

Jesus

the “I am” and “the One Who Is”

A Simple test
of the Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible,
the “New World Translation”

Can we trust this version?

by

Dr Trevor R Allin

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A Simple Test of the Jehovah's Witness version of the Bible

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RSV: REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF THE BIBLE Published by The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA 1952

NIV: “Holy Bible, New International Version ® NIV ®” Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by the International Bible Society

NWT: “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, Brooklyn, New York, USA: WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC, 1961

K.I.T.: “The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures”, Brooklyn, New York, USA: WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC, 1969

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About the Author

Dr Trevor R Allin graduated from the University of Leeds with a 1st Class Honours degree in Phonetics, French, Spanish and Philosophy and History of Religion. Following studies in linguistics, he undertook original research on a South American indigenous language, for which purpose he lived within the indigenous community and studied the language with native speakers over a period of more than a year. The University of St Andrews subsequently awarded him a Ph.D. for his thesis “A Grammar of Resígaro”.

For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

He is also the published translator of books from Spanish and German into English and is the author of “Curso de Griego Bíblico: Los elementos del Griego del N.T.”¹, the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff’s “The Elements of New Testament Greek”.² He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in various places in Spain and England on the most important early Greek manuscripts of the Bible, including Codex Sinaiticus.

¹ Viladecavalls (Barcelona): Editorial CLIE, 2019

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

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A Simple Test of the Jehovah's Witness version of the Bible

Notes by the author

Whole books have been written on some of the mistranslations in the Jehovah's Witness version of the Bible. Here, however, is a brief introduction to the subject that I wrote in response to an e-mail from a visitor to this website.

Some parts of it may be useful as a basis for a discussion with Jehovah's Witnesses.

The table on page 6, below, is particularly revealing and easy to follow.

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Transliterations and Translations

Where I quote from the Greek text, I follow this with a simple transliteration into English letters, giving an approximation to how the words are pronounced, followed generally by my own translation and then a well-known published translation. In my transliterations, the symbol ē indicates a “long e” in Greek and the symbol ō indicates a “long o”.

Introduction: The version of the Bible produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses depend on their version of the Bible in their proselytising activity, as standard translations of the Bible disprove so many of their extraordinary doctrines. They call their version "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures", which is abbreviated below to "NWT". When Christians are confronted by Jehovah's Witnesses, much of the discussion often focusses on what the Bible actually says, so different is the Jehovah's Witness version from all other Bibles.

In my experience, arguments along the lines of "my translation is right and yours is wrong" are a waste of time with Jehovah's Witnesses, since they claim that all other translations are wrong, and only theirs is right – which must seem unlikely to impartial observers. For this reason, if possible it is good to focus on the original Greek text of the New Testament.

This article has three parts:

PART I: a simple translation-accuracy test: "I am" in John's Gospel chapter 8

PART II: a detailed examination of the NWT explanation of John 8:58

PART III: the Bible phrase "The One Who Is"

PART I: a simple translation-accuracy test: "I am" in John's Gospel chapter 8

In a discussion with the Jehovah's Witnesses, one could perhaps focus on just one phrase, the Greek Text ἐγώ ειμι, for which an approximate English pronunciation would be "eggo amy" (generally transcribed as "egō eimi"). It means "I am". "I AM" was a phrase that was repeatedly used by God and to designate God in the Old Testament. This was the case in the original Hebrew text, but was repeated in Greek in the translation that was made by the Jews about 250 years before the time of Christ. This Greek text is known as the Septuagint and it is often referred to with the Roman numerals for the number 70, LXX, the number of translators that it was believed had produced the translation. This was the text that was used by the Jews at the time of Christ, and both Christ himself and the writers of the New Testament repeatedly quoted from this Greek text. I explain this in my short article called "The significance of the "I AM" statements in the Bible", which you can see here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/iaminbib.pdf>

When Jesus said (John 8:58), "Before Abraham was, I am", the Jews picked up stones to stone him, for he was claiming to be God. They themselves say this with reference to the incident – see John 10:33.

The Jehovah's Witnesses realise that in this verse Christ is saying that He is God, which totally destroys their claims about Him, **so they deliberately change the text of John 8:58!** For a detailed analysis of this verse, see my article on John 8:58, which you will find here: http://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf

However, here is a much shorter way of demonstrating that the NWT is wrong here. For this, we only need to look at the Jehovah's Witnesses' own "Kingdom Interlinear Text"³. This contains the Greek text that they state that they used, Westcott & Hort's "New Testament in the original Greek" of 1881⁴. Under each word of Westcott & Hort's Greek text the Jehovah's Witnesses have written their translation into English of that word. In a column to the right, they print the

³ "The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures", Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1969. Often referred to by them by the initials for the title, "K.I.T."

The Watchtower Organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses published a second edition of this text in 1985. In the passages quoted here, their interlinear text has not been changed from the previous edition.

⁴ Here is not the place to ask why the Jehovah's Witnesses have not used Greek texts of the New Testament produced since the Westcott & Hort edition of 1881. These newer editions of the Greek text include the results of the great discoveries of many older ancient manuscripts that have been made since 1881. That matter is addressed in my review of BeDuhn's book, <http://livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf>, especially in chapter 4.

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NWT text. Here, it is sometimes easy to see where the NWT deliberately mis-translates the original text. In 2013, the Jehovah's Witnesses published a major revision to the NWT which changed the text in many places. However, it does not change any of the phrases quoted in this article.

