

Exegetical Notes, John 8:48-58

“Before Abraham, I Am”

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John 8:48-58

Verses 48-51

The Jews answered him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”⁴⁹ “I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus, “but I honor my Father and you dishonor me.⁵⁰ I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.⁵¹ Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

- For many days Jesus had been engaged in a great debate with the leaders of Israel. He accused them of not being able to hear his message because “they did not belong to God.” See John 7:47.
- In return, they accused Jesus of being a Samaritan who was possessed by a demon. They knew that Jesus grew up in Nazareth which was not in Samaria. They may have been suggesting that his father was not really Joseph but some unknown Samaritan because they knew the story about Mary conceiving before she had lain with Joseph. Or they may have been implying that Jesus was so lax in keeping Jewish rituals and his theology so far from orthodox Judaism that he was, metaphorically, nothing more than an outcast, a Samaritan. The accusation that he was demon possessed meant that he was controlled by one or more evil spirits. Often this possession by an evil spirit made the one possessed appear to be insane or out of their normal mind. See John 10:20. .
- Jesus denied their accusation that he was demon possessed. He told them that he was not self-seeking, but they dishonored him by refusing to listen to his teaching and by seeking his death. He said that God would honor him, even if they did not, and that they would be judged by God for their treatment of him.
- He told them that those who did receive his message, those who believed in him, would not die.

Verses 52-53

At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death.”⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

- At Jesus’ promise of eternal life to those who believed, the Jewish leadership was convinced that Jesus was crazy. All the fathers of Israel, all Israel’s prophets had died. How could Jesus promise eternal life to those who believed in him?
- Again, the great question is put to Jesus, “Who do you think you are?” By implying that he could give eternal life Jesus was declaring himself to be greater than anyone who went before, even greater than Abraham.

Verses 54-56

Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.”⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word.⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

- Jesus responded to the great question by telling them that he was claiming nothing for himself. He claimed that God was giving him glory.
- Jesus claimed that while they claimed to know God, they did not. He said that making that claim when it was not true made them liars. He declared that they neither knew God nor obeyed God’s word.
- Jesus claimed that Abraham rejoiced about the promise which was fulfilled in him. He said that Abraham rejoiced in Heaven when God sent his Son to earth.

Verses 57-58

“You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”⁵⁸ “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

- They were convinced that Jesus was crazy. He was too young to have seen or to have been seen by Abraham.
- Jesus declared that they were wrong again. He declared that he had existed before Abraham was born.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Before Abraham, I AM*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)