

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: Meeting Jesus *

* Topic: Jesus the Son of God (Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles) * Scripture: John 7-8 * 12/17/23 *

MAIN POINT

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way of salvation.

INTRODUCTION

What are some things people in our culture believe about Jesus and who He is?

The world doesn't have to completely reject the idea of Jesus to reject His great salvation. It only has to distort or minimize Him. Embracing Jesus as a great moral teacher, a prophet of God, or even one way of salvation among others is a rejection of the real Jesus, the only Name under heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). It's easy to be swayed by the opinion and politics of the world if we aren't firmly grounded in the truth of God's Word. The Bible leaves no room for doubt. Jesus is God and the only way of eternal salvation.

UNDERSTANDING

BACKGROUND ON THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LEVITICUS 23:33-44

What did the Law require Israel to do at the Feast of Tabernacles, and did it to represent to them?

They were to live in temporary shelters for 7 days, and have a sacred assembly on the eighth day, to help them remember their time of wandering in the wilderness before entering the promised land. This may also be a picture of our time on this earth before entering the new heavens and new earth after the millennium.

*Note to study leader: Israel added three customs to this feast by the time Jesus was here at his first coming, and these provide significant historical context to John chapters 7 and 8. It would be helpful to share these customs with your class. **

1. *Every day for the seven days during the festival, a priest would take water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it out in the Temple area. This symbolized thankfulness for the water God provided for their crops, and symbolized the prophecy that God would pour out his Spirit on Israel when the Messiah would come (Isa. 44:3).*
2. *On the last day, huge menorahs were lit, illuminating the whole temple area. And this light was visible throughout Jerusalem. This symbolized God's presence in the wilderness with Israel, and God's light when the Messiah would come (Isaiah 9:2).*
3. *People would wave palm branches while shouting "Hosanna" as a prayer that the Messiah would come (Psalm 118:25).*

* *For more information on the Jewish feasts, two good books are "The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel", by Victor Buksbazen, and "The Feasts of Israel", by Bruce Scott*

BACKGROUND ON JESUS ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM FOR THIS FESTIVAL

Note to study leader: Remind the class that the last time we read of Jesus' public actions in Jerusalem, we read of him healing a lame man during a spring festival (perhaps Passover), which had happened a year and a half before what we are reading here in John 7. At that time, Jesus had called God his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18), and that the way to eternal life was to hear Jesus' words and to believe in the one who sent him (John 5:24). This created a lot of tension between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. This was covered in last week's lesson.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 7:1-9

Note to study leader: Jesus told his brothers “I am not going up to this festival because my time has not yet fully come” (verse 8). And yet he went to the festival a few days later. This may sound like a lie, but we know Jesus never sinned. So how are we to interpret what he said? First, several of the older manuscripts have the word “yet” included in this verse (“I am not yet going up to this festival...”) which makes the difficulty disappear. But even if this word wasn’t in the original manuscript, the context around this verse makes it okay. Twice in the surrounding verses Jesus uses the word “yet”, showing he wasn’t promising not to go to the festival at all, but rather he was not going to go right now with them (“My time is not yet here” (verse 6), and “my time has not yet fully come” (verse 8). He wasn’t promising not to go to the festival at all, rather he was saying he would go based on God’s timing, not on any human agenda as his brothers were accusing him of.

Any thoughts on the “advice” Jesus’ brothers gave him in verses 3-5?

They were assigning motive and judging motive. Only God knows what is going on inside people (Luke 16:15; 1 Cor. 2:11), and we are wrong to make assumptions about other people’s motives, especially when there is nothing wrong with their outward actions (Matt. 7:16-18).

“Though there were so many base insinuations in it (Jesus’ brothers’ advice), He answered them mildly. We should learn from our master to reply with meekness.” Matthew Henry, Commentary on John.

What reason did Jesus give about why the world hated him, but it didn’t hate his brothers, and what lesson can we learn from this?

The world hated Jesus because he testified that its works were evil. A lesson we can learn is we need to preach the whole gospel. This includes teaching that we are all sinners, and sin results in eternal separation from God in hell. This will be offensive to some, but it is essential in helping someone see their need for a Savior.

