

God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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The Adulterous Woman

The material in chapter 7 introduces us to the events occurring in Jerusalem at the feast of Tabernacles. The material of chapter 8 occurs within this same context. John 8:2 sets the stage for the material of chapter 8. Compositionally, it appears that Jesus' discussion on light (vv 12-20) occurred at a later time than the events preceding it (the adulteress episode) and the debates which followed (vv 21-59) occurred at a later time(s) than the discussion of vv 12-20. A clue to this is the introduction of each dialogue piece with such expressions as: "then spoke Jesus again," "later Jesus spoke," "when Jesus spoke again," and "again Jesus spoke" or "once more Jesus spoke" (cf. vv 12, 21). These are all translations of the Greek word "*palin*" (again).

Scene Six (7:53-8:11): Jesus and the Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery

Then each went to his own home. 8 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts; where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. 7But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8Again he stooped

down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

The **players** are Jesus, a crowd of Jews (*laos* – people) who gathered around him, the scribes (*grammateus* -*Torah* Scholars known as the *Sopherim*), the Pharisees, and a married woman caught in the act of adultery. The **setting** is Jerusalem following the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles with a specific location in the Temple colonnades, most likely in one of the outer courts. The **action** is that of Jesus teaching the people somewhere in the Temple, a confrontation with Jesus brought on by the Jewish hierarchy over a woman caught in the act of adultery. The **dialogue** is that of Jesus' conversation with those who wanted to stone her to death, followed by his conversation with the woman. The **themes** are: the ongoing rabbinic role of Jesus (i.e., he is a *didaskalos* – teacher), a confrontation concerning an act of adultery, the attitude toward the woman by the Jewish hierarchy, what Jesus wrote in the sand, the reaction of the Jewish hierarchy to what Jesus said and wrote, the attitude of Jesus toward the woman, and Jesus comments to the woman concerning what she had done.

This text may be viewed as a drama in which the different players on stage are made to stand before the judgment seat of human opinion and how they all fare in this hypothetical courtroom confrontation. A drama can assume different forms; this one takes on the form of tragedy, and then turns into something of a comedy with a moral conclusion. Developing this text with a courtroom scenario leads to some very insightful revelations about the players in this scene. The first player to be put on trial is Jesus himself.

Jesus before the Judgment Seat of the Self-righteous (8:2-6a)

Roman authority refused anyone of their realm to exact capital punishment but the Roman government and, specifically, Roman officials. The Law of Moses (*Torah*) said that one taken in adultery should be stoned to death (Deut 22:22-24).

If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man

who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel. ²³ *If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her,* ²⁴ *you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death-the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.*

The dilemma confronting Jesus was whether he would encourage obedience to the Law of Moses or, by implication, encourage disobedience to *Torah*. If he chose to encourage obedience to Moses, he would incur the wrath of Rome, if he encouraged disobedience to Moses, he would incur the wrath of the crowd thus proving himself to be a false prophet or no prophet at all.

Even though this situation took on the look of a concern about the actions of the woman, the motives of the Jews bringing her to Jesus in the Temple was for the purpose of putting him on the horns of a dilemma. In the context of the courtroom scenario, there is the adulteress as the accused, the scribes as the prosecutors, and Jesus as the judge. The case is presented as such: the woman before the court has been caught in the act of committing adultery. The *Torah* states that such a one should be put to death. With eyewitness testimony, the case seems open and shut. In this situation, however, Jesus as judge is the one on trial.

The Self-righteous before Their Own Judgment Seat (8:6b-9a)

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸*Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

Here Jesus turns the dilemma back on the prosecutors. The case was not so open and shut as it had been presented. What Jesus wrote in the sand seems to indicate this. Wouldn't you like to know what he wrote in the sand? Some scholars say that his writing in the sand was just a distraction designed to allow the woman's accusers to slip away without having to look him in the eye. Others say that he wrote something to remind them of

Exodus 23:1-9 on the rules of justice, mercy and prejudice. The *tannaitic* tradition (i.e., the teachings of the rabbis or elders) of this period of Judaism was decidedly prejudiced against women, leading some to think that Jesus was addressing this issue in his scribble.

