

Freedom in the King

John 8:31-38

SS Lesson for 04/24/2022

Devotional Scripture: Isa 61:1-3

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: John 8:36

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

FREEDOM DEFINED (JOHN 8:31-38)

Freedom is abiding in the truth (31-33)

Abiding in the truth of God's precepts (Ps 119:43-45)

Abiding in the truth of God's sanctifying word (John 17:17)

Abiding in the truth as obedient slaves to righteousness (Rom 6:17-18)

Abiding in the truth of repentance (2 Tim 2:24-26)

Abiding in the truth of God's perfect law (James 1:25)

Freedom is not being a slave to sin (34-36)

Slaves to sin because of being caught in the cords of sin (Prov 5:22)

Not being a slave to sin through crucifixion of the old self (Rom 6:6-7)

Not being a slave to sin through being a slave to obedience (Rom 6:16)

Not being a slave to sin through being freed by God (Rom 6:20-22)

Not being a slave to sin through being made alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-5)

Freedom is not through human heritage (37-38)

Not through human heritage but through God's promises (Rom 9:8)

Not through human heritage but through circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:28-29)

Not through human heritage but through being one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28-4:1)

Not through human heritage but through belief in Jesus' Name (John 1:12-13)

Not through human heritage but through God's mercy (Rom 9:16)

Not through human heritage but through the word of truth (James 1:18)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Father Abraham (8:31-41a)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Freedom can be looked at from at least four angles: (1) those who have freedom, and they know it; (2) those who lack freedom, and they know it; (3) those who have freedom, but they don't realize it; and (4) those who lack freedom, but they don't know it. Various forms of the words freedom, liberty, and their synonyms occur dozens of times in the New Testament, indicating the importance of the topic. We need to know which of the four categories we're in spiritually. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called synoptic. This designation implies that these Gospels tell the story of Jesus from similar perspectives. (For an example of these similarities, compare Matthew 24:4-8; Mark 13:5-8; and Luke 21:8-11.) However, John's Gospel is different. While telling the same basic story of Jesus, John often includes material not found in the synoptic Gospels (example: Jesus' "Bread of Heaven Discourse" in John 6:25-59). In other instances John omits material found in the synoptic Gospels (example: Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-13; and Luke 9:28-36). Today's Scripture text is an example of the former. The synoptic Gospels do not mention Jesus' teaching found in John 7-9. That John's Gospel has different emphases than the synoptics does not mean that John cannot be trusted. Just as different observers might have dissimilar yet accurate retellings of the same event, John's depiction provides a different yet complementary perspective on Jesus' person and work. John's Gospel notes

the special relationship he had with Jesus (see John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20). Further John was one of three witnesses to Jesus' transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). John was among the closest of Jesus' disciples—he had a front-row seat to Jesus' person and work. Therefore, John's attestation can be trusted (see John 21:24). Today's Scripture passage is a part of a longer discourse that took place in Jerusalem during the Festival of Tabernacles (see John 7:2, 10, 14). The observance was one of Israel's most important celebrations and dated to the time of Moses (see Leviticus 23:33–36, 39–43; Numbers 29:12–34; Deuteronomy 16:13–17; 31:10). The festival began on the 15th day of the month of Tishri, which is in late September or early October. Its significance was twofold. First, it celebrated the end of the harvest season. Second, it commemorated God's provision during Israel's wilderness wanderings. After the Israelites left Egypt, but before they entered the Promised Land, the people lived in tents. The celebration was to remind Israel of this history. Ultimately the festival thanked God for his daily provision. The festival provided a backdrop for Jesus to express his divine identity by using items common in first-century observation: water and lamp light. During the festival, a priest took water from the Pool of Siloam, carried it to the temple, and poured it over the altar. On the festival's final day the priest marched around the altar without pouring water. This act demonstrated hopeful expectation that the Messiah would provide water as had been promised centuries before (see Joel 3:18). On the festival's seventh day, against this backdrop, Jesus stated, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink" (John 7:37). Additionally, on each night of the festival, except on the Sabbath, giant oil lamps were lit in the temple's Court of Women. It was against this backdrop that Jesus proclaimed himself to be "the light of the world" and that whoever followed him "will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus proclaimed himself to be the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope, speaking the words of his heavenly Father (see 8:28).

Key Verse: John 8:36

Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

8:13. Again **the Pharisees challenged** His claim. Since He appeared **as His own witness**, they said His **testimony** was **not valid**. Self-authentication is sometimes unacceptable. The Law required two witnesses to establish a fact in capital offenses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; John 8:17). Rabbinic tradition rejected self-testimony.

8:14. Sometimes, however, self-authentication is the only way to truth. Sometimes an individual is the only one who knows the facts about himself. And only God can give **testimony** to Himself. **Jesus** was competent to give a true witness of Himself because as God He has a comprehensive knowledge of His origin and destiny (7:29). In spite of what the Pharisees thought they knew about Jesus, they were ignorant of His heavenly origin and destiny (cf. 7:33-34), and thus were invalid judges of Him.