“It is better to incur the world’s hatred by testifying against its wickedness than to gain its good will by going down stream with it.” Matthew Henry, Commentary on John.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 7:10-13 and 25-32

What were some of the various points of view on who Jesus was held by the people at the festival?

The leaders wanted to kill him. There was widespread whispering about him. Some said, he is a good man. People were afraid to speak up because they feared the leaders. Some thought he might be the Messiah, and some believed in him.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 7:37-52

How does Jesus’s declaration on the last day of the feast about living water flowing from those who come to him to drink, especially significant based on the Jewish custom of pouring out water on the last day of the feast (see page 1 of this lesson plan)? What did Jesus mean by “living water”?

The pouring out of the water symbolized God pouring his Spirit out on Israel when the Messiah would come (Isaiah 44:3). This was a declaration by Jesus that he was the Messiah. Note that people often wrongly assume Jesus called himself “living water”. What he actually said was “Let anyone who is thirsty come to him to drink, and living water would flow from them. And by living water he meant the Holy Spirit.

Why did the temple guards refuse to arrest Jesus, even though they had been given directions to do so?

The temple police knew only one thing for sure—no one had ever spoken with authority like Jesus.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 8:12-24 and 56-59

How does Jesus's declaration (likely on the last day of the feast) that he is the light of the world especially significant based on the Jewish custom of lighting the huge menorahs on the last day of the feast (see page 1 of this lesson plan)? What did Jesus mean by saying, "I am the light of the world"?

The light from these menorahs lit up the temple area and was visible at night in all of Jerusalem. Without Christ, we are in spiritual darkness. He not only shows us the way, he is the only way to God (John 14:6).

What did Jesus declare in John 8:24 and 58? What was the significance of these words? (Exodus 3:14.)

How did the Jews react to Jesus' claim? Why was their reaction so extreme?

Jesus was claiming to be God. The Jews clearly understood this, as evidenced by the fact they picked up stones to stone Him. In their minds, Jesus had committed blasphemy because He claimed to be God.

Considering what Jesus said in John 8:24 and 58, why does it matter what you personally believe about Jesus? (Note: the word "He" is not included with "I AM" in the Greek for either John 8:24 or 58)

An essential part of believing in Christ is believing who he is; the Son of God, who is himself God. As Jesus said, "If you do not believe that 'I Am', you will indeed die in your sins."

The train conductor in the Christmas movie "Polar Express" says to the children, "One thing about trains, it doesn't matter where they're going. What matters is deciding to get on." How does what Jesus said in these verses refute this bad doctrine.

Jesus's statements refute the idea that all religions lead to heaven. It definitely matters which train we get on! Jesus is the only way to heaven!

APPLICATION

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 8:31-34

According to Jesus, what really makes a person a disciple of his? What benefit will result from this?

Not just hearing Jesus' word but holding to it makes us disciples of Jesus. Then we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

Why is holding onto Jesus and his teachings necessary for freedom? What are we set free from?

Free from slavery to sin. We are also set free from our past. Our past cannot hold us captive from being able to serve God freely!

Why didn't the Pharisees think they needed to be set free from sin? What was wrong in their thinking?

The freedom Christ spoke of is freedom from sin. The Pharisees did not think they needed to be set free, since they were descended from Abraham, and because in their minds they were obeying the Law. But the Bible teaches us no one will be declared righteous by obeying the Law (Romans 3:20).

One other application would be to read all of John 7 and 8 this week to gain a better understanding of what Jesus taught about himself at this festival.

PRAYER

God, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus to this earth as our Savior. Thank you that through Jesus we can be set free from sin. We declare that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but our Savior, our Lord, and our God.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 7

7:1. Galilee (under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas) was safer than Judea (under the Roman prefect) for Jesus since the Jews were trying to kill Him.

7:2. The Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was celebrated in September or October, two months before the Feast of Dedication. It was also called the “Feast of Booths,” because people lived in temporary for the week of the festival to remember God’s faithfulness during Israel’s wilderness wanderings (Lv 23:42-43; cp. Mt 17:4).