This action of writing on the ground, however, is mentioned twice. He wrote on the ground, then stood and said to the woman's accusers, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." This is usually taken to mean that we all sin, therefore we should all live and let live because one sinner cannot consistently accuse another of sin without condemning himself. This is not likely. Looking at the course of events played out here one sees Jesus forcing this woman's accusers to face something more incriminating than the fact that they were all, as corporate Israel, guilty of sin. What he wrote in the sand obviously had something to do with his comment to the scribes, and his comment had something to do with their case against this woman; else, why would they simply walk away from such a strong case against this woman and the obvious dilemma in which they placed Jesus? Perhaps, what he wrote in the sand the first time, followed by his comment to the scribes, and then his continued writing in the sand, had to do with their own violation of the law. When he stooped down the second time to write in the sand, what could he have written that would have given cause for such a flight from the fight they had started.

It would appear that it had something to do with some kind of inconsistency in their case, since that was what this whole issue was all about. This seems all the more plausible when one realizes that what these men were doing was in violation of the very *Torah* legislation they were using to confront this woman and Jesus. This legislation is found in Deut 22:22, "If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die." Where was the man? How could this woman be accused of committing adultery by herself? The text of the *Torah* initially addresses the behavior of the man who commits adultery with a married woman; the woman is to be punished as well, but not exclusively. This was the teaching of the *Mishnah* as well:

These are they that are to be stoned: he that has connection with his mother, his father's wife, his daughter-in-law, a male, or a beast, and the woman that suffers connection with a beast, and the blasphemer and the idolater, and he that offers any of his seed to Molech, and he that has a familiar spirit and a soothsayer, and he that profanes the

Sabbath, and he that curses his father or his mother, and he that has connection with a girl that is betrothed . . . (*Sanhedrin* 7:4).

The man, who was stoned first, was to be stoned naked but the woman was to be covered (*Sanhedrin* 4:3). According Deut 17:6, there must be two or three witnesses in order to but someone to death, and according to *Sanhedrin* 4:4, the first witness was to throw the first stone,

The place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the witnesses knocked him down on his loins; if he turned over on his heart the witness turned him over again on his loins. If he straightway died that suffices; but if not the second [witness] took the stone and dropped it on his heart. If he straightway died, that sufficed; but if not, he was to be stoned by all Israel, for it is written, The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death and afterward the hand of all the people [*Deut* 17:7], (*Sanhedrin*, 4:4).

Perhaps what Jesus wrote in the sand had something to do with this *Torah* and this *Mishnah* teaching. He may have written, referring to Deut 22:22, “both the man and the woman,” or perhaps, “first the man.” Either of these or a similar expression scribbled in the sand would have turned the dilemma back on this woman’s accusers.

The most glaring questions which jumps out of this text is - why was the adulterer not there, if they were so concerned with a strict adherence to the *Torah*? All of the *Torah* and *Mishnah* legislation addressed punishment of the man’s transgression first. If the scribes’ concern was to insist on Jesus’ strict compliance to *Torah*, were they not now in a situation of facing the same dilemma they had set before him, that of inconsistency? If this woman was guilty of adultery, then there must be an adulterer who made her an adulteress. To be in compliance with the instruction of Deut. 22:22, there must be a presentation of both parties caught in the act. They brought only one to trial, why was that, and how could they explain that? “At this,” says John, “those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.” Jesus appears to have completely turned the tables on the prosecution in this court drama. Placed in the position of a trial judge, Jesus would have been responsible for seeing that everyone in the court was in compliance with the law; if the prosecution’s case was flawed, then they had no case. Their case

was flawed with inconsistency and was thus thrown out of court. Somehow they realized that and withdrew. Why was that? It must have had something to do with what Jesus wrote in the sand.

The Woman before the Judgment Seat of Jesus (8:9b-11)

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

“Has no one condemned (*katakrino* – to give judgment against) you?” “No one, Lord,” says the woman. “Neither do I condemn you,” says Jesus. What does one make of the fact that Jesus’ didn’t condemn this woman for the sin of adultery? In the first place, Jesus was not an eyewitness to her transgression and could not have accused her, let alone, condemned her. She had, however, violated the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery, (Exodus 20:14).” As mentioned earlier, the punishment for this sin was given in Deut. 22:22-24. Death was the punishment for a number of transgressions of the Ten Commandments: idolatry, breaking the Sabbath, dishonoring father and mother, murder, and adultery. Capital punishment for these sins was not consistently enforced, if enforced at all during the Roman occupation.

