatively, some obligatory complement must be explicit or implied, and when it is explicit it must follow the verb. When the be-verb is used existentially, it does not require a complement, and any adverbial used with it may appear before or after the verb. Thus, your criticisms of the conventional English translation with regards to word order and the lack of any complement following "am" appear to be without merit.

ON HARNER AND BROWN

You wrote:

<< Now let's return to an issue that you have made much of. In your post #17, you sought to justify your use of the term 'absolute' by citing biblical scholars whose authority you contended was sufficient to prove your usage. >>

Things must be going badly for you if you find it either necessary or useful to repeat misrepresentations that have already been thoroughly refuted. I cited these biblical scholars only to refute your assertion that nothing could be more obvious on the page

than that EIMI is not absolute, so that Robertson's saying so was downright foolish. My citations of scholars were offered, not "to prove [my] usage," but to prove your dogmatic assertion to be the overstatement of the debate.

You continued:

<< Two of the four you cited are obscure figures, while the other two were Philip Harner and Raymond Brown. >>

I cited (in addition to Robertson) Thatcher, Lincoln, Ball, Harner, and Brown. Of these, only Thatcher may be fairly described as obscure. Lincoln is a significant NT scholar, not an obscure one, despite your saying so. Ball is not a major NT scholar, but his published dissertation on the Johannine 'I am' sayings is already widely cited in Johannine scholarship and so in this context cannot be characterized as obscure.

You had written:

<< Brown, Harner, and Ball all buy into the great 'I AM' nonsense (that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like 'Hi, it's me,' and 'I'm the one you're looking for'), and this dictates their supposedly grammatical analysis." >>

I replied in my post #30:

*****BEGIN QUOTE FROM ROB*****

"Absolutely false. All three writers relate some or many of Jesus' EGW EIMI sayings in John to the 'I am' sayings of God in Isaiah. However, they nuance even this association, and they do not claim that Jesus is alluding to, let alone invoking, Exodus 3:14 in *any* of those sayings. Raymond Brown barely mentions Exodus 3:14 once in his appendix on the 'I am' sayings (Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:533-38), and only part of the OT background to the sayings (536). He does not even mention Exodus 3:14 in his comments on John 8:58 (360, 367-68). In Philip Harner's *The 'I Am' of the Fourth Gospel*, the primary OT source for Jesus' sayings is identified as the ANI HU sayings in Isaiah (6-15). Regarding Exodus 3:14, Harner argues that it 'can hardly be considered a direct source for an absolute use of *_ego eimi_* in the Fourth Gospel,' although 'we should not entirely exclude the I AM of Exodus 3:14 as part of the more general background' (17). Later, in his chapter discussing specific 'I am' sayings in John, Harner compares these texts to the sayings of God in Isaiah but does not even mention Exodus 3:14 (37-48). In his conclusion he comments that in the EGW EIMI sayings in John "we have not found any specific aspects of the phrase that would be especially reminiscent of Exodus 3:14" (60). In David Mark Ball's 300-page book *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, according to the index, he refers to Exodus 3:14 only once, in a brief comment about Harner's view (34).

It might be a good idea to READ these scholars before accusing them of 'nonsense'" (p. 368).

*****END QUOTE FROM ROB*****

You attempt to defend your characterization of Harner and Brown (but not of Ball, about whom you say nothing). Regarding Harner, you write:

<< If you look back to the quote from Harner, page 17 that you supplied in your post #30, you will see that he uses precisely this all capitalized form "I AM" that treats it as a divine name. Of this all capitalized form you had said in your post #5, "I agree that the versions using such capitalization have tipped their hand" as to their "understanding" of John 8:58 in connection with Exod. 3:14 as a divine name. So we can see that by that criterion, Harner does indeed "buy into the 'I AM' nonsense," even though you said it was "absolutely false" for me to say that he did. >>

Yes, let's look back at the quote from Harner that I supplied in my post #30. I have already quoted it in context above. Here is the specific sentence to which you refer:

“Regarding Exodus 3:14, Harner argues that it ‘can hardly be considered a direct source for an absolute use of _ego eimi_ in the Fourth Gospel,’ although ‘we should not entirely exclude the I AM of Exodus 3:14 as part of the more general background’ (17).”

As anyone can see, when Harner capitalizes “I AM” in the quote above, he is referring directly and solely to Exodus 3:14, not quoting John 8:58. In fact, he is *denying* that Exodus 3:14 is “a direct source” for the wording of John 8:58 while allowing that it may be “part of the more general background.”