7:3-4. Jesus’ brothers were naturally born sons of Mary. Their names were James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon (Mt 13:55 and Mk 6:3). Their poor advice stemmed from unbelief (Jn 7:5) and revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus’ messianic identity (Mt 4:5-7).

7:5-10. With “My time has not yet arrived”, Jesus was stating, “I’m not going up to the festival yet.” In verse 10, we learn that He also went up later, not openly but secretly. It surprises some readers to realize Jesus would at times combat opposition with human tactics rather than just overwhelm people with his power as God.

7:11-12. The charge that Jesus was deceiving the people may hark back to Dt 13:1-11 (cp. Mt 27:63; Lk 23:2).

7:13. The phrase they feared the Jews (cp. 9:22; 19:38; 20:19) refers to Jerusalem authorities represented by the Sanhedrin.

As he moved among the crowds, their confusion must have been obvious. Some thought him a good man, others a deceiver. It would have been politically incorrect to offer a public opinion, so all these little discussions took place in private. When we read Jews at the end of verse 13, we should understand a reference to official authorities. Then as now, some religious groups consider it unacceptable to disagree with the official opinions of leadership.

7:14-15. The Jews may include Judean crowds and Jewish authorities. Jesus lacked formal rabbinic training (as did His disciples; Ac 4:13), but His teaching and authority came from God (Jn 7:16; 8:28; cp. Mt 5:21-26; 7:28-29).

7:16. Unlike the teaching of the rabbis, the message of Messiah comes from God himself. It was obvious Jesus had not attended official rabbinical schools, so where did he get such learning? Notice they did not ask Jesus directly but discussed this among themselves. Interesting that in just about a year in this very city others would refer to Jesus’ disciples (Peter and John) as “unschooled ordinary men” (Acts 4:13). And this passage also evokes memories of Mark’s words, “The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:22).

7: 17. Although the question was not addressed to him, Jesus chose the opportunity to answer. My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. Then comes a verse that tells us both how to know the truth and how to know God’s will. God does not show us his will just to satisfy our curiosity; when we are prepared to do God’s will, then in God’s good time we will know it. Furthermore, only those prepared to do God’s will are prepared to discern the truth of Jesus’ words and the truth of Scripture as well. Jesus disavowed speaking for himself and deflected attention to the Father.

7:18-19 Jesus as authoritative source contrasted Himself with vain, false prophets (Dt 18:9-22). The Jews were proud of the fact that Moses had given them the law (cp. 9:28; Rm 2:17; 9:4).

7:20. This is one of several instances where Jesus was charged with demon possession (8:48; 10:20; Mt 12:24); the same charge was leveled against John the Baptist (Mt 11:18). Other charges against Jesus included breaking the Sabbath (Jn 5:16,18; 9:16), blasphemy (5:18; 8:58-59; 10:31,33,39; 19:7), deceiving the people (7:12,47), being a Samaritan (i.e., apostate, 8:48), madness (10:20), and criminal activity (18:30).

7:21. The one work Jesus referred to was probably the healing in 5:1-15.

Jesus' direct answer put an end to the private murmurings and opened a public dialogue. Apparently he touched a nerve with his reference to murderous hearts. Their response was, You are demon-possessed. This is one of several instances where Jesus was charged with demon possession (8:48; 10:20; Mt 12:24); the same charge was leveled against John the Baptist (Mt 11:18). But notice we have changed from "the Jews" in verse 15 to the crowd in verse 20, so the guilt is more widespread than it was just minutes ago. Whatever the motive, they seemed hesitant to hurl the accusation.

7:21 The one work Jesus referred to was probably the healing in 5:1-15.

7:22. Circumcision was given by the fathers (i.e., Abraham; Gen 17:9-14) and Moses (Ex 12:44,48-49; Lv 12:3). Jesus' argument was "from the lesser to the greater." The Jews were to circumcise their males on the eighth day even if that day fell on the Sabbath (the "lesser" issue). If "perfecting" one part of a human body on the Sabbath was legitimate, how much more the healing of an entire person?