1. The test: "I am" in John's Gospel chapter 8

Here is any easy example that enables us to check the accuracy of the "NWT". The Greek phrase for "I am / I am not" occurs eight times in John chapter 8. (It occurs twice in verse 23.) Here is the Greek text, my literal translation, the K.I.T. translation, and the NWT translation:

Nº	Reference	Greek ⁵	Literal translation	K.I.T. translation	New World Translation
1	John 8:12	ἐγὼ εἰμι	I am	I am	I am
2	John 8:16	οὐκ εἰμί	I am not	not I am	I am not
3	John 8:18	ἐγὼ εἰμι	I am	I am	I am
4	John 8:23	ἐγὼ ... εἰμί	I am	I ... I am	I am
5	John 8:23	ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμί	I am not	I not am	I am not
6	John 8:24	ἐγὼ εἰμι	I am	I am	I am
7	John 8:28	ἐγὼ εἰμι	I am	I am	I am
8	John 8:58	ἐγὼ εἰμί	I am	I am	<i>I have been</i>

It is thus clear that the first seven times in John 8 that the phrase "I am" occurs, the NWT translates it correctly. The only time it does not is when the accurate translation would undermine their doctrine. They try to justify this with a virtually incomprehensible "explanation" that refers to a non-existent "rule" of Greek grammar.

One of the current leading experts in Koiné Greek (New Testament Greek) is Dr Daniel Wallace. In his textbook for advanced students of the language, "Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics"⁶, he responds to the Jehovah's Witness claim that in John 8:58 ἐγὼ εἰμί ["egō eimi"] is a "historical present" as follows:

- "(1) The fact that the present tense follows an aorist *infinitive* has nothing to do with how it should be rendered [i.e., translated]. ...
- "(2) If this is a historical present, it is apparently the only historical present in the NT that uses the equative verb εἰμί ["eimi"].
- "(3) If this is a historical present, it is apparently the only historical present in the NT that is in other than the third person."⁷

We can thus see that in John 8:58, the NWT:

- 1) Contradicts the Jehovah's Witnesses' own "Kingdom Interlinear Translation" of the same verse.
- 2) Contradicts their own translation of the same phrase in all seven other places where it occurs in the same chapter (all of them in the same conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders).
- 3) Contradicts the rules of Greek grammar (1st point by Wallace).
- 4) Contradicts the actual usage of Greek throughout the whole of the rest of the New Testament (points 2 and 3 by Wallace).

⁵ The rules of Greek accentuation in the written text are complex, resulting in accents being added, removed or changed depending on the surrounding words. This does not change the meaning of the words. An explanation of the rules requires a whole text book, so we will not study it here. Such a textbook is "Greek Accents: A Student's Manual" by D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1985. Published in the United Kingdom by Paternoster Press, Carlisle, Cumbria, 1st edition 1995. Dr Carson is a renowned New Testament research professor and author of more than 35 books. He co-chairs the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics Section of the Society of Biblical Literature.

⁶ Wallace, Daniel B, "Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics", Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996.

⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 530, underlining added. See also pp 515 and 531.

2. Who is unmasking whom?

When the Jehovah's Witnesses knock on my door, I always chat with them, and if time permits, I invite them in, and show them key passages in the Greek text. A few weeks after one such visit, two Jehovah's Witnesses, a man who had previously visited me, accompanied by a woman whom I had not seen before, knocked on my door. The man said, "You speak Greek, so I have brought one of our members along. She is Greek."

I replied, "I do not *spea*k modern Greek, but every day I read from the New Testament in the original Koiné Greek text." I invited them in, and asked the Greek lady to sit beside me, so that we could both look at the Greek text together. We worked through the above verses from John chapter 8, and she even checked them in a modern Greek version on her tablet. This was done in a friendly atmosphere and was not confrontational.

The Greek lady then turned to her colleague and said to him about me, "He's right!" As soon as possible after that, the man made excuses and said that they had to leave. I smiled, shook them by the hand and said that I would be delighted to see them again.

A few months later, the Jehovah's Witnesses were working along our street again. I was in our front downstairs room, from which I can see the front door. A couple whom I didn't know walked right up to our front door, looking for the house number. When they found it, they turned and walked away, without ringing the bell. It is clear that they have our house marked as one *not* to visit!

On their previous visit they had come to "unmask" me, but they had discovered that I was right! They clearly consider that it is *too dangerous* for the members of their congregation to be exposed to the Greek text of the New Testament, *especially* those who are native speakers of Greek, as they will see that in their version of the Bible, the sect changes the meaning of the original text!

Now let us focus our attention on their version of John 8 verse 58 and their comments on it.

3. John 8:58: the "Kingdom Interlinear Text" versus the "New World Translation"

Here is my copy of page 467 of the 1969 edition of that text. We can see that John 8:58 has the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι ["egō eimi"] and that the Jehovah's Witnesses' own interlinear translation correctly translates this as "I am", with no other options. However, the NWT **changes** this to "I have been".

My article on John 8:58 goes into the details of why this is not possible.

A footnote in their "K.I.T." shows that they knew what was at stake here: that Christ's reference to Exodus 3:14 (and to Exodus 3:6!) would be spotted by readers. They claim that the Greek in the verses in Exodus is different. I therefore reproduce on the following pages the Greek text of those two verses. **However, their footnote, reproduced here, deliberately misses out the identical phrase, ἐγώ εἰμι ["egō eimi"], which is in the original text of Exodus 3:14!** – see below.