Another reason for Jesus’ reaction to this woman is found in the words of John 1:17, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” So John 3:17, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him,” and John 12:47, “. . . for I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.” Or, perhaps, as he said to this same group later in this text, “You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my judgments are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me,” (John 8:15).” There is also the possibility that he read her heart, “for he knew what was in a man,” John tells us in John 2:25. There is also his emphasis on the theme of “mercy” found in the Synoptic Gospels, “But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice [Hosea 6:6]. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners,'” (Matt 9:12); and in Matt 12:7, “If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' [Hosea 6:6] you would not have condemned the innocent.”

Although he tells the woman that he did not condemn her, his admonition to her regarding her sin is clear, “Go your way (*pouromai* – proceed) and from now (*apo tou nun* – from this moment) you are not to sin (*hamartane* – present imperative). The imperative is the mood of command; Jesus commanded her to stop her life of sin. There is no attitude of acceptance of sin in Jesus’ words here. His reaction to this woman cannot be interpreted as acceptance of her sinful behavior. His command to her to cease from the behavior that brought her to him is explicit and beyond question – sin no more.

***Scene Seven (8:12-20): Jesus Continues to Teach in the Temple:
the Leaders Continue to Challenge His Claims***

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ¹³The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." ¹⁹Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" ²⁰"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

Within this scene we have Jesus and the Pharisees as players. The setting is the Temple colonnades sometime following the feast of Tabernacles. The action and dialogue is that of another verbal exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. The themes all have to do with the identity of Jesus. He claims that he is the light of the world, and the Pharisees reply that he is a false witness of God, which is followed by a claim of Jesus claim to have been sent by God, whom he identifies as, “my Father.”

There is a significant amount of symbolism in this Gospel, most of it

rooted in the traditions of Judaism and, more specifically, the love of the poetic metaphor in Hebrew literature. Such is the case with Jesus' use of light here in this text. Light is used in two distinctive ways in Jewish theology: (1) as that which dispels darkness, and (2) as a manifestation of the presence of God.

Used as a metaphor for illumination, light is that which makes it possible to see, and in this sense light is often used for knowledge or enlightenment (i.e., mental illumination). Psalms 119:105 is a good example of this, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Light is often contrasted with darkness in Scripture, usually as a metaphorical contrast between truth and error, knowledge and ignorance, right and wrong, righteousness and sin, etc. The poetic metaphor is a very essential literary device in Hebrew literature; especially, the *Tanakh* (OT Scriptures). It is a figure of speech which stands for something else because the one possesses characteristics like the exemplar.

The second use of light in Judaism is, perhaps, more significant for our purposes here. Light, in ancient and modern Jewish theology, is a symbol of God's presence (i.e., his glory). Manifestations of God, called theophanies, are often portrayed in Scripture in the form of light (cf. Exodus 3:1-6). In fact, God's presence with Israel in the wilderness was consistently represented by light (i.e., a brilliantly glowing fire or illuminated cloud: Exodus 3:1-6; 16:10; 19:16-22; 24:17; 25:8 and 40:34-38). When Moses came down from Sinai, where he had been in the presence of God, his face shown so brightly that he had to cover it with a veil (Exodus 34:29-35). When the temple was dedicated, God's presence in the temple was represented by the *shekinah* light [the light which "dwells/tabernacles" among men], (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron 5:13-14; 7:1-3).

The symbolism of light in the night celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, just concluded, was to call to memory God's presence with their fathers in the wilderness. In this context, the symbol of light represents the presence of God. This is the most natural understanding of Jesus' words, "I am the light of the world." Taken with the fact that Jesus introduces this statement with the Greek expression, "*ego eimi*" (I AM), which is the expression found for God's name in the Greek Septuagint version of Exodus 3:13-15 (especially for the Greek speaking Diaspora Jews), it would appear that what Jesus is doing here is nothing less than claiming to be the presence of God, who has come into the world to provide illumination to those who are in darkness.