7:23-24. Jesus' statement about judging may allude to Lv 19:15

7:25–27. The religious authorities were trying to kill Jesus, but he spoke boldly and publicly without challenge. Is it possible, wondered the people, that the religious authorities have concluded he is the Messiah? Obviously not. Such thinking led many people into false conclusions about the origins of Messiah—a topic which left most in confusion. A twofold trap emerged from their misunderstanding. First, they determined they knew where Jesus came from (Nazareth), thereby denying the virgin birth. Second, they argued that no man would know the origin of Messiah, but the prophets spoke much of this with specific references to Bethlehem. As with many people today, ignorance of the facts about Jesus led them into further theological error.

Notice how John designated a specific group again—this time some of the people of Jerusalem instead of "the Jews" of verse 15 and "the crowd" of verse 20. The spotlight narrows from the broad pilgrims present at the feast to the locals who had made a regular practice of second-guessing their religious leaders. We should not infer that the Bethlehem reference of the Old Testament had been completely missed. The Herod-appointed scribes of Matthew 2 had no problem coming up with that name. But the spiritual blindness, especially in Jerusalem, had reached such levels that theological confusion about Jesus had clouded public thinking.

The next three scenes (vv. 25-31,32-36,37-44) center on the question, "Is Jesus the Christ?" Representative queries (in some cases involving misunderstanding) from the crowd serve as foils for dealing with this issue (vv. 27,31,42), in turn focusing on the supposedly unknown origins of Messiah, His performance of signs, and Bethlehem as Messiah's birthplace.

7:26. The authorities probably refers to the Sanhedrin (v. 48; 12:42)

7:27-28. Some rabbis taught that Messiah would be wholly unknown until He set out to procure salvation for Israel. Others felt His birthplace was foreknown (v. 42; Mt 2:1-6).

7:29-30. Once again Jesus answered rumors with direct proclamation. The origin of Messiah left most people in confusion, but that origin also linked him with God. In effect, Jesus' response to their confusion was three simple statements: (1) You know me in terms of my physical presence on earth; (2) but I really came from the Father and you do not know that because you do not know him; and (3) nevertheless, I know him because he sent me to earth.

So all this knowledge was no knowledge at all. John may have intended a deliberate irony in the way he recorded this passage. Since the Jews did not accept Jesus' divine mission, they did not accept the one who sent him.

7:31. Since Messiah would be a prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15,18) and Moses performed many miraculous signs at the exodus (Ex 7-11), Messiah was expected to perform miracles as well. It would have been natural for people to wonder, after witnessing Jesus' miracles, if He was the Messiah.

7:32-35. People misunderstood Jesus' statement in verse 34. Ever since the exile, many Jews had not returned to Palestine but continued to live in the Dispersion (Gk diaspora). Greeks is synonymous with "Gentiles."

7:36. Only six months remained in Jesus' earthly pilgrimage—the period from the Feast of Tabernacles to the Feast of Passover. So he told the crowd that his invitation would be activated by the ascension. Again the Jews interpreted these words in earthly terms. Where would he go? To the Diaspora, Jews living outside of Palestine around the Mediterranean world? Or would he go and teach pagan Greeks?

All this seemed preposterous to Jews gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles, but that is precisely what happened in the early chapters of Acts. Paul sought out synagogue after synagogue across Asia Minor and Greece, proclaiming the gospel to Jews, Jewish proselytes, and pagan Gentiles.

The discussion then looks at two types of people in a household—a slave and a son. The slave is not a permanent member of a household but a son inherits the household, thus a son will be given power. In this instance it is a proclamation that Jesus as the only Son of the Father can offer a new truth that slaves will be freed and receive the inheritance of the household.

7:37. While verse 14 referred to the festival being "already half over," this was now the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus' invitation harks back to OT prophetic passages such as Isa 55:1 (see Isa 12:3).

7:38-39. This great water ceremony reminds us again of the link between water and the Holy Spirit in John 4. Any thirsty people out there within the sound of Jesus' voice? Let them come and drink. And those who drink would have within themselves streams of living water. Streams of living water flowing from deep within Jesus' followers fulfill the end-time blessings predicted in the OT.