467	JOHN 8: 55—9: 2
<p>ἐμαυτόν, ἡ δόξα μου οὐδέν ἐστιν. ἔστιν myself, the glory of me nothing is. Is ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με, ὃν the Father of me the (one) glorifying me, whom ὁμοίως λέγετε ὅτι θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν, 55 καὶ you are saying that God of you is, and οὐκ ἐγνώκατε αὐτόν, ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδα not you have known him, I but have known αὐτόν· κἄν εἶπω ὅτι οὐκ him; and if ever I should say that not οἶδα αὐτόν, ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν I have known him, I shall be like you ψεύστης· ἀλλὰ οἶδα αὐτόν καὶ τὸν liar; but I have known him and the λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ. 56 Ἀβραάμ ὁ word of him I am observing. Abraham the πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα father of you exulted in order that ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν, καὶ εἶδεν he might see the day the mine, and he saw καὶ ἐχάρη. 57 εἶπαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι and rejoiced. 57 Said therefore the Jews πρὸς αὐτόν Πεντήκοντα ἔτη οὕτω toward him Fifty years not yet ἔχεις καὶ Ἀβραάμ ἐώρακας; you are having and Abraham you have seen? 58 εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ἰησοῦς Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν Said to them Jesus Amen amen λέγων ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι I am saying to you Before Abraham to become ἐγὼ εἰμί. 59 ἦραν οὖν λίθους I am. They lifted up therefore stones ἵνα βάλωσιν ἐπ' αὐτόν· in order that they might throw upon him; Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐκρύβη καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ. Jesus but hid and went out of the temple.</p> <p>9 Καὶ παράγων εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν And going beside he saw man blind ἐκ γενετῆς. 2 καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν οἱ out of birth. And questioned him the μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ λέγοντες Ῥαββεί, τίς disciples of him saying Rabbi, who ἤμαρτεν, οὗτος ἢ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ, sinned, this (one) or the parents of him, ἵνα τυφλὸς γεννηθῆι; in order that blind he should be generated?</p> <p>58^a I have been=ἐγὼ εἰμί (e-go' ei-mi') after the a'orist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect tense. It is not the same as ὁ ὢν (ho ohn', meaning "The Being" or "The I Am") at Exodus 3:14, LXX.</p>	<p>myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, he who you say is your God; 55 and yet you have not known him. But I know him. And if I said I do not know him I should be like you, a liar. But I do know him and am observing his word. 56 Abraham the your father rejoiced greatly in the prospect of seeing my day, and he saw it and rejoiced." 57 Therefore the Jews said to him: "You are not yet fifty years old, and still you have seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them: "Most truly I say to you, Before Abraham came into existence, I have been."^a 59 Therefore they picked up stones to hurl [them] at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple.</p> <p>9 Now as he was passing along he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, so that he was born blind?"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">cf Mk 12:26 1/4/75 8</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X/</p>

The "Kingdom Interlinear Text" from the Jehovah's Witnesses

PART II: a detailed examination of the NWT explanation of John 8:58

In their “Kingdom Interlinear” text, the Jehovah’s Witnesses are confronted with the contradiction between the interlinear translation and their own version of the Bible, and they seek to justify this difference with the following explanation:

“58^a I have been = ἐγὼ εἰμί (*e-go’ ei-mi’*) after the a’orist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect tense. It is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn’*, meaning “The Being” or “The I Am”) at Exodus 3:14, *LXX*.”

The Jehovah’s Witnesses here give two arguments to justify their mistranslation of the Greek text.

1. The first argument in their explanation of John 8:58

“58^a I have been = ἐγὼ εἰμί (*e-go’ ei-mi’*) after the a’orist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect tense.

The first argument used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses in this note is that a strange grammatical rule requires them to translate the Greek present tense for “I am” into the English past tense “I have been”.

This argument is analysed in detail in my article on John 8:58 on this website.⁸ In fact, in the 1985 revised edition of the K.I.T. they abandoned this argument and invented a new one! For this change, see that article, especially pages 7-9.⁹

2. The second argument in their explanation of John 8:58

“58^a ... ἐγὼ εἰμί (*e-go’ ei-mi’*) ... is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn’*, meaning “The Being” or “The I Am”) at Exodus 3:14, *LXX*.”

This second argument in their footnote has three components.

1. The **first component** is their statement that “ἐγὼ εἰμί (*e-go’ ei-mi’*) ... is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn’*)”
2. The **second component** is the implication that they give that the first phrase, ἐγὼ εἰμι [egō eimi], is not in Exodus 3.
3. The **third component** is their statement that “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] means “I am”.

We will now examine these three components of their second argument.

Argument 2, Component 1: “I am” and “The One Who is”

This argument is the Jehovah’s Witness claim that the phrase that Christ uses in John 8:58, ἐγὼ εἰμι [egō eimi], “is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn’*, meaning “The Being” or “The I Am”) at Exodus 3:14, *LXX*.” This may be described as stating the blindingly obvious. One phrase is not the same as another phrase that is different from it. So why do they make this statement? We answer this question in the next point.

Argument 2, Component 2: “I am” in Exodus 3

The purpose of the previous statement is to claim that Christ’s words in John 8:58 do not echo back to or quote the same words that occur in Exodus 3. In order to make this claim, the Jehovah’s Witnesses quote from a different phrase in Exodus 3, and miss out the occurrences of the same phrase in Exodus 3.