8:15. The Pharisees, Jesus said, judged **by human standards**, that is, they were limited by superficial appearances. They saw only His flesh, not His deity, so they misjudged Him. By contrast, Jesus did not come to **judge** people but to save them (3:17). When He does judge in the future, He will simply execute the Father's will according to truth and the Law (cf. 5:27, 45). He Himself will **pass judgment on no one**.

8:16. Jesus' judging was totally unlike theirs. Theirs was biased and limited. His was not His own because of His unique union **with the Father**. Nor was His witness **alone**; He spoke with divine authority.

8:17-18. **In your own Law** may refer to Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15 (or to Rabbinic laws), which speak of the necessity of **two** witnesses. In Jesus' case only God could authenticate Him. God the Son and God **the Father** are the required two Witnesses. The Father **sent** Jesus and authenticated Him by the signs (miracles) He performed.

8:19. Jesus' teaching on God as His **Father** was unique (cf. 5:18), and the Jews were puzzled by His familiar way of talking about Him. The Pharisees **asked Him, Where is Your Father?** Was He talking about God, or (as they supposed) His human father? Their ignorance of Jesus showed their ignorance of God, for Jesus is the Revelation of the **Father** (cf. 1:14, 18; 14:7, 9).

8:20. Jesus **spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put**. This was probably in the women's court (see the diagram at 8:12; cf. Mark 12:41-42). Jesus went there and instructed the people. **No one seized** (*piazō* "arrested") **Him** (cf. John 7:30, 32, 44, 10:39) **because**, as John repeatedly pointed out, Jesus was working on God's **time** schedule to accomplish the Father's will (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 30; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

8:21. Just as His time was short, so their opportunity for trusting in Him was limited. Soon He would go back to His Father and they could not follow Him there (cf. 7:33-34). **You will die in your sin.** The singular “sin” is that of rejecting the One who offers salvation (cf. 16:9). They would “die” because they continued living in the realm of sin, remaining under its power. Physical death would be their prelude to eternal separation from God.

8:22. Their question, **Will He kill Himself?** was both a misunderstanding and an ironic prophecy. They wondered if He would commit suicide and thus be unreachable. (Earlier they thought He meant He would go teach non-Jews in other lands [7:35].) Though Jesus did not kill Himself, He did lay down His own life (10:11, 18).

8:23. Jesus pointed out His heavenly origin and His real home (**from above... not of this world**). They belong here (**from below... of this world**), but He does not.

8:24. Jesus said twice they **would die in their sins** (cf. this pl. with the sing. “sin” in v. 21). If they would reject the Sin-Bearer (1:29), they would continue in the realm of sin. If they would reject Jesus as the revelation of God, they would miss their only hope for salvation. **I am the One I claim to be** in Greek is the enigmatic “I Am,” which is a self-designation for God in certain contexts (cf. Isa. 43:10-11, LXX).

8:25. This revelation of Jesus as “I Am” only confused the Jews. And His words about their sins probably angered them. **Who are You? they asked.** He replied, **Just what I have been claiming all along.** This is the NIV’s translation of a problematic Greek sentence. (Other translations make it a question or an exclamation.)

8:26-27. Jesus could have said much more and even condemned His hearers, but His purpose in coming was to give them and **the world** the message from the One **who sent** Him. This message is certainly true because the Sender **is reliable** (cf. 7:18, 28). John added that the people **did not understand that Jesus was** referring to the **Father**. God was unknown to them so they missed Jesus (cf. 1:18).

8:28. Jesus was now unknown to them. Only the Crucifixion (when **the Son of Man** would be **lifted up**; cf. 3:14; 12:32) would enable them to see Him for **who** He really is. He did not mean that all will be saved, but that the Cross would reveal that Jesus is God’s Word (the *Logos*) to man, and that what He taught was **just what the Father... taught** Him.

8:29. Jesus’ union with the Father is one of love and continual obedience (cf. 4:34; 5:30). Though people reject Jesus, the Father will never abandon Him. Jesus is never **alone**, and even on the cross the Father glorified Him (cf. 16:32; 17:5).

8:30. In spite of widespread unbelief and official rejection, the ministry of Jesus did bring many to faith (cf. 7:31). Yet this faith would need to be tested and refined. The words **many put their faith in Him** contrast with the next verse. Though large numbers of people responded to Jesus, many people fell away.

8:31-32. **Jews who had believed Him** indicates that some paid attention to Jesus’ words without necessarily committing themselves to Him personally (cf. 6:53). It was possible to “believe” in the message of repentance and the coming kingdom without being born again. Continuing in the truth is the sign of true followers and learners (**disciples**). **If** they really grasped His message, they would find salvation **truth**. Knowing this salvation truth would liberate them from their bondage in sin.

8:33. Their response indicated that they had not grasped Christ’s message. Even though they were under Rome, they insisted that as **Abraham’s descendants** they were **free** men. How could Jesus free them when they were not **slaves?** They had no sense of their bondage to sin.

