

Exegesis

Vs. 39-40 – Apparently, understanding that Jesus, in questioning their heritage, was also casting doubt on their standing with God, the Jews protest by asserting that "Abraham" was their "father." And, as we've already pointed out, the Israelites held themselves in high regard by virtue of their genes alone (vs. 33). Their verbiage before is actually quite explicit in that they said they were, literally, of Abraham's "seed." "Seed" is the Greek term **σπέρμα** (*sperma*) from which we get our English word "sperm." In light of this, Jesus seems to be making a play on words when he retorts, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."¹ They may have been born from Abraham's "seed" (**σπέρμα**, *sperma*), but they were *not* Abraham's "children" (**τέκνον**, *teknon*).² As Paul points out in his letter to the Galatians, that honor is reserved for those who put their faith in God just as Abraham had done (Gal. 3:7; cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8)).

By not believing Jesus, these Jews proved that they were anything but the children of Abraham even though they were undoubtedly his descendants (cf. vs. 37). So much so that they were actually doing the exact opposite of the "works of Abraham" in that they were seeking "to kill" the son of God. These murderous machinations were unjustified for many reasons, but they were especially egregious because, as Jesus frankly points out, he has only "told [them] the truth." If given the opportunity, they would've hanged an honest man. Furthermore, this truth, Jesus explains, was not his own, but a truth that he has "heard of God." And so, Jesus reiterates how un-Abraham they were being by pointing out "this did not Abraham." Their patriarch may have been flawed, but he never stooped so low as to try and kill the innocent. Unlike his progenies, when Abraham heard God, he believed God (cf. Gen 18:1-8). Even when he did not fully understand the word of God, he still obeyed (cf. Gen. 22:1-14).³ It is abundantly clear that the apple has fallen far from the tree since Genesis 12.

At this point, what could they say in their defense? Jesus had deftly batted away the connection to Abraham and exposed them for what they were. If they stood in a modern-day courtroom, they would've quickly been convicted by a jury of their peers. It seems the longer Jesus spoke, the more the evidence mounted against them appeared as a noose around their necks. Far from hanging Jesus, they were hanging themselves.

¹ Köstenberger (2008), p. 264.

² Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 134; Kruse (2017), p. 241.

³ Kruse (2017), p. 242.

Vs. 41-42 – Jesus revisits the idea of contrasting fathers when he says that rather than doing the "works of Abraham," the Jews were engaged in the "deeds of [their] father." In response, Jesus' insistence that they were not Abraham's children was understood as an accusation that they had been, in a manner of speaking, unfaithful to God. After all, the prophets would commonly equate idolatry to spiritual infidelity (cf. Ezek. 16:15; Hos. 1:2; 2:4; 4:15). To serve other gods was to become adulterous in the eyes of God. In the face of such serious allegations, Jesus' opponents respond by saying, "We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God."⁴ Before, they had claimed Abraham was their father. Now, they stake a claim even more impressive by stressing that they have a singular progenitor, none other than God Himself (cf. Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1-2; 32:6, 18; Jer. 31:9). Ironically, they sought to kill Jesus when he claimed the same thing (cf. 5:18).⁵ However, their denial that they were spiritual bastards strikes us as nothing more than false bravado considering their plans to murder Jesus. This is why Jesus says that if God was really their father, they would've "loved" him since he "came from God." Their supposed allegiance to God should've expanded to include God's Son. They should've loved him rather than loath him. Furthermore, Jesus says, "neither came I of myself, but he sent me." His will was secondary to his Father's. He did not come of his own accord but was dispatched by God. There was literally no reason they shouldn't have welcomed Jesus with open arms had they indeed known God as well as they said they did.

Vs. 43-45 – At this point, all pretense is dropped, and Jesus begins to speak plainly. You can hear the frustration in his voice when he says, "Why do ye not understand my speech?" If you'll remember, our faithful narrator made a point to tell us that even though Jesus went to great pains to connect the dots for the Jews, they still could not grasp what Jesus was saying (cf. vs. 27). But Jesus is done mincing words and so supplies the answer to his own rhetorical question: they could not understand what he was saying because they could not "hear [his] word." In this way, Jesus equates being cognizant of ideas (i.e., understanding) with being cognizant of sound (i.e., listening). They cannot comprehend the meaning behind Jesus' words simply because they cannot listen to him. They have closed off their ears to the truth of his words.⁶ If they

⁴ Some commentators—Carson (1991), p. 352; Köstenberger (2008), p. 265; Kruse (2017), p. 242—interpret the Jew's words as a thinly veiled slur meant to question Mary's virtue. It's possible that they knew she had been pregnant months before she was married. Thus, in asserting that they had not been "born of fornication," they could be implying that Jesus was the byproduct of some love affair. And to question the legitimacy of one's birth was an effective way of discrediting someone. Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 135 and Keener (2012), 1:759-760, cast doubt on such a theory thinking this is a purely defensive statement.