⁸ Here: http://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf

⁹ In the edition of the article consulted on 8.8.20.

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On reading this footnote written by the Jehovah's Witnesses, one would believe that the phrase ἐγὼ εἰμί ["egō eimi"] "I am" is not to be found in Exodus 3:14, but *it is there!* The Jehovah's Witness note on John 8:58 misses out the half of the phrase in Exodus 3:14 that has precisely these words! – and in the same verse!

Now we will look at the use of these two phrases in Exodus 3:6 and Exodus 3:14.

The half of Exodus 3:14 that the Jehovah's Witnesses do not include in their footnote

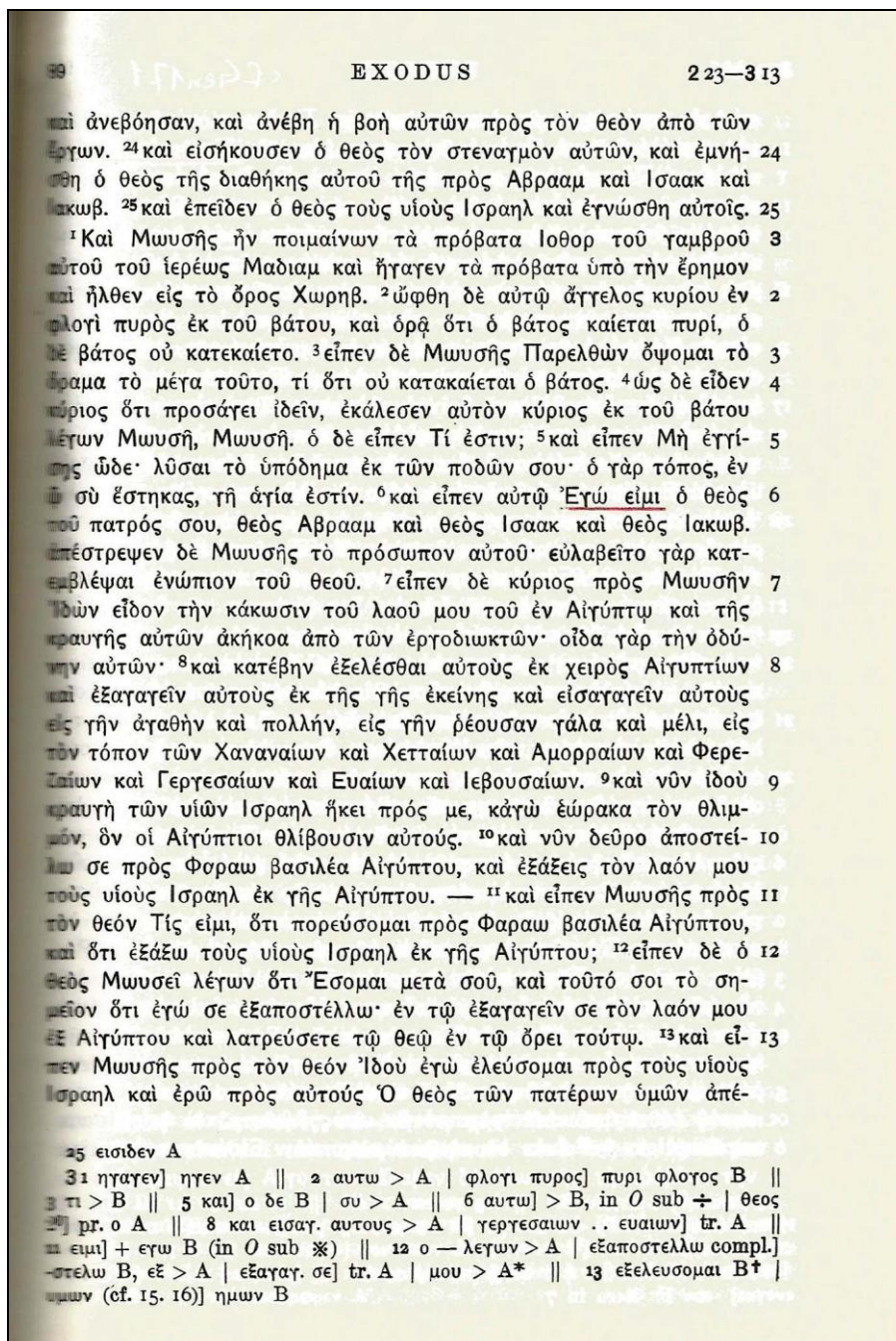
"I am" in Exodus chapter 3

Exodus 3:6 in the Jewish Greek translation "The Septuagint", often referred to with the Roman numerals for 70, "LXX".¹⁰

The footnote to John 8:58 in the "K.I.T" published by the Jehovah's Witnesses, reproduced above, claims that Jesus' words there are not the same as the Greek words ὁ ὢν ["ho ōn"] in Exodus 3:14. However, they are identical to the words ἐγὼ εἰμι ["egō eimi"] in the same encounter of Moses with God, in Exodus 3:6, as will be clear from the text here, even for those who are not familiar with Greek. I have underlined the key words in red.

Here we have a capital Greek "E", which is the same as our modern Roman script "E", whereas in the above printing of John 8:58, a lower case Greek ε ("e") is used.

However, we must remember that in the Greek texts of the Septuagint used at the time of Christ, and in the text of the New Testament, capital letters were used throughout, so these phrases would have been visually identical – as well as acoustically identical, in the spoken form!



Exodus 3:6 in the Septuagint

¹⁰ Rahlfs-Hanhart "Septuaginta", © Stuttgart, 2006: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft

“I am” in Exodus chapter 3, continued

Exodus 3:14 in the Jewish Greek translation, “The Septuagint”

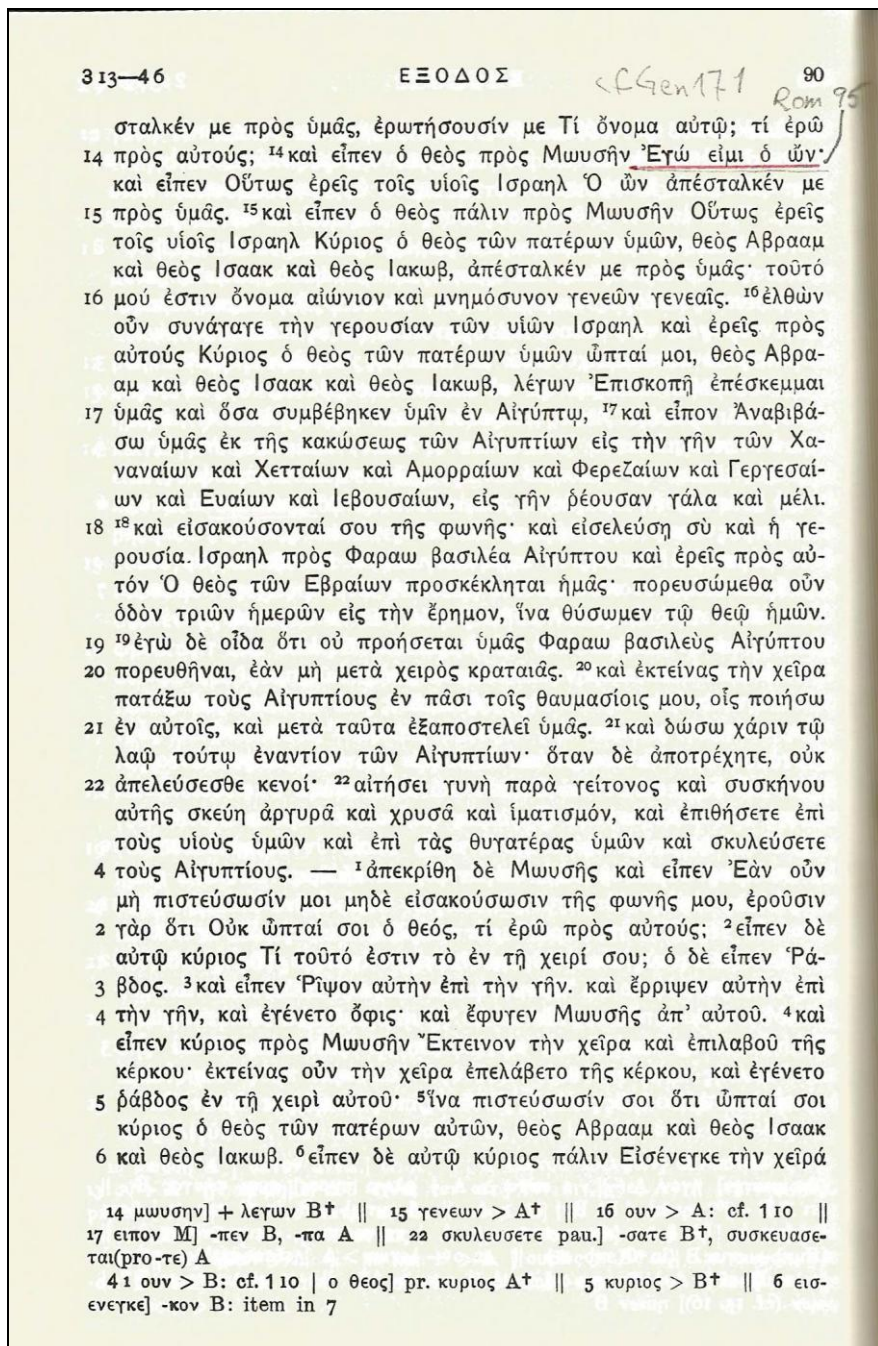
In fact, the same Greek words that Jesus used in John 8:58 do also occur in Exodus 3:14 – but the editors of the K.I.T. chose to suppress them in their footnote that selectively quoted from a small part of that verse!

Again, I have underlined the key phrase in red.

The full text of the key phrase does in fact say, ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν [“egō eimi ho ōn”]. It means “I am the one who is” or “I am the Being One”. The first two words are identical to Jesus’ words in John 8:58. By missing these words out in their footnote to John 8:58, which refers to this verse from Exodus, the Jehovah’s Witnesses who produced the “Kingdom Interlinear Text” deliberately withheld information. This proves that they themselves were aware that the note that they had written was itself deliberately misleading.