Of course, you made no attempt to refute my observation that when Harner discusses the specific EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John, he compares them frequently to sayings of God in Isaiah but “does not even mentions Exodus 3:14 (37-48).”

So much for Harner, then. Your characterization of his position was just as wrong as I said it was.

You try a little harder with Brown. Again, you argue that Brown's use of “I AM” in all quotes proves that he is associating Jesus' words in John 8:58 with Exodus 3:14:

<< You should have stopped goading me about not reading them, Rob, because now I have gone down to the library and pulled Brown off the shelf. And of course I have found, in a consistent pattern we have seen throughout this debate, that you have misled us about what he says also. First of all, in your original citation from him, you listed the verses he cited in the category of the "absolute use": John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19. If you had actually quoted the verses as he gives them in this discussion (page 533), we all would have seen that in every case he translates "I AM" in all capitals, which you agreed back in your post #5 "tips (his) hand" as to associating the verse with "I AM" as a divine name supposedly given in Exod. 3:14. He uses the same all capitalized form, I AM, in the main body of his translation at 8:58 (page 354). >>

First of all, Brown's capitalizing "I AM" in his quotations of these texts does not prove that he was associating John 8:58 with Exodus 3:14. In fact, that is not what he was doing. We know this because we have his whole commentary to consult, and we can see that he consistently associates these texts with the Isaianic sayings of God, not with Exodus 3:14. I will reiterate the evidence on this point shortly. As to what I said in post #5, here is what I actually wrote:

"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."

In saying that the use of all capitals in these few English versions "tipped their hand" in that it "made their understanding of the text more explicit," I said nothing about Exodus 3:14 per se. Some or all of those translators may indeed have had Exodus 3:14 in mind; I believe that one or two of them make that explicit with a cross-reference or note. But this doesn't mean that everyone who uses all capitals when quoting or translating John 8:58 is connecting it with Exodus 3:14. Specifically, if you read Brown more carefully, you'll see that he is not making that connection.

You wrote:

<< In his comment on this verse (page 367), he refers to "the divine name, 'I AM'" and when we return to Appendix IV, from which you quoted, we see that there, too, he refers to "EGW EIMI employed as a divine name in the OT" (page 533). >>

There is a reason for the vagueness of your report as to what Brown actually said: "he refers to 'the divine name'" is not the same thing as Brown equating or associating John 8:58 specifically with Exodus 3:14. I will demonstrate this fact below.

You wrote:

<< The analysis of various uses of "I am . . ." in the OT and in Jewish and pagan literature includes discussion of where the verb functions as a copula with a predicate, which Brown also regards as divine revelation, even though the pronoun and verb do not function as a name in these many cases. This leads him to discussion of the ANI HU passages, which he understands as "I am he," and so not a divine name, even though rendered in the LXX as EGW EIMI (page 536). He goes on to suggest that it was through the medium of the Greek of the LXX in Isaiah that EGW EIMI might have come to be seen as a title. He includes Exod. 3:14 in his discussion as "the all-important text for the meaning of 'Yahweh': its Hebrew meaning as 'He who causes to be' is part of the background, and its LXX rendering as 'I am the Existing One' part of the development of a shift or "tendency" in the reading of EGW EIMI away from identity in a copulative expression and towards a stress on "existence" (page 536). Thus to claim that Brown

"barely mentions" the Exodus passage is at best shows a poor grasp of the significance it has in his discussion. >>

Again, you have danced around the text of Brown to try to salvage your misreading of his commentary, but it won't work. I never denied that Brown saw Exodus 3:14 as figuring somehow in the history of the theological use of EGW EIMI in biblical literature. I said that Exodus 3:14 is barely mentioned (which is true) and that it recedes into the deeper background, with the Isaiah sayings of God coming forward as the primary Old Testament antecedents to the Johannine EGW EIMI sayings.

Let me give those who don't have access to Brown's commentary a better review of the relevant material in his appendix. Under the heading, "The Background of Johannine Usage" (of EGW EIMI), he dismisses in a paragraph the search for that background in paganism (535). He then says, "The OT offers excellent examples of the use of 'I am,' including the only good examples of the absolute use" (535). He reviews Zimmerman's treatment of the "I am Yahweh" or "I am God" statement in the OT, "for the absolute use of 'I am' is a variant of this statement" (535). Next, he writes:

"A use that is more closely associated with revelation is where God promises, 'You shall know that I am Yahweh.... This OT use offers interesting parallels for class (1) of the Johannine "I AM" statements. There Jesus says that men will come to know or believe that "I AM." In John viii 24 this is related to God's punishing judgment; in viii 28 it is related to the great salvific action of death, resurrection, and ascension" (536).

