

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #155

Who Is a True Descendant of Abraham?

John 8:37-40

37 "I know that you are physically Abraham's descendants. Yet even now you are looking for a way to kill me, because you do not hold to my word. 38 I myself am telling you what I have truly seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing 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 be doing what Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you decisively about the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Temple Courts in Jerusalem
Timeline	September (Month 31)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VI: Jesus' Later Judean Ministry
	B. Jesus' Ministry at the Feast of Tabernacles
	3. Jesus' 2 nd Teaching in the Temple: "I AM the Light of the World"
Title	v. Who is a True Descendant of Abraham?

COMMENT:

Jesus' ministry on the closing day of the Feast of Tabernacles continued as his teaching/discussion in the Temple courts escalated toward a bitter end. In today's reading the issue of who is a true "son of Abraham" was raised. In tomorrow's text the question of our spiritual parentage will go even deeper, to the ultimate level--God or satan. Today, the Light of the World illuminated the question of "who is a true Jew," or descendant of Abraham?

In the mid-first century, the membership and cultural background of the church underwent a critical transformation. The church began as a thoroughly Jewish fellowship, within Judaism. Jesus was a Jew, as were all the apostles, and 100% of the original disciples. All of these people shared the cultural background of first century Palestine in common.

Then, as the gospel was proclaimed in "**Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**," as Jesus commanded in Acts 1:8, Gentiles began to enter the fellowship. That created a problem. Did new believers have to become Jewish by undergoing circumcision, and pledge obedience to the Old Covenant Law?

On a practical level, since there are far more Gentiles living in the world than Jews, over the next 50 years the ratio of non-Jewish believers in the Church steadily grew, as did the number of churches that were outside of Palestine. The balance of influence in the church was shifting from its Jewish roots to its Gentile fruit.

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Persecution and ex-communication from the Synagogues of believers in Jesus grew during this period, creating more tension between the Gentile and Jewish elements in the churches. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. intensified this process. By the end of the first century most of the believers, churches, and leaders in the church were Gentiles. This was the environment in which John wrote his gospel. The problem of the relationship between the church and Judaism was a burning issue among believers in Jesus.

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, John remembered the way Jesus had anticipated and addressed this issue in his teachings and debates with the Jewish leadership during his final Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus did not expect Gentile believers to become circumcised Jews under the Old Covenant. He established a New Covenant that welcomed Jew and Gentile alike into the fellowship of the Trinity--the family of God.

Jesus taught in this text that it was not physical lineage that went back to Abraham that made a person his descendant--it was faith in YHWH--including Jesus as the Son of God--that made a person a child of Abraham, and more importantly, of God. This is what Jesus meant when he said: ***"If you were Abraham's children, then you would be doing what Abraham did."*** It was faith expressed in obedience that made Abraham righteous in God's sight.

Since the church has been primarily a Gentile spiritual fellowship for 1900 years, the issue that Jesus addressed in today's and tomorrow's readings seems rather matter-of-fact to most of us. However, it was a matter of life and death in the early church. It was critical for first century believers to base their attitudes and practices in the church on the firm foundation of the life and teachings of Jesus himself. Passages like these enabled then to do that.

APPLICATION:

Jesus taught that it was the faith of Abraham, not physical lineage, that made a person his descendant. This opened up the way for people of both Gentile and Jewish background to share together in spiritual fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and therefore with each other.

The concept of all believers, from every religious and cultural background living in unity as one family--one body--one church, was radical in Jesus' day, and it remains so today. Jesus had made us all one in him.

How can our common faith in Jesus overcome the cultural and social barriers that separate many of us today?

What can you do to promote unity among believers?