And (as we will see below) Jesus had used the other half of the Greek phrase that is in Exodus 3:14 a few minutes earlier, also applying it to Himself. (John 8:47)

Aware of the danger to their doctrines if they allowed this text to stand, in their “New World Translation” the Jehovah’s Witnesses have translated the phrase ἐγὼ εἰμι [“egō eimi” – “I am”], which is in the **present** tense in Greek, into the **past** in John 8:58 and – in order to hide the link between these two passages completely! – they have translated the same phrase into the future in Exodus 3:14! There are no two ways of saying this: by these actions, they are not truthfully presenting the unambiguous meaning of the original text. In these verses, their two diametrically-opposed versions of this one same phrase (versions which do not merit the title “translations”) are not linguistically possible. Not my opinion; fact.



Exodus 3:14 in the Septuagint

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Argument 2, component 3: The Jehovah's Witness statement that “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] means “I am”

The problem facing the Jehovah's Witnesses is that many translations of Exodus 3 have the phrase “I am”. How can they explain the presence of that phrase in other translations of the Bible, having said that the phrase used by Christ in John 8:58 was not the same as the phrase in the Greek translation of Exodus 3? They decided to claim that “ὁ ὢν (*ho ōn*)” is the phrase that is used in Exodus 3:14 in the Septuagint and that it means “I am”. Thus, the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the phrase that Jesus uses in John 8:58, ἐγὼ εἰμι [egō eimi], is different from the phrase that is used in Exodus 3.

We have above shown that – contrary to the claims made by the Jehovah's Witnesses – the phrase ἐγὼ εἰμι [egō eimi] is repeatedly used in Exodus 3. Now we will look at:

1. The Jehovah's Witness version of the phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”]
2. The significance of the use of this phrase
3. The use of the phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] elsewhere in the New Testament
4. Jesus Christ, the Being One, the One Who Is, the One Who Exists, the “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”].

PART III: the Bible phrase “The One Who Is”, “the Uncreated One”

The fundamental concept behind the phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] is that it signals a Being who has not been created, but who has always existed, *in Himself and by His own Power*. This is the meaning that it has both in Exodus 3:14 and in the New Testament. It is applied to *the true and eternal God*.

1. The Jehovah's Witness translation of the phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”]

The Jehovah's Witnesses say that the meaning of ὁ ὢν [“ho ōn”] is “The I Am”, but this is not a correct translation of this phrase. This is either just part of their technique of confusing readers – or else those who wrote this footnote were themselves confused! As we have seen, “I am” is ἐγὼ εἰμι [“eggo amy” or *egō eimi*]. An accurate translation of “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] would be “The One Who Is” or “The One Who Exists”. We will look at the use of this phrase in Scripture shortly.

2. The significance of the use of the phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”], “the Being One, the One Who Is”, “the Being One”, “the One Who Exists”, “the Uncreated One”

This is the half of Exodus 3:14 that the Jehovah's Witnesses do include in their footnote on John 8:58.

However, *even the half that the Jehovah's Witnesses have quoted in their note on John 8:58 is not helpful to their argument*, as anyone will observe who reads the Greek text of the whole discussion between Jesus and the Jewish leaders that is recorded in John chapter 8. The half of Exodus 3:14 that the Jehovah's Witnesses quote here is “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”], which they state means “The Being” or “The I Am”.

However, they appear not to have noticed that previously *in the same discussion between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, Jesus also quotes this half of Exodus 3:14, too!*

In John 8:47, Jesus describes himself as “ὁ ὢν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ” [“ho ōn ek tou theou”]. This phrase could be accurately translated as “The One from God Who Exists” or “The One Who Is, from God”, “The One Who Has Always Existed, [who has come] from God.” If we were to adopt the Jehovah's Witness translations of this phrase in Exodus 3:14, we would have to put, “The Being from God” or “The I Am from God.”

The English translation “The Being One from God” may not be easily understood, and so most translations paraphrase the original in one way or another. The Revised Standard Version is close to the original Greek: “He who is of God”.

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We can see the progressive increase in tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders as this discussion advances, and verse 58 merely confirms the meaning of the phrase that He had used a few minutes earlier (recorded in verse 47).

Christ had also used this same phrase, “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”], about himself in a previous discussion with the Jews about who he was, recorded in John chapter 6. On that occasion, the complete phrase was ὁ ὢν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ [“ho ōn para tou theou”], which could be translated “The One Who Exists alongside God” or “The Being One alongside God” (John 6:46). Again the reference to the words in the Greek translation of Exodus 3:14 is clear. The word here translated “alongside” can in some contexts be translated “from”, and RSV has “him who is from God”.

The use of these words by Jesus was understood by the Jews to be a claim that he was God. They say so later, when commenting on their actions at this point: “The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God.”” (John 10:33, RSV). They were so outraged by Jesus’ use of these phrases that they responded by trying to kill Him.

“ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] can be translated “the one who is” or “whoever is”. This meaning can be seen in John 12:17, which is not a quotation from Jesus but part of the author’s text, describing what was happening at the time: ὁ ὄχλος ὁ ὢν μετ’ αὐτοῦ [“ho ochlos ho ōn met autou”], “the crowd which was with him” (literally, “the crowd the one being with him”).

Greek is a human language, after all, and not every use of a given word or phrase has a divine meaning. Here the phrase is describing a crowd. Similarly, the phrase “I am” does not always have a divine meaning: anyone can say “I am ... (something or other)”. But, for Jews, when the phrases “Ἐγώ εἰμι” [“egō eimi”] and “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] were used about God, they indicated His inherent nature and eternal existence.