Note that the "I AM" sayings in John that Brown expresses using all capitals, specifically 8:24 and 8:28, are explicitly compared here, not to Exodus 3:14, but to other OT sayings of God of the type "you shall know that I am Yahweh."

Next comes the only paragraph in the appendix to mention Exodus 3:14. Brown writes:

"The most important use of the OT formula 'I am Yahweh' stresses the unicity of God: I am Yahweh and there is no other. This use occurs six times in Deutero-Isaiah, as well as in Hos xiii 4 and Joel ii 27. The Hebrew *ʾanî YHWH* in Isa xlv 18 is translated in LXX simply as *egô eimi*. In this use which stresses unicity a Hebrew alternative for *ʾanî YHWH* is *ʾanî hû* ('I [am] He'), and the latter expression is always translated in LXX as *egô eimi*. Now, as the formula stands in the Hebrew text of Isaiah, it is clearly meant to stress that Yahweh is the only God. We pointed out in discussing the banal use of *egô eimi* that it normally means 'I am he' or 'I am the one,' and so it is quite appropriate as a translation for *ʾanî hû*. Nevertheless, since the predicate 'He' is not expressed in the Greek, there was a tendency in LXX for the formula to stress not only the unicity of God but also His existence. We see this same tendency at work in LXX translation of Ex iii 14, the all-important text for the meaning of 'Yahweh.': If we understand 'Yahweh' as derived from a causative form (see F. M. Cross...), the Hebrew reads, 'I am who cause to be,' or perhaps more originally in the third person, 'I am "He who causes to be."' But LXX reads, 'I am the Existing One,' using a participle of the verb 'to be,' and thus stressing divine existence" (536).

That is the only reference to Exodus 3:14 in Brown's appendix. He devotes two sentences to Exodus 3:14, out of two and a half pages on the background of the Johannine sayings, and then only to mention that it illustrates the same tendency in the LXX as the Isaiah EGW EIMI sayings to use those words to express existence as well as the Lord's unique deity. Thus, my comment that Brown "barely mentions" Exodus 3:14 in the appendix is quite justified, and what he does say about it cannot even begin to justify your claim that Brown (as well as Harner and Ball) was guilty of thinking "that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like 'Hi, it's me,' and 'I'm the one you're looking for'" (as you had claimed).

Brown goes on to write, "There is even evidence that the use of *_egô eimi_* in LXX of Deutero-Isaiah came to be understood not only as a statement of divine unicity and existence, but also as a divine name. The Hebrew of Isa xliii 25 reads, 'I, I am He who blots out transgressions.' LXX translates the first part of this statement by using *_egô eimi_* twice. This can mean, 'I am He, I am He who blots out transgressions'; but it can also be interpreted, 'I am "I AM" who blots out transgressions,' a translation which makes *_egô eimi_* a name. We have the same phenomenon in LXX of Isa li 12, 'I am "I AM" who comforts you'" (536).

As you can see, Brown puts "I AM" in all capitals when he thinks it is being used as a 'name,' not necessarily with any reference to Exodus 3:14. He cites texts in Isaiah to illustrate this phenomenon, not Exodus 3:14. After citing additional evidence of this use of "I AM" as a 'name' (Isa. 52:6; he also mentions rabbinical evidence cited by Dodd and Daube), Brown writes:

"Against this background the absolute Johannine use of *_egô eimi_* becomes quite intelligible. Jesus is presented as speaking in the same manner in which Yahweh speaks in Deutero-Isaiah" (537).

Brown then illustrates his point comparing John 8:28 to Isaiah 43:10 and by noting the implications of deity in John 8:58-59 and 18:5-8 (537).

Clearly, your original claim that Brown was guilty of thinking "that Jesus is invoking Exodus 3:14 even when he says things like 'Hi, it's me,' and 'I'm the one you're looking for'" simply cannot be sustained. You claimed: "And of course I have found, in a consistent pattern we have seen throughout this debate, that you have misled us about what he [Brown] says also." I suppose you get points for bravado, but your defense of this accusation fails abysmally. What an anticlimactic note on which to end your last post to this debate!

