

A combined letter addressed to both the Trinitarian Bible Society
and the Society for the Distribution of Hebrew Scriptures

22/6/24

Dear brethren,

Greetings in our dear Saviour and Lord Jesus the Messiah.

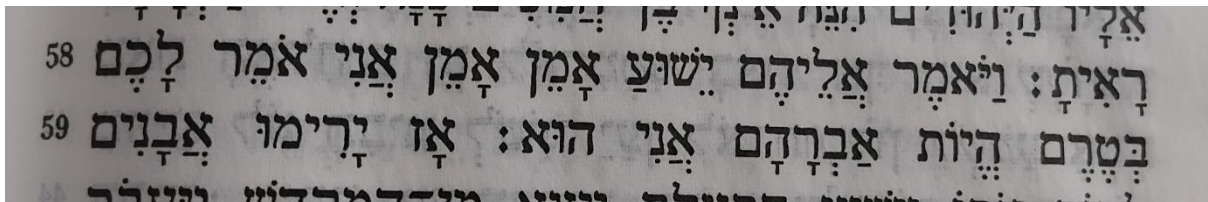
I heartily support and pray for your endeavours to convey the Gospel to Jewish and other Hebrew speaking friends. I hope you will forgive me for writing to both societies simultaneously on the same issue, since you both have a common interest.

I understand the TBS is revising the Hebrew translation of the New Testament. I am writing to express my concern about the existing wording of one seminal verse, in both the 2018 modified Salkinson-Ginsburg SDHS edition and the 1998 TBS Hebrew translation and to suggest better alternatives, based on the Greek Textus Receptus.

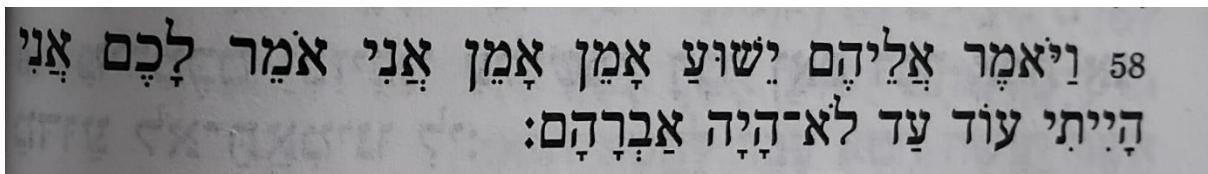
The Greek Text for John 8.58 reads:

εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ ἰησοῦς ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν πρὶν ἀβραὰμ γενεσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμι

This is the translation in the 1998 TBS translation:



This is the translation in the 2018 modification of the Salkinson-Ginsburg translation:



The crucial phrase, bearing witness to the full Deity and pre-existence of the Messiah, for which His adversaries sought to stone Him, is, “Before Abraham, was I AM.”

I AM is a reference to Exodus 3.14, and other passages. It’s no surprise therefore that the seminal Hebrew dictionary of Ehud Yehuda refers to אֵהִיָּה as a Divine Name. As you’ll know the Jehovah’s Witnesses, along with other Arians, translate the phrase, “I have been”*, to downgrade its significance. It seems highly likely since Aramaic was not so widely spoken in Jerusalem, Mt.27.47, and the Apostle Paul spoke in Hebrew to calm the rage of the crowds of Jews in the Temple, Acts.22.2, as he was also earlier addressed by Christ, Acts 26.14, that in

this Temple dispute, the Saviour was speaking in Hebrew, not Aramaic or Greek. So the words here are especially important.

However, the TBS translation literally is:

בְּטָרָם הָיִיתָ אַבְרָהָם, אֲנִי הוּא

Before Abraham was, I [am] He. The crucial point is moot and merely implied.

And the modified Salkinson-Ginsburg translation is:

אֲנִי לִפְנֵי אַבְרָהָם הָיִיתִי אֲנִי**

Before Abraham, I was. This text sadly in this place, emulates the errors of the Arians.

There are much better ways of capturing the allusion to Exodus 3 in the literal Greek text.

I am no expert in modern Hebrew idiom, but each of these appears to express the phrase more precisely, more helpfully and more faithfully:

אֵלֶּהּ אֲנִי, הָיָה אַבְרָהָם קֹדֶם

אֵלֶּהּ אֲנִי, אַבְרָהָם הָיִיתָ בְּטָרָם

אֵלֶּהּ אֲנִי, הָיָה אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי

Please consider them carefully,

Yours in the Beloved Son,

Charles Soper

*The original letter contained the phrase 'I was', but the current NWT text is [here](#).

** This should read **אֲנִי הָיִיתִי עוֹד עַד לֹא-הָיָה אַבְרָהָם**

[Some background.](#)

[Another simpler correspondence \(anonymised\).](#) [Page 2](#)