Thus in Exodus 3:14 and John 6:46 and 8:47, “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] is used by God/Jesus with a divine meaning that is unambiguously clear from the context, and the Jewish religious leaders, as well as many of the other listeners, will have heard an echo of the divine phrase used in Exodus 3:14 and will have recognised the significance attributed to these words in many of the passages of their sacred Scriptures – hence their outrage when Jesus used these phrases.

3. The use of the phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] elsewhere in the New Testament

The phrase “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”] is rarely used in the New Testament, and apart from the one occasion when it is used with a non-religious meaning by the Evangelist in John 12:17, it is used by Jesus about himself and his relationship to God the Father in John 6:46 and John 8:47, as indicated above, and four times in the book of Revelation, in these verses always about “the Almighty God”.

Here is the first of these four uses, in Greek and English:

Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ. [“ego eimi to alfa kai to omega, legei kurios ho theos, ho ōn kai ho ēn kai ho erchomenos, ho pantokratōr”]
--

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, **the Being One (the One Who Is)** and the One who was and the One who is coming, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8, my translation)

The New International Version renders this as:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "**who is**, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

The other three occurrences are in Revelation 4:8, 11:17 and 16:5, each time with reference to the Almighty God and with the same meaning.

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Someone might ask if in John 8:47 Jesus is referring to *anyone* who hears the words of God, but earlier in the same exchange he identifies *himself* as being the one to whom he is referring, who hears the words of God. See verse 26:

Πολλὰ ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν λαλεῖν καὶ κρίνειν· ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με ἀληθὴς ἐστίν, καὶ γὰρ ἃ ἤκουσα παρ' αὐτοῦ, ταῦτα λέγω εἰς τὸν κόσμον
[“Polla echō peri humōn lalein kai krinein, all' ho pempsas me alēthēs estin, kagō ha ēkousa par' autou, tauta legō eis ton kosmon”]

“I have much to say about you and to judge, but the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from Him I speak to the world” (John 8:26, my translation)

The RSV renders this as ““I have much to say about you and much to judge; but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what **I** have heard from him.”” (John 8:26, RSV)

In any case, we need to do no more than to read verse 47 in the context of Christ's previous sentence, in verse 46, to see that he is referring to himself:

τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐλέγχει με περὶ ἁμαρτίας; εἰ ἀλήθειαν λέγω, διὰ τί ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε μοι; ⁴⁷ **ὁ ὢν** ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούει· διὰ τοῦτο ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἀκούετε, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστέ.
(John 8:46-47)
[“tis ex humōn elenchei me peri hamartias? ei alētheian legō, dia ti humeis ou pisteuete moi? ⁴⁷ **ho ōn** ek tou theou ta rēmata tou theou akouei. Dia touto humeis ouk akouete, hoti ek tou theou ouk este.”]

My translation: “Which of you reprimands me concerning sin? If I speak the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷ **The Being One from God** hears the words of God. This is why you don't hear, because you are not from God.”

The RSV translates these words as:

““Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ **He who is** of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”” (John 8:46-47, RSV)

Thus, even the two words from Exodus 3:14 that the Jehovah's Witnesses do quote in their note on John 8:58 are in fact a description of God – **and Jesus quoted them, too**, in the same discussion with the same Jewish leaders.

4. Jesus Christ, the One Who Is, the Being One, the One Who Exists, the Uncreated One, the ὁ ὢν [“ho ōn”] in the Orthodox Church

For two millennia, Christians who knew and know Greek have described Jesus Christ as “the One Who Is”, “the Being One”, “the One Who Exists”, “the Uncreated One”, the “ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”]. They still do so today.

In 1054, the Christian Church worldwide split into two major sections.

- The “western” section, based in Rome, became known as “the Roman Catholic Church”.
- The “eastern” section, based in Constantinople, became known as “the Orthodox Church” or “the Eastern Orthodox Church”.

Historians call this split “the Great Schism”.

The Roman Catholic Church used Latin as its official language and thereafter largely ignored the Greek text of the Bible, referring only to the Latin Vulgate translation.

The (Eastern) Orthodox Church retained Greek as the language of communication and worship and referred to the Greek manuscripts of the Bible, both the New Testament and the Greek Septuagint

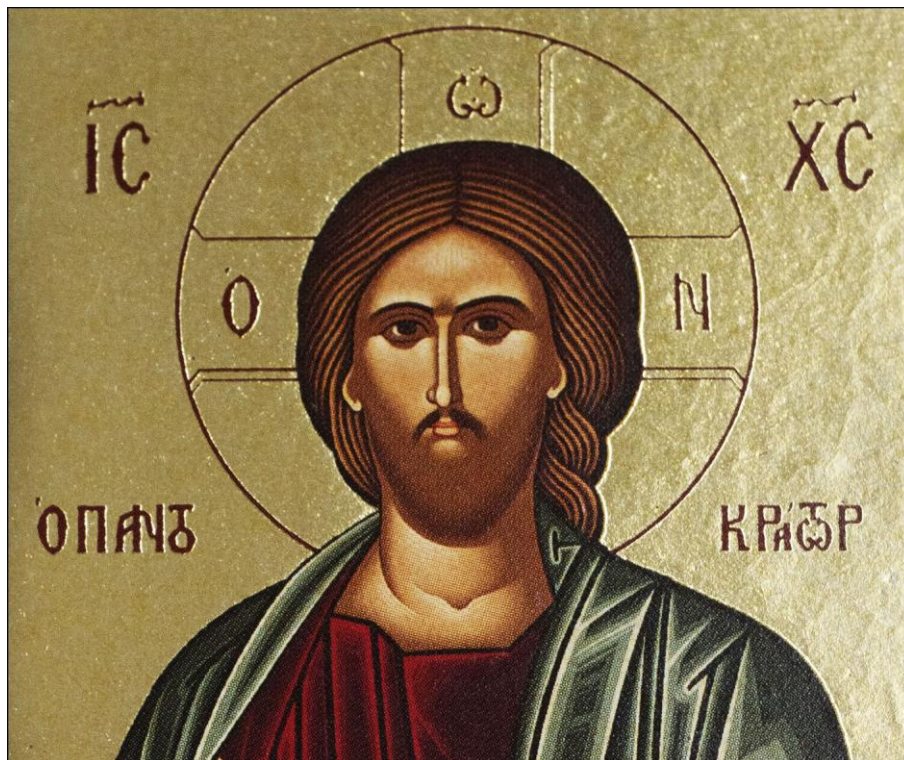
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translation of the Old Testament. It also continued to produce Greek manuscript copies of the Bible.