⁵ Keener (2012), 1:759.

⁶ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 135, quoting Blank, "From a not wanting to hear develops a not able to hear, an incapability of giving a hearing to the message of Jesus. Unbelief has become an attitude of life in self-enclosure, a hardening or stubbornness."

were to do them, they would realize the truth of them (cf. 7:17).⁷ But they will not do what they will not even listen to. "The flaw is therefore not with the communicator, but with those whose values and prejudices make them constitutionally unable to hear."⁸

By doing so, they have revealed the identity of their true father. And, once again, just so that he is not misunderstood, Jesus states in no uncertain terms, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." They are the offspring of demons. And, in the same way, that Jesus does as God wants him to do, so, too, are the Jews driven by the "lusts" of Satan. Theirs is a mind twisted by the prince of darkness so that they will only do dark things. Where do they think their homicidal thoughts came from if not from that serpentine being who was, as Jesus explains, "a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." With his forked tongue, he bewitched Eve, who then went and convinced Adam to eat that forbidden fruit, effectively dealing death to all of us.⁹ This is not to say we are entirely innocent. We still disobey. As our parents did before us, we still take the forbidden fruit. Ours are the hands that dig our own graves. But it was Satan who first taught us how all the while telling us it was the only way to truly live. "Satan thus became the murderer of the whole human race."¹⁰

What's more, the Devil of devils wasn't only a murderer from the start but a "liar" *and* the father of liars. "When [Satan] speaks a lie," Jesus explains, "he speaks of his own." "Speaks of his own" is an idiomatic phrase that means lying comes as naturally to the Devil as flying does to a bird (cf. Mat. 12:34).¹¹ Or, to borrow another turn of phrase, essentially, Jesus was saying that Satan's "native language" was deceit itself.¹² And in the same way that a person's cadence, inflection, and accent might give away their nationality, traits like dishonesty and violence reveal a person's spiritual parentage. To lie is to follow in the footsteps of the father of all lies as a child might aspire to be like their dad. To murder is to mimic the architect of all murders, similar to how a follower might emulate their mentor.¹³ Jesus said they would've recognized him if they would've known God (cf. vs. 19). And the only reason why he acknowledges that they were children of the Devil was because Jesus knew the Devil personally (cf. Matt. 4:1-11).

⁷ Kruse (2017), p. 242.

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 353.

⁹ Keener (2012), 1:760.

¹⁰ Morris (1995), p. 411.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Köstenberger (2008), p. 267.

¹³ Interestingly, while the religious leaders and Judas were the hands that dealt the blow, John will later reveal that the true mastermind behind the crucifixion was Satan himself (cf. 13:2, 27).

As they should've seen the resemblance between Jesus and God, our Lord notices the striking similarities between them and that old sinuous serpent (cf. Gen. 3:1).

Jesus then says it is precisely because he “tells” them “the truth” that they do not “believe” him.¹⁴ Had the Lord come speaking lies, they would've received him. They would've thought the Son of God was one of them. After all, he would've been speaking *their* language. Instead, Jesus spoke a language that they could not get the hang of. The truth was on the tip of his tongue. And Christ's accent was so thick with the infallibility of God's word that they could no more understand what he was saying than the deaf can hear. The Jews had bought into the lies of their earthly father and were incapable of believing anything different. They had been sedated through demonic lullabies and refused to wake.

¹⁴ Carson (1991), p. 353.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 8

Text: John 8:39-45

When we resemble our parents, some might say that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. And while this is true when it comes to simple things like one's talents or characteristics, the truth of that statement holds even in spiritual matters. For instance, Jesus was the Son of God. As such, he was loving, caring, and only did what was right. Conversely, the Jews during this time acted in a way that proved their demonic parentage. They were children of the devil because, like their father, they set their minds to murder the innocent. Rather than love the Son of God, they loved their lies. As such, the resemblance between them and Satan himself was uncanny.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: