

## Lecture 40. The Light of the World, 8:12-20]

Translation of the Greek (*Synopsis # 243*).

No Synoptic Parallels

Follows Naturally 7:51

Indication that story of the Adulteress (found in some mss.) is an insertion.

**12. I-Am statement, with predicate**

See Lecture 32 (on chapter 6) for a list of these<sup>1</sup>

Not an essential definition of Jesus. Rather, who he is *in relation to humanity*.<sup>2</sup>

Contrast Matt 5:14 (Sermon on the Mount), **You** are the light of the world.

Johannine focus on the mystery of the person of Jesus.

**Feast of Tabernacles Context**

Recall that every night during the feast 4 menorahs were lit in the Temple

The pious danced under these lights.<sup>3</sup>

**The light of life**

Probably not like “the light of a flashlight” (light which comes from a flashlight)

Probably not like “the light of Joe” = “Joe’s light” (the light which belongs to Joe).

Probably like “the light of day” (the light which is the source of daytime)

**Torah as Light**

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching [*torah*] a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, (Prov 6:23 RSV)

Turn, O Jacob, and take her [the book of the Law, *torah*]; walk toward the shining of her light. (Bar 4:2 RSV)

For teaching [*torah*] shall go forth from me, and my judgment, as light to the peoples. (Isa 51:4 NAB)

[plague of darkness vs. Egyptians] For their enemies deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept thy sons imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world. (Wis 18:4 RSV)

He will shine forth the wisdom of what he has learned and glory in the Law of the Lord's covenant. (Sir 39:8 NAB, modified by PJM)

In his commandments he gave him [Moses] authority and statutes and judgments, to teach Jacob the testimonies, and to enlighten Israel with his law. (Sir 45:17 RSV)<sup>4</sup>

The Johannine Jesus is claiming for himself the role Torah plays in Judaism.

For Christians, the Torah is not replaced by a **book** (even the NT!) but by a **person**.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion, see “Appendix IV: *Egō Eimi*—‘I AM’” in R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, AB 29, 533-538.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 534.

<sup>3</sup> Moloney, *John*, 235.

<sup>4</sup> For Sirach, God's Wisdom is incarnate in the Torah: All this [Wisdom] is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. (Sir 24:23 RSV)

### 13-16. Discussion about Judgment

Two senses of Judgment

1. to pronounce a condemnation of someone
2. to demand a decision of someone: *Kr̄isis* > Crisis

Those who do not accept the Johannine Jesus **condemn themselves**.

### 17. “Your” Law

The Johannine Jesus distances himself from “the Jews.”

If this were a historical narrative about the 30’s, one would expect “our Law.”

This reflects the situation in the 90’s.

### 18. The Father Who Sent Me

Begins discussion of “fatherhood” – of Jesus and of “the Jews”

### 19. Where is your father?

More appropriate: **Who** is your Father

“The Jews” do not know the Father of Jesus

### 20. His “hour” had not yet come.

A reference to the passion narrative.

## Lecture 41. Argument with “the Jews” 8:21-30

Translation of the Greek (*Synopsis* # 244). **Omitted from recorded lecture to keep short.**

**Please pause the lecture and read one or more translations.**

### No Synoptic Parallels

### 24. First of Four Absolute Uses of *Egō Eimi* “I AM”<sup>5</sup>

8:24 Unless you come to believe that **I AM**, you will surely die in your sins.

8:28 When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that **I AM**.

8:58 Before Abraham even came into existence, **I AM**.

13:19 When it does happen, you may believe that **I AM**.

Three of the Four Johannine Usages are in Chapter 8

### Possible English Translations

“It is I.” Formula of self-identification. Answer to “Who’s there?”

Colloquial: “It’s me.”

“I am.” *Eimi* by itself means “I am.” Stating the word *egō* gives an emphasis.

We have to do this with italics in English, or by the tone of our voice in speech.

Contrasting self with others. “Who is strong enough to lift this?” “I am?”

I AM. The divine name.

### Background for “I AM” as the divine name.

There are 3 passages in the Greek OT where the phrase *egō eimi egō eimi* occurs

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<sup>5</sup> For details, see Brown, *John I-XII*, 533-534. I have used Brown’s translation of all 4 of the verses.

All of these are in Second Isaiah: Isa 43:25; 45:19; 52:12  
To save time we will look at only one of these in detail: 52:12  
But the same observation applies to the other two passages.

### Translations of the Hebrew of Isa 52:12a

I, *even* I, *am* he that comforteth you (KJV – puts into *italics* words not in the Hebrew)  
I, I am he who comforts you (RSV, NRSV, JPS Tanak, PJM)  
I, it is I who comfort you (NAB, NABRE)  
I, I am your consoler (NJB)

### The Greek OT's Translation of this passage can be rendered

It is I, It is I who comforts you OR  
I am he, I am he who comforts you

These preserve the poetic repetition, originally for emphasis (YHWH does this; not somebody else)

### By the first century A.D. the Greek was understood to mean

I AM I AM THE ONE WHO COMFORTS YOU

This may be punctuated in at least two ways

I am, I am the one who comforts you.

This preserves the meaning of the Hebrew

I am "I AM" who comforts you.

This introduces an idea not in the Hebrew<sup>6</sup>

The second "I AM" is no longer simply poetic emphasis.

Now it has become understood as the divine name.

This is the primary meaning that underlies John's use of the phrase.

### "The Jews" Misunderstand in Verse 22.

They wonder if Jesus is going to commit suicide.

He is not, but **ironically** it is through his death that Jesus will be exalted to where they "cannot come."

**Misunderstanding** and **irony** are two Johannine **literary** techniques to move the story along.

(Because they are literarily so "neat" they are historically suspect.)

### "The Jews" Misunderstand in Verse 24

They do not understand Jesus to say: "Unless you come to believe that **I AM** you will die in your sins"

But rather: "Unless you come to believe that **I am he** you will die in your sins."

That is why they ask in 25a: "So, who are you?"

The "answer," verse 25b, is notoriously difficult to translate.

### John 8:25b, The Various Translations of the Greek Fall into Three Categories <sup>7</sup>

I will spare you the gory details of Greek syntax

The colors represent various renditions of the same Greek words / phrases.

(a) **Affirmation:** **What** I have been telling you **from the beginning** (Brown, KJV, RSV, NAB, NET, NJB)

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<sup>6</sup> Post-lecture note. It is just barely possible that the Hebrew of Isa 43:25 and 51:12 could be stretched to mean this. In any case, the Greek text is much more easy to understand in this way, without "stretching" the meaning. The Hebrew of Isa 45:19 could not be so stretched no matter how hard one tried.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *John I-XII*, 347-348, discusses the details. There are actually **several** different translations under **each** possibility.

**(b) Question:** Why am I speaking to you at all? (Moloney, NRSV)

**(c) Exclamation:** That I speak to you at all! (No modern translation)

The Latin translations are based on a scribal mistake that gives a 4<sup>th</sup> possibility

**(d) [I am] the beginning who also speak to you (Douay)**

It is possible the text has become corrupted in transmission.

The other alternative is that John wrote gibberish, and would have profited from a good editor.

IMHO, Option “a” makes the best sense out of the nonsense.

### **V. 28 When you have lifted up . . . I AM**

Second occurrence of absolute *egō eimi*.

The Johannine Jesus uses “Son of Man” as a self-designation

Ironically their **hostile** action of “lifting up” (crucifying) Jesus

Will be completed by the “lifting up” (resurrection, ascension)

Which will reveal his true identity.

### **V. 30, Many believed**

Brown considers this an “editorial device” to break up the discourse into manageable portions.

It is not an “integral part” of the discourse.

The reason why will become apparent in the next lecture.

## **Lecture 42. The Truth Will Make You Free, 8:31-38**

**Translation of the Greek (*Synopsis* # 245). Omitted from recorded lecture to keep short.**

**Please pause the lecture and read one or more translations.**

### **No Synoptic Parallels**

#### **31. Audience “Those Jews who believed in him” ???**

That the remarks that follow are directed to believers is very hard to reconcile with the sharp disagreement uttered by these “believers” in vs. 33 and their desire to kill Jesus in vs. 37. . . . Almost certainly the words of Jesus in this section were addressed to the same type of disbelievers we have been encountering all along. However, when the editorial vs. 30 was inserted to break up the discourse, it was necessary to add a phrase in vs. 31 introducing Jesus’ words. Seeing the reference in 30 that there were some who believed in Jesus, the composer of 31 (the final redactor?) thought it reasonable to make them the audience for what would follow and saw no contradiction in describing these believers as “Jews.”<sup>8</sup>

Brown points out that in certain passages “the Jews” has a neutral sense in John.

#### **Moloney’s Solution**

The group of believers in vs. 30 is different from the group of believing Jews in vs. 31.

The narrator wants us to imagine that those in vs. 30 have departed

And Jesus is now dealing with a different group of people.

#### **Fr. Pat’s Solution**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel would have profited from an editor with a sharp eye and a sharp red pencil.

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<sup>8</sup> Brown, *John I-XII*, 354.

I have read many student papers (undergraduate & graduate-level) with similar mistakes. Even inspired writers sometimes have “modest” writing skills. Divine inspiration is no substitute for paying attention to grammar, syntax, and literary context. (The “verbal dictation” model for divine inspiration is impossible.)

### **V. 32, The truth will make you free.**

This has nothing to do with the “political spin” given by contemporary politicians / journalists. Moloney gives post-NT Jewish references that the study of Torah makes one free.<sup>9</sup> The concern here is the revelation which comes through Jesus.

### **V. 33, Offspring of Abraham**

Literally “seed,” a collective **singular** noun.

In Galatians Paul makes use of this to argue that Jesus is the true “seed / offspring” of Abraham i.e., because “seed” is singular, it refers to **one** person, i.e., to Jesus!

Is John hinting at a similar argument?

This is the first of 10 references to Abraham in the Gospel of John.

All 10 references are in chapter 8.

The theme of “Abraham” holds this part of the discourse (8:31-59) together.

### **Modern footnote**

Interreligious dialogue between Jews, Christians, & Moslems begins with Abraham.

All three monotheistic religions claim him as their first ancestor called from paganism by their God.

They argue about which of the prophets to follow Abraham was greatest: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed.

### **Never Slaves to Anyone**

Politically this is impossible: Israelites were slaves to: Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans. Perhaps they mean they have never been guilty of **idolatry**.

Perhaps they are referring to their spiritual freedom, even under domination.<sup>10</sup>

### **V. 35 Slaves [of Sin]**

A few mss. omit “of sin”; the great majority contain “of sin.”

This makes apparent that neither Jesus, nor “the Jews” are speaking of political freedom.

The theme of slavery to Sin (personified) is found in Romans 7.

According to Brown, the only other reference to humans being slaves to sin is 2 Pet 2:19.<sup>11</sup>

### **V. 37. Jesus acknowledges that “the Jews” are children of Abraham**

The discussion has not yet degenerated into a name-calling argument.

#### **You are seeking to kill me**

That is, you are not behaving as children of your father.

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<sup>9</sup> Moloney, *John*, 277. Post-NT references (whether Christian or Jewish) are best used with caution! They are at times helpful, but need to be taken with a “grain of salt”—sometimes an entire shaker of salt. Again, this applies to writings by Church Fathers, as well as to Jewish rabbis.

<sup>10</sup> Moloney, *John* 278; Brown, *John I-XII*, 355.

<sup>11</sup> The actual phraseology of 2 Peter is “slaves of corruption.” Brown, *John I-XII*, 355.

**The word *chorei* can have two different meanings**

I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word **hath no place** in you (KJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NAB, NJB, AB [Brown], SP [Moloney]).

I know that you are Abraham's descendants. But you want to kill me, because my teaching **makes no progress** among you (NET).<sup>12</sup>

The first meaning, preferred by the majority of translators, seems most natural to me.

**V. 38 Manuscript Differences reflected in Translation**

**Group 1. A distinction between the Father of Jesus / father of the Jews**

I speak that which I have seen with **my** Father: and **ye do** that which ye have seen with **your** father (KJV)

I speak of what I have seen with **my** Father, and **you do** what you have heard from **your** father (RSV).

I speak that which I have seen with **my** Father: and **you do** the things that you have seen with **your** father (Douay, based on the Latin Vulgate).

What I speak of is what I have seen at **my** Father's side, and **you too put into action** the lessons you have learnt from **your** father (NJB).

I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and **you do** what you have heard from your father (SP, Moloney).<sup>13</sup>

This group renders *poieite* as indicative, i.e., what the Jews **actually do**.

**Group 2. No distinction between the Father of Jesus / father of the Jews**

I tell you what I have seen in **the** Father's presence; then **do** what you have heard from **the** Father (NAB).

I am telling you the things I have seen while with **the** Father; as for you, **practice** the things you have heard from **the** Father! (NET).

I declare what I have seen in **the** Father's presence; as for you, **you should do** what you have heard from **the** Father (NRSV).

I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; therefore, **you should do** what you heard from the Father (AB, Brown).<sup>14</sup>

This group renders *poieite* as imperative, i.e., a command as to what the Jews **should do**.

**UBS Reading**

The United Bible Society Greek NT follows “Group 2.”

They give it a “C” rating (considerable degree of doubt).

At this point in the argument, Jesus is arguing “behave according to what you are”

I. e. children of Abraham (v. 37).

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<sup>12</sup> NET gives a note justifying this translation. Moloney (*John*, 278) notes that Hoskyns and Bauer prefer this translation.

<sup>13</sup> Moloney (*John*, 278) acknowledges that the words “**my**” and “**your**” are not in the best manuscripts, but are added by later scribes to clarify the meaning. Because he thinks the scribal “clarification” is correct, he includes the words in his own translation, even though he does not think that John actually wrote them. This corresponds to Moloney’s proclivity to have the final text of John “make sense.”

<sup>14</sup> Brown (*John I-XII*, 356) argues that the scribal “correction” was actually an error. It reads a later part of the discourse (vv. 39-47) back into the first part. This corresponds to Brown’s proclivity to acknowledge “tensions” within the final Johannine narrative, even if these tensions make the final text more difficult to understand.

### **I have seen in the Father's Presence. You have heard from the Father**

The Johannine Jesus seems to be referring to a pre-existent vision he had.

The alternative is that even now, he has a vision of God in heaven.

“You have heard” possibly refers to the Torah (if their “Father” is God)

It refers to a lie from the devil (if the distinction in v. 44 is understood here).

I interpret the passage as referring to the same Father for Jesus and “the Jews”

**See footnotes 13 & 14 above for my final points in this lecture.**

## **Lecture 43. Children of the Devil, 8:39-47**

**Translation of the Greek (Synopsis # 246). Omitted from recorded lecture to keep short.**

**Please pause the lecture and read one or more translations.**

### **No Synoptic Parallels**

#### **39a. Our Father is Abraham**

The interpretation depends on how one understands the final part of v. 38.

If Jesus has (already indirectly) referred to them children of the devil, they reject this in favor of Abraham

If “the Father” referred to by Jesus is unknown to them, they reject the unknown in favor of the known.

#### **39b. You would act as your father**

The underlying assumption is: “the son is like the father”

Those who love both good & evil people are “sons of the heavenly Father” (Matt 5:44-45)

James & John are “sons of thunder” (fiery disposition?)

The Lucan Paul calls the magician Elymas a “son of the devil” (Acts 13:8) because of his evil behavior.

### **English idioms**

“s.o.b.” (in this case, like one’s mother—as nasty as a dog with new pups)

Old English curse, “son of a gun”

When guns were first invented, they were regarded as practically demonic

Now, in light of atomic & biological weapons, flamethrowers, etc. they seem less terrible.

### **Grammatically Difficult Structure**

Real condition: “If Abraham **is** your father, **act** like Abraham”

Contrary-to-fact condition: “If Abraham **were** your father, you **would act** like Abraham

Mixed conditions: “If Abraham **is** your father, **you would** act like Abraham.

This appears to be what John actually wrote.

Many translations “smooth out” his grammar by making the whole statement contrary-to-fact.<sup>15</sup>

This is the **first time** in the discourse that Jesus denies “the Jews” are children of Abraham.

### **V. 41. We were not born of fornication.**

The “we” is emphatic. One possibility: it is a response to the emphatic “you” of the first part of the verse.

Second possibility: *We* were not born of fornication, [but you were!]

In the second century there were traditions that Jesus was illegitimately born.

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<sup>15</sup> Brown (*John I-XII*) translates the awkward structure literally.

Brown thinks it is possible (not certain) that such a slur is intended  
Moloney is also undecided about the relevance of such post-NT materials.<sup>16</sup>

#### **V.44 the Devil**

This is the first time “the Jews” are explicitly called children of the devil.

The argument has changed.

In the first part of the dispute it was: “You are children of Abraham; act like it!”

Now the argument has become: “You are acting like the Devil. You must be his children.”

#### **Devil as murderer**

A reference to the story of Cain & Abel

Interpreting “sin crouching at the door” (Gen 4:7) as the devil

See also Wis 2:24

#### **Devil as liar**

Interpreting “the Serpent” who deceived Eve in Genesis 3 as the devil

See also: Rev 20:2

Not the original meaning of Genesis 3

No OT text understands the serpent in Genesis 3 as the devil

#### **Summary of Argument**

The “argument” has degenerated into name-calling.

“The Jews” accuse Jesus of being illegitimate.

The Johannine Jesus calls “the Jews” who do not believe children of the devil

That is, they are liars and murderers.

#### **Comment on Contemporary Catholic Teaching**

It is improper to apply epithets hurled at certain first-century Jewish leaders to all Jews of every time.

Pope John XXIII invited the Jewish leaders of Rome to the Vatican

Vatican II repudiated the teaching that all Jews everywhere are guilty of the death of Jesus

Pope John XXIII modified the Good Friday prayer which referred to “the perfidious Jews.”

Pope Paul VI approved the new Good Friday prayer which we say to this day.

“For the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God . . .”

Pope John Paul II went to the synagogue in Rome, where he prayed with the Jewish people there.

#### **Quote from Raymond Brown**

Perhaps here we should re-emphasize that a chapter like John viii with its **harsh statements about “the Jews”** must be understood and evaluated against **the polemic of the times when it was written**. To take literally a charge like that of vs. 44 and to think that the Gospel imposes on Christians the belief that Jews are children of the devil is to forget the **time-conditioned element in Scripture**. (Esther ix with its reverse pogrom presents to thoughtful Jews a similar problem of time-conditioned religious attitudes.) Lest the picture seem too dark, we must

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<sup>16</sup> Brown, *John I-XII*, 357; Moloney, *John*, 41. Moloney refers to the work of John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Meier sees such second-century references as derived from the late first-century Christian claim for a miraculous birth of Jesus (in Matthew and Luke) rather than as independent historical information.

remember that this same Fourth Gospel records the saying of Jesus that salvation comes from the Jews (iv 22).<sup>17</sup>

### Lecture 44. Before Abraham Was, I Am, 8:48-59

**Translation of the Greek (*Synopsis* # 247).**

#### No Synoptic Parallels

#### V. 48, Name-calling continues.

Samaritan (racial slur); you have a demon.

In Mark 3:22-25 and parallels (*Synopsis* #117) we have “the Beelzebul controversy.”

The synoptic Jesus employs several arguments

How can Satan cast out Satan?

By what power do your experts cast out demons? (apply the same standard to me)

Even if I do cast out Satan by Satan, my main message is true: Satan is defeated.

The Johannine Jesus, by contrast, answers only of his relationship with the Father.

#### V. 52. We **know** you have a demon

Usually in the FG, when people say they “know” something, they are wrong.

#### VV. 52-54. Johannine Irony

The Samaritan woman could not imagine Jesus was greater than Jacob (at the beginning of the story)

“The Jews” cannot imagine that Jesus is greater than Abraham or the prophets.

John’s readers, the faith community, get the “inside joke.” They know Jesus **is** greater!

#### V. 56 Abraham rejoiced to see my day: Several theories<sup>18</sup>

1) Abraham had a vision of Jesus during his life (almost unanimous opinion until 16<sup>th</sup> century)

Post-NT rabbinic traditions: Abraham saw the entire history of his descendants in a vision.<sup>19</sup>

Heb 11:13 speaks of OT heroes (beginning with Abel, and including Abraham and Sarah) seeing the promise “from afar.”

2) Abraham had a vision of Jesus after he died (Bernard, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ICC, 2 volumes on John).

3) “My day” is an incident in Abraham’s life (birth of Isaac will lead to birth of Messiah).

Most likely interpretation is #1: John imagines Abraham as having a vision of the future during his life.

#### V. 57. You have seen Abraham?

Actually, Jesus does not claim to have seen Abraham.

He claims that Abraham saw “my day.”

#### V. 58-59. I AM

For a discussion of the meaning, see Lecture 41.

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<sup>17</sup> Brown, *John I-XII*, 368.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *John I-XII*, 359-360.

<sup>19</sup> Recall my earlier caution about the usefulness of post-biblical traditions (patristic or rabbinic) for interpreting what biblical authors meant “when the ink was wet.”

Previously “the Jews” have misunderstood the phrase *egō eimi*.

The fact that they pick up stones shows that this time they have understood it as the “divine name.”

### **John is not talking about “divine nature.”**

John never uses the word “divine” or the word “nature” even once in his Gospel.

The phrase “divine nature” occurs only once in the entire Bible (2 Peter 1:4)

It refers to a gift from God to those who believe in Jesus.

It is not something that makes Jesus distinct from believers.

The Johannine Jesus claims the same “name” as God.

Think of a son who is “named after” his father.

### **Parallel with divine Wisdom**

An attribute of the God of Israel is that he is “one.”

“Hear O Israel, the LORD is God; the LORD is **one**”

The book of Wisdom claims this attribute for Lady Wisdom

And she, who is **one**, can do all things, (Wis 7:27 NAB)

John claims the “name” of God for Jesus.

Neither the Book of Wisdom nor John is talking in terms of “divine nature.”

### **Later theology**

Develops these biblical images with philosophical language, such as “nature” and “substance.”

E.g., the current translation of the creed: “**consubstantial** with the Father.”

From the faith perspective these are **legitimate** developments.

From the scientific perspective these are legitimate **developments**.