7:40-44. Finally, we see the invitation of Messiah is divisive to unbelievers. How typical of the gospel. Invariably in Acts when the gospel is preached, some people believe, some hesitate, some scoff, and some want to kill the messenger. On this occasion, some believed a portion of what Jesus said; some believed but did nothing; some got lost in religious arguments; and some reacted in hostile indignation. How foolish to recognize that Messiah was prophesied to come from Bethlehem and yet not check the facts of Jesus' birth. Rejecting hearts are blinded still to the fact that Christ's origin was not Galilee but Bethlehem; indeed, it was not earth, but heaven.

John kept dropping in references to the Prophet, a device in line with his messianic emphasis. Yet there was still no clear connection in the people's minds between Moses' promise of a future prophet and the coming of this Messiah. One thing was clear—the people were divided because of Jesus.

7:45-46. This chapter ends in an interesting way. John described conversations between the temple guards and the Pharisees. The officers who had witnessed all this and heard Jesus' words were impressed, more by his words than his works. But people who did not agree with the Pharisaic point of view were cursed.

John 8

8:1-6a. The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11. The Pharisees posed a dilemma. If Jesus agreed to stone the woman, he would incur the distrust of the sinners he came to save as well as break Roman law. But a refusal to stone her would make him vulnerable to the accusation that he treated the Law of Moses lightly. It is a sad commentary on the culture of first-century Israel that they brought in the woman but no mention is made of the man. The sin of adultery and its handmaiden, divorce, represent almost the norm in modern America. But at least in our day we recognize mutuality of responsibility.

John left no doubt regarding the Pharisees' motivation: They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. So the chapter begins with public accusation, but it also goes on to talk about personal guilt. In one sense the Pharisees stood on solid ground with their appeal to the Law of Moses (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24), but the law was not as clear as their accusation seems to imply. For example, her marital status would be a defining factor.

8:6b-8. Interpreters seem fascinated by Jesus' writing in the sand, certainly a reaction unexpected by the Pharisees. Why did Jesus do this? What did he write? One answer suffices for both questions: We do not know. It is useless to speculate, as some have done, that he wrote the names of other adulterers who were standing there among the group of accusers. We are bound to the text which tells us nothing more than that Jesus refused an immediate or reactionary response to the Pharisees' accusation. The centerpiece of this scene is the Lord's answer: If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

The writing in the sand was followed by the wisdom of the Son. This rubric is certainly valuable for judgmental Christians in our times. The perfect reply preserved both Jewish and Roman law while exposing the wickedness of the accusers. As Jesus began writing on the ground a second time, they had time to think about their own lives and God began to speak to those who were open to hear his voice. Again the accusers were brought face to face with the law they themselves had quoted. According to Deuteronomy 17:2-7, the witnesses of a crime who had reported it to the authorities would be the first to cast the stones.

8:9. What followed was the withdrawal of the sinners, one at a time, the older ones first. Did the older ones leave first because they had more time to accumulate sins of their own? Was it their maturity and sense of impending judgment that made them fleet of foot to escape this embarrassing predicament? Did they recognize that perhaps their sin was greater than the woman's and Jesus knew that full well? Again, the text does not tell us. But conscience must have played some role in this scene as the accusers left Jesus alone with the woman. Imagine a stage play as you watch in silence—no dialogue, no music. The confident and critical Pharisees, moments ago pointing their fingers at the woman and at Jesus, now silently exit stage right or stage left without another word. Christians are not perfect—just forgiven. And because of the extent of God's forgiveness to us, we ought to be the least judgmental people in the world.

8:10-11. The first two scenes of the story described the charges and their response. Now we come to the verdict. With the accusers gone, there remained no condemnation. The Son of God refused to press the issue. Her sin was not just set aside; soon Jesus would pay the penalty for both the woman and her accusers.

8:12. Here we find the second of seven "I Am" passages in John's Gospel. Like water (ch. 4) and bread (ch. 6), light is necessary for life. And the Lord wasted no time in explaining that spiritual light comes to those who willingly follow Him. Since light is one of John's major themes, several assumptions arise from this verse. One is that the world needs light, something John has already told us in chapter 1. There are conditions for seeing and knowing the light—following Jesus. Finally, walking in the light can be permanent. The light of life can change a person so that he or she need never again walk in darkness.