Not only did the Greek Orthodox Church use Greek in its worship, it still does so in the 21st century, even though some services in some non-Greek-speaking countries are conducted partially in other languages.

In line with the prohibition in the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4a), the Orthodox Church rejected the three-dimensional “graven images” so beloved by the Roman Catholic Church. (See also Deuteronomy 4:15-18 and many other Bible passages.) However, they permitted *paintings* of Christ and other religious themes (obviously, two-dimensional only). Their name for such a painting is εἰκών [eikōn], which simply means “image” or “likeness”. It is a word that occurs more than fifty times in the New Testament and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. In English this has become the word “icon”.

It is significant that the Greek-speaking church routinely gave – and still gives! – Christ the name “the ὁ ὢν” [“ho ōn”], “the One Who Is”, “the Being One” or “The One Who Exists”, “the Uncreated One” and this appears on many icons of Christ. Here we reproduce a part of one such icon:



Original image out of copyright.

Copy by S & K Greek Traditional Hand-Made Byzantine Icons, www.sandk.gr, who describe the image as follows:
"Copy of an old Byzantine Icon painted by well known iconographers of that day, the monks of the period."

Photograph of part of the icon by Trevor R Allin 2021.

The meaning of the lettering on the icon is as follows:

As written in the icon	Modern Greek	English
ΙC	Ἰησοῦς	Jesus
ΧC	χριστός	Christ, Anointed One
Ο ΩΝ	ὁ ὢν	the One Who Is, the One Who Exists, the Being One, the Uncreated One
Ο ΠΑΝΤΟ ΚΡΑΤΩΡ	ὁ παντοκράτωρ	the Almighty

Sinaiticus LSU font courtesy of Linguists' Software, Inc.

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It is significant that precisely that part of the universal Church with the best knowledge of Greek understood that when Christ used the phrase ὁ ὢν ["ho ōn"] in John 6:46, and John 8:47, He was referring to Himself as God, the Uncreated One.

We note moreover that this particular icon also calls Christ ὁ παντοκράτωρ [ho pantokratōr], "the Almighty One".

For more information on the phrase ὁ ὢν ["ho ōn"] see "God: the One Who Exists" on this website here: https://livingwater-spain.com/The_One_Who_Is.pdf

Conclusion

We have seen that:

1. The NWT translation of the Greek for "I am" into "I have been" in John 8:58 goes against their own translation with all seven earlier occurrences of the same phrase in the same chapter.
2. The NWT translation in John 8:58 goes against their own interlinear translation.
3. They have abandoned the first reason that they gave for this in the first edition of the interlinear New Testament.
4. The second reason that they give in their footnote misleads readers by leading them to believe that the phrase used by Christ in John 8:58 does not occur in Exodus 3. This is not true. The Jehovah's Witnesses thus deliberately mislead the readers of their "K.I.T." text.
5. In their note they mistranslate the phrase "ὁ ὢν" ["ho ōn"] in Exodus 3:14.
6. They fail to take into consideration Christ's use also of the phrase "ὁ ὢν" ["ho ōn"] in the *same* dialogue with the Jewish leaders.

It thus becomes abundantly clear that they have mistranslated Christ's words recorded in John 8:58, and that they have done this in order to hide the significance of Christ's words and to protect the doctrines of their sect from what the Bible actually says.

This examination of just one chapter of the New Testament demonstrates that it is not possible to have confidence in any part of their versions of the Bible, as the guiding principle has been that where the Greek text contradicts the sect's teaching, **it must be changed.**

Other articles on this website look at their sectarian translations of various other passages of the Bible.

Postscript

A few days after I first posted this article on-line I received the following reply from the visitor to this website:

Just wanted to say thanks again for your help with this issue. I talked with [two Jehovah's Witnesses, names deleted by me for this article] for almost 2 hours today. I used your table of "I am" in John 8 as one example of mistranslation in the NWT.

They didn't budge an inch and pushed back in various ways But without your chart I could not have presented the argument so clearly.

This is what I replied:

Thank you for the feedback. I am not surprised that they didn't budge: they have been taught that everything said by non-Jehovah's Witnesses is false. But they have now seen some of the contradictions in their own publications. The real work in their minds will begin to happen after they left you. If they are sincere about knowing what the Bible really says, what you said to them will go round and round in their minds. We can only pray that they will let the Holy Spirit lead them on and away from all the distortion and deception of the Jehovah's Witness organisation.