Both meanings of light discussed here may be applied to Jesus in this Gospel (cf. John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46). Also of significance here is John's use of the symbol of "glory," (cf., John 1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 40; 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24). Also of significance is the fact that when the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth appeared to Paul, he appeared in a manifestation of light (cf. Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13), which would have been a theophany, an appearance of God.

Scene Eight (8:21-30): Jesus Continues His Messianic Claims and Calls upon the Jews to Believe in Him

Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."²²This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"²³But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.²⁴I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."²⁵"Who are you?" they asked.²⁶"Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is true, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."²⁷They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.²⁸So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."³⁰Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

The dialogue here consists of Jesus' affirmation of his messianic identity and the Jews challenge of his claims. The themes have essentially to do with the identity of Jesus: his ascent to God, his identity as one from above (his descent from God), his claims of an otherworldly origin, and the deadliness of their disbelief - they will die in their sins. The Christological title "Son of Man" is of great significance. The Jewish belief that the Messiah would be a great scholar and teacher of God is present here. Jesus speaks nothing but what the Father has told him to say, God is with him and what he does is pleasing to God, and the continuing theme of faith - "many put their faith in him."

The claims of Jesus here in these verses are astonishing, but serve to

show the emphasis Jesus placed on the importance of arousing the people's interest in who he was. In verse 23 he claims, "I am from above" and "I am not of this world." He is saying, in no uncertain terms that he is an otherworldly being, someone who has come into this world from another world - a heavenly realm of existence. In much of the apocalyptic literature of this period, there was the belief that a redeemer from beyond this world would be sent from God to deliver Israel (1 Enoch 45-51; 4 Ezra 7:26-61; 13:1-58; 2 Baruch 29-32; 39-40; 51; 70; 72-73). The imagery of a heavenly savior figure who appears to have been drawn from "the son of man" figure, so prevalent in all of these apocalyptic writings, are, no doubt, drawn from Dan 7:13-14, 26-27. The belief that the Messiah would be an otherworldly being was clearly a part of the messianic beliefs present within some aspects of first century Judaism. In fact, many different messianic beliefs, with a variety of messianic figures, were current in the Judaism of the first century Mediterranean world.

Jesus' words that he was "from above" and was "not of this world" would have raised a major question in the minds of these Jewish pilgrims as to who and/or what they were being confronted with in this person Jesus of Nazareth, as is seen in 8:25. In his response to them (8:28), he even refers to himself as "the Son of Man," then adds further that by means of his being "lifted up," they would know who he was. What did he mean by this expression, "when you have lifted up the Son of Man"? In this Gospel, this is the way Jesus speaks of his death - his crucifixion. But how could his crucifixion reveal who he was? The answer to this question leads to a discussion of a very complex piece of theology - the theology of the cross. As challenging as this theological concept may be, the insight one gains makes the intellectual energy spent well worth the effort.

The cross was the means by which Jesus was subjected to Satan's greatest power over man - the power of death (cf. Heb. 2:14-15); and from which, by means of his resurrection, he emerge victorious over Satan, death, and the powers of darkness/Hades (cf. Rev. 1:13-18). What appeared to be a means of Satan's conquest of God became the means by which God conquered Satan. What appeared to be "thrown down in defeat" was, in reality, being "lifted up in conquest." Through his resurrection from death, Jesus of Nazareth rendered death (Satan) powerless to hold one within its realms, if that person believed that God could and would raise him up (John 11:25; Rom 10:9). That power which raised Jesus from death was his belief that it would happen. The cross was Christ's means of access into that realm of Satan

wherein he exercised his greatest power over man - the realm of death. It was by means of the cross that the resurrection was made possible, and it was by means of the resurrection that Satan's greatest and most powerful hold upon mankind was destroyed. This is how Jesus' crucifixion revealed who he was. As Paul says in Rom 1:4, Jesus was designated the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead. And furthermore, unless one believes this, he will die in his sins (John 8:24). According to verse 30, some did believe.