Chapters five, six and seven of John's Gospel have picked up three major Old Testament wilderness reminders of how God dealt with His people: the comparison between manna and the bread of life in chapter 6; the comparison between water in the desert and the water of the Holy Spirit in chapter 7; and here in chapter 8 a comparison with the pillar of fire which led the people through the wilderness and Jesus, the light of the world. The Feast of Tabernacles was also known as the Feast of Lights because of the many ceremonies that involved various kinds of lighting. From the earliest verses of the first chapter in this Gospel, John has been fascinated with the link between light and life. Here, however, we do not have a statement about everyone participating in the light, but the exclusion of all who do not follow the true light.

Some interpreters have suggested that Jesus may have drawn His illustration from the great candlestick (Menorah) which cast its light over the room in which He was teaching. Everyone there knew the Menorah would be extinguished after the feast. But Jesus indicated that His light would remain forever.

8:13-14. As we might suspect, Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees. They argued that His own self-defense was not admissible evidence. But of course it was, since He is the omniscient, impartial, and perfect Son of God. They misunderstood and misconstrued everything He told them. When He spoke of heaven, they thought of Nazareth. When he mentioned the Father, they impugned the legitimacy of His birth. When He spoke of home, they concluded He was planning suicide.

8:15-18. Throughout this Gospel, the author emphasized words of Jesus that referred to His own deity. There was no question in John's theology that Jesus is God. This constant reference to the Father both in relationship and authentication forms a uniquely Johannine trait.

8:19-20. Since Jesus had identified the Father as one of the witnesses to His message, the Pharisees asked of His father's location. Notice the absence of the capital letter in their question. Jesus referred to heaven, while they pondered His earthly origin. But since they had rejected His message, they had no understanding of the Father.

All this happened in a public place, at the temple where the offerings were received. But no one assailed Jesus because His hour had not yet come. This important phrase appears seven times in John's Gospel. At the end of the passage Jesus issued a threat that must be proclaimed to all who reject Christ. In human law a clever attorney can create innocence out of guilt and let murderers and rapists go free. But there is no escape from the law of God, no universalism, no second-chance gospel in the message of the New Testament.

21-29 "Those that live in unbelief, are for ever undone, if they die in unbelief. The Jews belonged to this present evil world, but Jesus was of a heavenly and Divine nature, so that his doctrine, kingdom, and blessings, would not suit their taste. But the curse of the law is done away to all that submit to the grace of the gospel. Nothing but the doctrine of Christ's grace will be an argument powerful enough, and none but the Spirit of Christ's grace will be an agent powerful enough, to turn us from sin to God; and that Spirit is given, and that doctrine is given, to work upon those only who believe in Christ. Some say, 'Who is this Jesus?' They allow him to have been a Prophet, an excellent Teacher, and even more than a creature; but cannot acknowledge him as over all, God blessed for evermore. Will not this suffice? Jesus here answers the question. Is this to honour him as the Father? Does this admit his being the Light of the world, and the Life of men, one with the Father? All shall know by their conversion, or in their condemnation, that he always spake and did what pleased the Father, even when he claimed the highest honours to himself." *Matthew Henry, Concise Commentary on John*

8:30-31. The primary obligation of a believer is noted in Jesus' call to "abide in My word." Abiding in Christ's word is the mark of a true disciple. The verse demonstrates that the test of a person who is truly a disciple is a continuing trust in Christ.

8:32. There is a strong theme for believers to know the truth, the revelation of God in Christ. Revelation is intrinsically tied to the redemptive plan executed in Christ. Thus the knowledge of the truth is both intellectual and effectual. The knowledge of this truth, knowing the Redeemer, carries with it freedom; the concept is tied to the Exodus where a first redeemer led God's people out of slavery, now the true Redeemer brings freedom for all people.

8:33. The reply to Jesus' call of freedom is strange because the descendants of Abraham have been imprisoned more than once. The Lord brought His people out of slavery in Egypt, God's people were exiled into captivity to Assyria and Babylon, and even at this time the Jews were subjects of Rome.

8:34 Jesus then explains the statement of verse 32. All people, even descendants of Abraham, are slaves to sin. This slavery is internal, not external, meaning that no one can flee. This type of slave can only be freed by a Redeemer.