TRUTH IN TRANSLATION AND THE LITERATURE ON JOHN 8:58

Your handling of Brown and Harner in the later part of this debate is consistent with the one-sided, partisan scholarship of your chapter on John 8:58 in your book Truth in Translation_. It appears from the eight endnotes of that chapter (p. 112) that you are

entirely dependent on one secondary source regarding John 8:58. That secondary source is Greg Stafford's book *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 2d ed. (Huntington Beach, Calif.: Elihu Books, 2000). You cite Stafford in notes 3, 5, and 6 (referring to Stafford, 256-57, 268, 282). In note 5 you also refer to Stafford's citation of Edwin Freed. Note 4 is a content note referring to a general comment about translation that you quoted from Bratcher (see pp. 106-107). Note 7 is a comment about the NASB. The other three notes are all references to K. L. McKay's article on John 8:58 and his work on Greek verbal syntax (notes 1, 2, 8), and the same two works by McKay also figures prominently in Stafford's treatment of John 8:58 (Stafford, 266-70, 272). In fact, the words that you quote from McKay in note 8 are also quoted by Stafford on one of the pages that you cited (Stafford, 268).

No other secondary sources appear in your chapter on John 8:58 other than a citation from Smyth's *Greek Grammar* as a general reference work documenting the PPA usage (p. 106). Harner's book *The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel* is cited in your bibliography (p. 184) but not in the chapter on John 8:58. It is possible that you were indebted to Harner for your acknowledgment that God's EGW EIMI sayings in the LXX of Isaiah are in the background of Jesus' EGW EIMI sayings in John (111), although you don't refer to Harner there or anywhere in the chapter. If you did actually consult Harner when writing your book, it is peculiar that in our debate you have insisted on misrepresenting Harner with regard to the relation of John 8:58 to Exodus 3:14.

Thus, the secondary literature cited in your chapter on John 8:58 that actually deals directly with that verse consists of a book by a Jehovah's Witness (Stafford) and works by two scholars (Freed and McKay) cited by that Jehovah's Witness. The works by Freed and McKay have as their purpose to critique the conventional understanding of Jesus' EGW EIMI sayings in John, which is of course why Stafford quotes them so much.

If your intent had been to give your readers an unbiased introduction to the translation issues pertaining to John 8:58, one would have expected, at least, that you would have cited works on both sides of the issue. Stafford himself would have led you to numerous such works, since in his treatment of the EGW EIMI sayings he makes an effort to interact critically with works reflecting a traditional view of those texts. But you didn't even do that in your chapter on John 8:58.

ROB #38 – 6/1 – #17936

ROB #38: A REVIEW OF THE DEBATE

Jason,

In this post, I offer a review of our debate, despite your judgment that doing so is unnecessary and “would be simply an exercise in trying to control the reading of what has gone before.” Not only are closing statements conventional elements of a debate, but in a debate that has gone on for ten months and nearly 500 pages some sort of summation is virtually a necessity. I make no apology for the fact that this review will reflect my own viewpoint, though I have endeavored to represent your arguments fairly.

A. THE POSITIONS TAKEN

1. Jason BeDuhn’s Position

Your position, articulated earlier in your book *Truth in Translation* and elaborated in your posts in this debate, is that the conventional English translation of John 8:58 is definitely, flat-out wrong and indeed evidence of theological bias on the part of the translators. You based this assessment primarily on two factors.

(1) You allege that the conventional translation fails to represent the Greek text adequately in its use of the present-tense verb EIMI as a ‘present of past action in progress’ (PPA). Such a usage of the present tense should, you argued, be rendered into English using a form of the past tense, such as “I have been,” rather than the conventional rendering “I am.”

(2) You allege that the conventional translation is grammatically poor English in three respects: the tenses of the two verbs are not properly coordinated (since, you argue, it is ungrammatical to say “Before such-and-such *happened*, I *am*”), the word “am” in modern English is not used to express existence, and the clauses are in the wrong order (that is, you argue that the dependent clause should follow the main verb).

You argued that the above two factors, taken together, constitute evidence of theological bias because the same translators do not make these errors in other places.

(3) You also made note of the use of all capitals in a few translations (i.e., “I AM”), reflecting the view that Jesus’ words echoed the words of God in Exodus 3:14, as further evidence or confirmation of such theological bias.