***Scene Nine (8:31-59): Jesus Continues His Debates with the Jews,
Continues His Messianic Claims***

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins (ho poion ten hamartian - present, active, participle – a habitual sinner) is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Those Jesus addressed here in this text are identified as, “the ones having believed in him, Jews;” and he says to them, "if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free," (8:31-32). To embrace a personality is one thing, to accepting his teachings and his claims about himself is another; but to know and live out of the teachings of that *didoskalos*, *kurios* or *rabbi* is what makes one his disciple. The Greek word for disciple is *mathates*, from the verb *matheteuo*, which means, “to be a follower of a master teacher.” Plato was a *mathates* of Socrates, and Aristotle was a *mathetes* of Plato. Saul of Tarsus was a *mathates* of Rabbi Gamaliel, as Gamaliel was a *mathetes* of Rabbi Hillel. One cannot be a disciple of a given teacher without being a student and follower of his teachings. This is what the synagogue was to the Jews, a *Beth HaSepherim*- house of the scrolls. The synagogue of Jesus’ time was essentially a *yeshivah* in which one’s faith was informed.

Because the term “Christian” has become a universal designation for someone who identifies with Jesus as a religious figure, the term does not tell

us much about how or to what extent a person is identified with Jesus. To call one “a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth” is another matter. To be a disciple of Jesus one must know and follow his teachings. It would be easy to say that the majority of those calling themselves Christians, could not, by definition, be able to call themselves “disciples of Jesus.” Why not? Because they are not actually students of his teachings; in fact, most hardly know his teachings, and the greater majority of those calling themselves Christians do not even lay claim to being a follower of his teaching in their daily lives.

Jesus says to those Jews that being his disciple required receiving his words. Jesus is saying something essential about those he considers to be his *mathetai* – disciples. It is those who know the truth (*aletheia*) that he considers to be his true disciples. Truth (*aletheia*) is knowledge that is consistent with the reality it identifies or defines. To say that one is a follower of the *aletheia* of Jesus, one must, of necessity, know the *aletheia* of Jesus. In this context, the *aletheia* of which Jesus speaks would be “christological truth;” i.e., the truth with reference to who or what he is - the truth of his messianic claims.

The Jews’ response to Jesus’ offer of freedom through the possession of truth resulted in a somewhat ridiculous claim that they had never been an enslaved people. “They answered him, ‘We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone’,” (8:33). What a curious statement. Did they not remember Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria, and now the Romans? There’s a history of enslavement to someone or something. Even their claim to being descendants of Abraham was not legitimate to Jesus. They were of the seed of Abraham (biological heritage) but they were not of the faith of Abraham. It was not Abraham’s bloodline that gained him God’s favor; it was his belief of God’s word to him that made him the friend of God.

They were an enslaved people who did not even know the depths of their enslavement. The "truth" of which Jesus spoke had the power to free them from that enslavement, defined in 8:34 as “sin.” “Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin,” Jesus insists. This same idea is found in Paul's writings, especially in Romans (cf. 5: 20-21; 6:6, 16-17, 19-22; 7:14). Sin is a reigning power that enslaves and destroys everyone who participates in it. Belief in Jesus of Nazareth (i.e., that he is who he claims himself to be) is the only thing that can free man from this malevolent power.

I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence and you do what you have heard from your father." ³⁹"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would ⁴⁰do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." ⁴²Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

In verse 38, Jesus claims to have been in the Father's presence, and in verse 42, he makes an even deeper claim, which reads literally from the Greek text: "I have come out of the Father." The Greek preposition *ek* (used in this grammatical construction) literally means, "out of the midst of from within the midst of." He claims to have come from or out of the very presence of God, and his audience responds to his claims as a violation of their monotheistic belief, as they received it from Abraham the father of monotheism. Jesus insisted that they were not sons of Abraham. He was the father of faith because of his belief of God's word, they, the Jews, were the sons of Satan, who was the father of lies. The lie they believed was the satanic lie that has repeatedly deceived man - that God was not God and he could not, nor would not, do what he promised man he would do. In Isaiah 40:3-5 God had promised that he would come to deliver Israel. The designated savior or deliverer in this text is *Yahweh* and *Elohim*, which the Jews did not take seriously. Jesus was in their midst in fulfillment of this very prophecy and they refused to believe.