8:35-36 The discussion then looks at two types of people in a household—a slave and a son. The slave is not a permanent member of a household but a son inherits the household, thus a son will be given power. In this instance it is a proclamation that Jesus as the only Son of the Father can offer a new truth that slaves will be freed and receive the inheritance of the household.

8:37-38. Jesus takes on the claim in verse 33, "We are Abraham's descendants," by telling them He knows. But these descendants are trying to kill Him and refuse the revelation that Christ brings. Receptivity of Christ is not based on the power or eloquence of His message but on the hearts of the hearer. In this case, the Pharisees were so assured of their lineage they could not hear the truth that Christ offered.

8:39-40. The Jews repeat their claim of Abraham being their father. Jesus does not acknowledge the claim this time, instead trading descendants for children, implying that children should act like their father. If they were Abraham's descendants they would listen to the word of God as Abraham did, instead they wish to kill the Son of God who brings them a true revelation.

8:41. Jesus speaks out against His opponents telling them their father is not Abraham but is instead an unnamed father. They respond by referring to Hosea, stating that they are not “children of fornication.” They claim to have “one Father, God.” This is an appeal to the shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

8:42-43. Jesus immediately rejects their claim; if God were their Father they would know that Jesus came from God and love Him instead of hating Him. Their problem is that they cannot receive the revelation of Jesus in faith.

8:44. The conduct of the Jews points to who their father is not, God, and who their father is, the devil. The devil is then contrasted with Jesus Christ. The devil is called (1) a murderer, (2) a liar, and (3) the father of lying. However Christ came down to earth (1) to bring life, (2) to reveal truth, and (3) to give mankind power.

8:45. The interaction gives credence to Jesus calling out the Jews. While Jesus is the revelation of God by speaking the truth, the Jews because of their father do not believe. Jesus appeals to their strict following of the Law asking them to convict Him of a sin. They cannot name a sin because Jesus’ life and teaching match up, He is the embodiment of the truth that He preached from God.

8:47. The question of “why don’t you believe me?” is answered in verse 47—only the one who is a child of God and belongs to God listens to the revelation of Christ. The idea is tied into the Pharisees not understanding in verse 43, and includes the idea of hearing, believing, and following.

8:48. The accusation of the Jews to Jesus were outright insults, Samaritans were considered second-class citizens, and having a demon spoke to the source of Jesus’ words and power.

8:49-51. Jesus quickly dismisses the charge of a demon, and ignores the charge of being a Samaritan. At this point Jesus was well known, and in that people knew He was from Nazareth, thus the claim of Samaritan did not need to be addressed. Jesus further demonstrates His devotion to the Father, by not seeking glory. Jesus promised eternal life to his followers, the same followers who he promised freedom if they would keep His words in John 8:31.

8:52-53. The question of who would die and when and how and what would happen after death had occupied Jewish theology for centuries. Suddenly Jesus appeared, talking about life after death in almost casual terms and assuring hearers that acceptance of truth meant that true disciples would never die.

8:54-56. True disciples of Jesus are hated by the world. Jesus had been trying to tell them since the beginning of the discussion that he did not stand alone in witnessing the truth of his message. In fact, it was not his message at all but the message of the Father, the one they claimed as their God. Interpretations of these verses must recognize two different Greek verbs translated by the English word know in verse 55. These religious leaders did not know God by experience (oidao), but Jesus knew him by personal relationship (ginosko). Jesus came to tell them the truth about his relationship with the Father.

The reference to my day in verse 56 delineated Christ’s birth and time on earth. Some interpreters have narrowed it to the crucifixion and/or resurrection, but such a scenario seems unwarranted here.

8:57-59. By this time the rejecting skeptics’ patience had been bent to the breaking point. This young man (interesting they should say not yet fifty years old) had seen Abraham? Jesus’ response provided the final blow. Once again he picked up a theme from the Old Testament: “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’”” (Exod. 3:14). In this chapter Jesus made himself equal with God, a cornerstone of biblical theology. How did they respond? They picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus slipped away from the temple grounds.