2. Rob Bowman’s Position

My position, articulated earlier in my book *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* and elaborated in my posts in this debate, is that the conventional English translation of John 8:58 is at least an acceptable, legitimate translation and is not the result of theological bias. I acknowledged that renderings in such versions as the Living Bible ("I was in existence before Abraham was ever born!"), which do not take a formal-equivalency approach to translation, may be legitimate because they make readability a higher priority than precisely or fully expressing the original meaning. However, I argued that in a formal-equivalency translation the conventional rendering "I am" (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, etc.) is superior to that found, for example, in the New World Translation (NWT, "I have been"). I based this assessment on a cumulative argument consisting of five major considerations: the conventional translation

- (1) is the most literal ("am" is the customary rendering of the present-tense EIMI),
- (2) more faithfully expresses the pointed contrast in Jesus' statement between Abraham's coming into being (GENESQAI) and Jesus' own unbounded existence (EIMI),
- (3) retains the "I am" wording found in other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John,
- (4) accommodates the ambiguity of the original as to whether EGW EIMI means "I am [existing]" or "I am [he]," and
- (5) enables the reader to notice the association or allusion in this and other Johannine EGW EIMI sayings to the "I am" sayings of God in Isaiah.

The view that you espouse is of relatively recent vintage (roughly a century old). It is still distinctly in the minority in biblical scholarship. Moreover, it is the more dogmatic claim: you claim that the conventional translation is definitely wrong and clearly biased, so that even so renowned a Greek scholar as A. T. Robertson is "foolish" for supporting that translation, whereas I claim only that the conventional translation is better than the rendering you favor. For these reasons, I assigned the burden of proof to you.

I also addressed the three criticisms you made of the conventional translation:

- (1) In response to your argument concerning EIMI as a PPA, I argued that this is far from certain, that if it is a PPA it is an unusual sort, and that a PPA need not always be translated using a form of the past tense.
- (2) In response to your argument that the conventional translation is ungrammatical English, I pointed to other examples of such renderings of biblical texts, showed that the translation you favor shares some of the same 'defects,' and presented arguments backed up from English dictionaries and other reference works to show that your criteria for grammatical propriety were unfounded.

(3) In response to your criticism of those translations that have “I AM” or similar capitalization, I noted that this is not the case with most English versions (including the KJV), so these orthographic variations cannot count as evidence of theological bias in the conventional rendering of John 8:58.

Since a case can be made for the superiority of the conventional rendering and your objections to it are answerable, I conclude that your position falls short of meeting its burden of proof.

B. THE PRIMARY ISSUES

Our debate focused on three issues pertaining to the translation of John 8:58: the grammar of the Greek sentence; the order of clauses in the English translation; and whether EIMI should be translated “am” or “have been.”

1. The grammar of the Greek sentence PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI EGW EIMI

a. Is EIMI a PPA? The function of the PRIN clause

Various aspects of the grammar of John 8:58 dominated our debate. You argued that EIMI in this sentence is a straightforward and unambiguous example of the PPA, meaning that EIMI is qualified by the dependent clause so as to denote existence from some time before Abraham’s coming into being forward to the time of Jesus’ speaking. In support you argued that the dependent clause functioned in the same way as other noncontroversial examples of the past-time temporal markers of the PPA.

I argued that EIMI in this sentence, if it is a PPA at all, is a highly unusual one. In my view the dependent clause, an infinitive of antecedent time (PRIN + aorist infinitive), clearly qualifies the main verb (EIMI) to denote existence antecedent to the event specified in the dependent clause (Abraham’s birth), rather than denoting existence since some time prior to that event and continuing to the time of speaking. This understanding of the infinitive of antecedent time was documented from recent Greek grammars (Young, Wallace) and confirmed by an exhaustive analysis of the 112 occurrences of the construction in biblical Greek. Because Jesus is speaking centuries after Abraham, though, the statement connotes existence both before and after Abraham. Grammatically, this usage is either a highly unusual type of PPA (broadly defined) or something akin to a universal (non-proverbial) gnomic present (as defined by Wallace), expressing a state that is always or perpetually so.

b. Old Testament grammatical parallels

The only texts in biblical Greek that are grammatically parallel in some respects (a present tense main verb qualified by an aorist infinitive dependent clause beginning with PRIN or PRO) are three verses in the Septuagint (LXX), all three of which you argued are also examples of the PPA. I argued that one of these certainly cannot be a PPA (Prov.

