

Abraham's Children (John 8:37–47)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (December 5, 2021)

Introduction

1. The dispensational view of biblical interpretation rests on the belief that the physical descendants of Abraham are the people of God. This view necessitates a distinction between Israel and the church. The church exists because of Israel's sinful disobedience in the OT and rejection of their Messiah, Jesus. God *temporarily* suspended His work with Israel until the end of the gospel age when Jesus returns to rule over them during a literal thousand-year reign in Jerusalem. This millennial age will be followed by a final rebellion and the end of time.

The *church* poses somewhat of a problem for dispensationalism and must be viewed as an added but secondary purpose, playing out until the end when the focus of redemptive history returns to Israel. On the other hand, many non-dispensational scholars believe the church *replaces* Israel. This view misses the truth revealed in Isaiah (49:3). The context reveals God's Son to be the subject of that statement. Jesus is the *fulfillment* of Israel.

2. In the text before us, John reveals that Abraham's true offspring are *spiritual*, not natural. Paul closed Galatians with a truth to be remembered: "*Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation*" (Galatians 6:15). The children of Abraham are identified by the works of Abraham (John 8:39).

Jesus promised that those He made free would be truly free (8:32) from their enslavement to *sin*. Because of their long history of sinful rebellion, they were constantly under the yoke of enemy nations God used to punish them (Psalm 106:39–43). Jesus spoke not of bondage to *foreign enemies* under whose thumb they now lived but of their enslavement to sin (8:34).

3. The *nature* of God's salvation was misunderstood. The Jews assumed that the many promises of deliverance in the OT were due to their DNA. They understood salvation, not on a personal but on a national level. God was to save the nation by His Messiah, but the issue of personal salvation was covered by works—the traditions of the elders. But salvation is transforming grace intended to glorify God (Leviticus 10:3).

I. Fickle Faith

1. John introduced the theme of false faith in Chapter 2 (John 2:23, 24). Many people who claim to believe in Jesus do not have true saving faith. Thus Jesus warned, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21).
2. The issue of fickle faith becomes the center of this very heated exchange. What began as a seemingly harmless statement quickly turned into an exposure of false faith (vv. 30, 31). The passage reveals five things that proved these "believers" false: (1) they were not free but slaves to sin (v. 34); (2) they were indifferent to Jesus' Word (v. 37); (3) they exhibited the nature of their true parent (vv. 38, 44); (4) they were liars (v. 55); (5) they followed the mob, even attempted murder when offended by what they heard (v. 59).

II. True Faith

1. Like father, like son. Abraham believed, trusted, and obeyed God. Therefore, all true children of Abraham should live like Abraham (Psalm 22:23).
 - a. Of Jacob and Esau, God said: “*I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated*” (Malachi 1:3). Paul explains this quote from Malachi in Romans 9:8, 11.
 - b. God’s sovereign purpose takes precedence in all His works of salvation. God chose Jacob. There was no unfairness in this choosing for neither son qualified for God’s favor. Nevertheless, through *discipline* God providentially worked holiness in Jacob’s life (Proverbs 3:12; Genesis 32:26–28). *Israel* means “*God prevails.*”
2. The *New Covenant* promised (Jeremiah 32; Ezekiel 36) would be the means whereby His people would be transformed from self to serving Christ.
 - a. The *purpose* of this supernatural work is the vindication of the Lord’s name (Ezekiel 36:23).
 - b. The *result* of this work will be the fear the Lord in His people to the extent that they will never turn from Him (Jeremiah 31:40).
 - c. The *means* by which God will work this transformation in His people is defined in these texts: (1) forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Ezekiel 36:25); (2) regeneration through the new birth (Ezekiel 36:26a); (3) tenderness and sensitivity to God’s Word (Ezekiel 36:26b); (4) His Spirit’s enabling believers to walk in His statutes and obey His rules (Ezekiel 36:27).
3. Jesus did not seek to talk the false believers into changing their minds. He did insist that would-be followers count the cost (Luke 9:62).

Only the transformational work of the Holy Spirit can accomplish real change, as promised in the New Covenant. Christ came to be the mediator of this New Covenant (Hebrews 8). Therefore, “*Whoever is of God hears the words of God*” (John 8:47a). On the other hand, “*The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God*” (John 8:47b).

Conclusion

1. The tragic truth revealed in this message is that, like Israel, the church is filled with people who function by fickle faith. Fickle disciples vacillate between hero worship and mass discontent. The simple truth that separates true disciples from false professors is “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples*” (John 8:31).
2. A genuine disciple *remains* in the Word (Christ’s teaching) “*to observe all that I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). Obedience is necessary for one to remain in Christ’s teaching.
3. In other words, *perseverance* is the mark of true faith, but it comes with glorious consequences: “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).