There is a piece of valuable imagery here in this text. Nowhere is Satan more clearly identified for who and what he is than here in these words of Jesus. The very word Satan means, "the adversary." The biblical sense in

which he is an adversary is that he is the one who challenges the credibility of God.” The most essential thing for man to know about Satan is that he is a liar. Everything he says is a lie, even though he often couches it in enough truth to deceive us; everything he does is a lie, every promise he makes is a lie, and everyone who believes him becomes a slave to his lies – a slave to him and his defiance of God.

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. ⁵⁰I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵²At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" ⁵⁴Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵Though 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 keep his word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" ⁵⁸"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Jesus' identification of these people with Satan leads to a counter charge that it is Jesus who is one with Satan. "You are a Samaritan and demon possessed," they say. " Why call Jesus "a Samaritan?" The Samaritans were viewed by the Jews as half-breeds, having half Jewish and half pagan blood. Following the captivity of the Northern ten tribes of Israel in 722 BC, the Assyrians allowed those Israelites not carried off to be sold as slaves to remain on the land and work it. Foreigners were brought in by the Assyrians to oversee and work the land as well, many of whom intermarried with the Jews, producing the half-breed Samaritans. The word became a term of contempt, i.e., they were neither Jews nor Pagans, but rather half-breeds, a people with no credible identity. Another piece of information may be significant here. Because the area of Samaria was filled with foreign and/or pagan influences, it was condemned by the Jews as a place filled with idolatry and sorcery. In

Acts 8:9-13, one sees an example of this in the presence of Simon the Sorcerer, who had a number of followers in Samaria. The Samaritans were followers of demonic powers; therefore, Jesus was filled with demonic powers.

Also, in 8:41, the Jews make a curious statement, “We were not born out of fornication.” The expression, “*ek porneias gegennetha*,” literally translates, “out of fornication having been begotten.” It was the expression used for an illegitimate child. Some scholars see in this reference a subtle implication that Jesus was thought of by some to be such a person. With the pregnancy of his mother occurring during her betrothal period, there were possibly rumors that Jesus had been conceived out of wedlock and was a *manzer* (bastard). Perhaps, one scholar argues, they were throwing this accusation at him (cf. Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, pp 3-22). This “interpretation” is not possible in that there is no indication in any of the Gospels that Jesus was ever considered “unclean” by his community of Nazareth or the Jewish community at large. Deut 23:2 states that an illegitimate son is not allowed access to the religious community and its traditions. In Luke 2:21 and 41 we see Jesus undergoing the circumcision rite and dedication at the Temple, and in Luke 4:14 ff we see Jesus going from synagogue to synagogue preaching and in verse 16-22 he is given access to the bema and the public reading of the Scriptures. Such could have never happened if Jesus was considered a *manzer* by his community.

They, in a counter to Jesus’ charge associating them with Satan, accused him of having a demon (*daimonion echeis* – “a demon you are having”). This charge was also leveled against him in Matt 11:18 and 12:24-27. Here the term of derision was “Beelzebub (*beelzeboul*), the ruler of demons.” The most common form of argument used when all reason fails is “*reduction ad homo*” – reduce the argument to the man. In this way an attempt is being made to reduce the image of the man in the eyes of others by ridiculing or discrediting him, and thus reduce his credibility. The issue in the pursuit for truth is never “who” is right, but “what” is right. This is exactly what Jesus insisted upon. “Listen to what I am saying to you from the Father,” was his plea. “Our father is Abraham,” was their answer. “Then follow him in this matter, for he longed to see the day of the Messiah,” Jesus replied (8:56).

When they ask him if he thought he was greater than Abraham, the chief of all patriarchs, Jesus replied, “before Abraham was, I am.” The Greek here reads, literally, “Before Abraham became, *ego eimi* - I AM.” As in verse 12, Jesus uses the same expression found in Exodus 3:13-15 (of the Greek

Septuagint/OT) in God's revelation of his name to Moses. The Jews here clearly understood what Jesus was claiming. He was the one who identified himself to Moses as "I AM, *YHWH*." Before them stood the very presence of deity in the form of a man - and they took up stones to throw at him. How do we explain this type of behavior? Why were these people so full of disbelief? Why were they so incapable of seeing who and what he was?

MWLIII