8:23-25, where GENNAi cannot denote begetting continuing from the past to the present), one is debatable (Jer. 1:5), and one clearly denotes unbounded existence and not merely existence from the past to the present (Ps. 89:2 LXX). All three of these texts speak of God, specifically of his wisdom (Prov. 8), his knowledge (Jer. 1:5), and his existence (Ps. 89:2 LXX). Semantically Psalm 89:2 LXX is closest to John 8:58 (it also has the contrast between becoming, GENHQHNAI, and being, EI) and so supports understanding EIMI in John 8:58 as connoting boundless existence.

c. EIMI as ‘absolute’

Another grammatical feature that Psalm 89:2 LXX has in common with John 8:58 is that the present-tense be-verb is ‘absolute,’ meaning that there is no subject or adjectival complement expressed (and none evident or clearly implied in the context). In both texts an adverbial clause precedes the main clause, but the main clause includes no ‘predicate’ to complement the verb (i.e., no subject complement, no locative prepositional phrase, or the like). We disagreed on the meaning of the term ‘absolute.’ You argued that if EIMI in John 8:58 were absolute this would mean that the main clause EGW EIMI was standing alone as a complete sentence, which would leave the dependent clause PRIN ABRAAM GENESQAI hanging. I used the term in the same way as the many biblical scholars who have described EIMI as absolute, as explained above: EIMI has no subject complement or other such expression completing or complementing the verb. This is evidently what Robertson meant when he said that EIMI in John 8:58 is absolute. I also cited Charles Kahn, a scholar whose interests lie outside the New Testament, and who uses a similar definition in his major treatise on the be-verb in ancient Greek. All of the major scholarly studies in recent decades on Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings, including those by Brown, Harner, Ball, and Williams, make the same point about EIMI. The dependent clause, I argued, is probably to be categorized as an adjunct rather than a complement (obligatory or optional), but in any case it is not a ‘predicate’ in the sense of a subject complement or similar grammatical unit. This is significant, because, as I explained in my book 16 years ago, the absolute EIMI does not denote “an action or ongoing event, nor even an ongoing specific condition,” such as are described by PPA verbs. Known examples of the PPA using EIMI or another form of that verb always use it as a linking verb, or copula, to describe an ongoing action or specific condition. The only known candidate for a PPA using the absolute EIMI is Psalm 89:2 LXX (implicitly identified as such by Winer), and this example supports the conventional understanding of John 8:58 as a divine affirmation of unbounded existence.

2. Whether the clauses are improperly ordered in the conventional English translation of John 8:58

You argued that ‘preposing’ the dependent clause “before Abraham came into being” in front of the main clause (whether translated “I am” or “I have been”) is blatantly ungrammatical. You argued that in English the be-verb must be followed by some sort of complement (with certain exceptions of no relevance to John 8:58), and in John 8:58 that complement must be the clause “before Abraham came into being.”

In response, I gave examples from both older and contemporary English writers of sentences in which the be-verb stands at the very end of the sentence. I showed that the be-verb cannot have this last position (formally) when it functions as a linking verb or copula, but that it can have this last position when it functions existentially, that is, when it expresses a state of being or existing (“I think, therefore I am”; “Pooh just is”). You tried to relegate this usage to archaic English, but my “Pooh” example shows otherwise. Furthermore, in my last post I also cited The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2000) and the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary in support of this usage as legitimate in modern English. Both of these works under ‘be’ have another usage that they do identify as archaic, but not this usage. I also showed that the dependent clause “before Abraham came into being” in English is not the obligatory complement that must follow the English be-verb (when used as a copula) but is an adverbial that can stand before or after the verb. The element that cannot appear before the be-verb is the obligatory complement, the predicate that is linked or copulated to the subject by the be-verb. Thus, in the sentence, “Before the Lord named me Job, I was Jobab” (Testament of Job 2:1), the dependent clause “before the Lord named me Job” (which is grammatically identical in function to “before Abraham came into being” in John 8:58) is perfectly fine where it is. What would make that sentence ungrammatical would be to put “Job,” the subject complement, before the verb, as in “Before the Lord named me Job, Jobab I was” (what has been called “Yoda English”).

There is another type of sentence ending with the be-verb, in which that verb has an implied predicate (subject complement), typically in response to a question of identity (“I am [he]”). You agreed that the main clause could stand last in the sentence only if that predicate was expressed (“Before Abraham came into being, I am he”). I replied that the predicate (“he”) need not be expressed (giving examples) and that translating “I am” retains in English an ambiguity in the Greek as to whether EIMI expresses a state of being or a statement of identity.

3. Whether EIMI in John 8:58 should be translated “am” or “have been”

a. Translating “am” or “have been” and the PPA

You argued that EIMI in John 8:58 should be translated “have been” because it is a PPA, and PPAs should be translated using a form of the progressive past tense to express extension from the past to the present. In response, I argued that it is unlikely that EIMI should be classified as a PPA, at least in a narrow sense (see point #1 above), and that in any case a PPA need not always be translated using a form of the past tense.

b. Translating “am” with an existential meaning

You argued that “am” in modern English is normally not used to express existence, so that the conventional translation “I am” should really be replaced with “I exist” (or “existed,” see point a. above). I pointed out that “have been” is just the present perfect tense of “am,” so that if “am” cannot be used existentially, neither can “have been.”

However, as explained earlier in this post, I also showed that “am” can indeed be used in modern English to express existence.

c. “I am” in John and in Old Testament sayings of God

I also argued that a translation of John 8:58, in addition to taking into account the grammar of the sentence, should also take into account its relation to other EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John as well as the EGW EIMI sayings of God in Isaiah to which those Johannine sayings evidently allude. The translation “I am” is to be preferred because it enables the English reader to perceive these Johannine parallels and Isaianic allusions.

You had three main objections to the above argument. First, you argued that the grammatical form of the Johannine EGW EIMI sayings of Jesus varies, even in John 8, with some expressing predicates (“I am the light of the world,” 8:12) and others implying a predicate (“I am he,” 8:24, 28), while in John 8:58 EIMI is used existentially. I responded that these grammatical variations do not negate the connections among these sayings as profound self-revelatory statements of religious and even divine claims.

Second, you argued that drawing such connections with other EGW EIMI sayings is absurd in light of the formerly blind man’s EGW EIMI saying in John 9:9. In response I reminded you that my argument is that Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings in John share thematic connections; John 9:9 has a different speaker on a different occasion answering a specific question unrelated to those themes and making no allusions to divine EGW EIMI sayings in the Old Testament.

Third, in reference to translating John 8:58 in light of the Isaianic EGW EIMI sayings, you objected that doing so confuses translation with interpretation. I replied by pointing out that in your own book *Truth in Translation* you acknowledge that the Old Testament scriptures “form an essential context for understanding the expression of the New Testament,” so that “the exact nuance of a phrase of argument in the New Testament may depend on this background knowledge” (xviii). Thus, considering the “background knowledge” of the divine EGW EIMI sayings in Isaiah is quite proper in considering how best to translate Jesus’ EGW EIMI sayings, including John 8:58.

4. Conclusion: Whether the conventional translation is theologically biased

You attempt to make a case for theological bias in the conventional translation of John 8:58 by arguing that it is not only a bad rendering but that the same versions don’t make the same mistakes when translating other verses. The first two errors that you claim these versions make in John 8:58 are misreading the Greek grammar (point #1 above) and grammatically flawed English (#2). I have shown that both of these criticisms are very much disputable. I have also shown, contrary to your argument for bias, that the same versions actually do sometimes render alleged PPA verbs in other texts using the English present tense (e.g., Ps. 89:2 LXX; 2 Pet. 3:4). I also showed that the NWT places the clauses in John 8:58 in the same order as the conventional versions, and that your

explanation (the translators were unduly influenced by the conventional translation tradition) was implausible (they were, after all, abandoning that tradition in this very verse). The third error you charged to the traditional rendering was the imposition of a connection between John 8:58 and Old Testament sayings of God, specifically Exodus 3:14. The Exodus 3:14 connection is made explicit only in a very few contemporary versions; the simple “I am” rendering in the KJV, NASB, and many other versions cannot be accused of this error, if an error it be. In my view, though, one good reason for translating the text with “I am” is that the text’s association with other “I am” sayings of God in the Old Testament, notably in Isaiah, will be more evident to the English reader. This is not evidence of theological bias, but of taking into account the religious and literary context of the saying, something you said in your book was important, as documented above. Thus, your entire set of arguments for religious or theological bias in the conventional rendering of John 8:58 fails.

Thank you for participating in this long and difficult debate.