8:34. Three times in this chapter (vv. 34, 51, 58) Jesus said, **I tell you the truth** (cf. 1:51). The very act of committing **sin** reveals that the one doing the act is under the power and authority of sin. Sin is personified as a cruel master. Paul used the same illustration (Rom. 6:15-23).

8:35. Just as Ishmael, Abraham’s **slave** son, was cast out of the house (Gen. 21:8-21), so those in sin are in danger. Isaac was **a son** who belonged and therefore remained in the house. Were they like Ishmael, or Isaac? The issue was not physical genealogy but spiritual kinship.

8:36. Jesus is **the true Son** and seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). He remains in the house and is over it (Heb. 3:6). People can become truly **free** by becoming sons of God by faith in Christ, *the Son* (Gal. 3:26).

8:37. Physically the Jews of course **are** the **descendants** of Abraham. **Yet** this same crowd was seeking to **kill** Jesus, Abraham’s true Son, thus showing that they were not Abraham’s *spiritual* descendants (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6, 8; Gal. 3:29). They were rejecting His message (**My word**).

8:38. Jesus spoke what He had **seen in the Father's presence** (cf. v. 28). Thus His words are God's truth. But the people had no affinity for His words because they listened to *their father* (Satan; v. 44) and followed him. As yet Jesus had not identified their father, but the implication was becoming plain.

8:39. To counter the thrust of Jesus' argument, the Jews claimed **Abraham** as their spiritual **father**. But **Jesus** responded by stating that spiritual descendants of Abraham **do** what **Abraham did**, that is, they believe and obey God. They should respond in faith to the heavenly messenger and do what He says. John the Baptist had earlier warned the Jews against the danger of trusting in their Abrahamic lineage (Luke 3:8).

8:40. But they were rejecting the heavenly Messenger and seeking **to kill** the One who **told** them God's Word. **Abraham did not do** that; he was obedient to God's commands (cf. Gen. 12:1-9; 15:6; 22:1-19).

8:41. The Jews' works were different, so their **father** (cf. v. 38) must also be different. They could seek to evade Jesus' logic only by denying an illegitimate human paternity and claiming a heavenly one. In their denial, **We are not illegitimate children**, they may have been casting aspersions on Jesus' birth.

8:42. **Love** is a family affair (1 John 5:1). If the Jews really had **God** as their **Father** and really loved Him (the Gr. assumes they did not), then they **would** have loved **Jesus** because He **came from God**. Jesus again affirmed His position as God's Representative: the Father **sent** Him.

8:43. Jesus the *Logos* speaks to people, but their fundamental opposition to Him caused them to misunderstand His **language**. **Unable to hear** means a spiritual inability to respond. The rendering **what I say** is literally, "My word" (*logos*). Paul later wrote that "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1 Cor. 2:14).

8:44. **The devil** is the enemy of life and **truth**. By a lie he brought spiritual and physical death to mankind (cf. Gen. 3:4, 13; 1 John 3:8, 10-15.) He still distorts truth (**there is no truth in him... he is a liar and the father of lies**) and seeks to lead people away from God, the Source of truth and life (2 Cor. 4:4). Since these Jews wanted Jesus' death and since they rejected the truth and embraced the lie, their family solidarity with Satan and his desires was certain. How different from having Abraham as their father!

8:45. Jesus, in contrast with them, lives in **truth** and proclaims it. Since unbelievers love darkness not light (cf. 3:19-20), and falsehood not reality, they reject Jesus.

8:46. Many accusations had been made against Jesus (cf. 7:12b, 20). But He is so committed to doing God's will ("I always do what pleases Him" [8:29]) that it is impossible to show any connection between Jesus and sin: **Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin?** Since this is so, they should have recognized His divine origin. His second question, **Why don't you believe Me?** is answered in the next verse.

8:47. Belonging **to God** is the basis for hearing Him. To **hear** God is **not** a matter of being able to discern audible sounds but of obeying the heavenly commands. Jesus' hearers absolute rejection of the heavenly Word was a clear reflection **that they did not belong to God** (lit., "are not of God").

8:48. Samaritans were a mixed race with a religion the Jews considered apostate (cf. 4:4). To call Jesus a **Samaritan** was to use a term of abuse, referring to a heretic or one with a faulty worship. Their charge that Jesus was **demon-possessed** (cf. 7:20; 8:52; 10:20) suggested they thought He was mad, unclean, and evil. How ironic that after He said their father was the devil (8:44), they said He was demon-possessed!

8:49-50. Jesus' claims were not those of a **demon-possessed** person. He was seeking not self-exaltation but the **honor** of His **Father**. Their attempt to **dishonor** Him was an attack on His Father. (Cf. Hanun's attack on David's messengers, which was an insult against the king; 2 Sam. 10:1-6.)

When accused, Jesus did not seek to justify Himself (cf. John 8:54). He committed His case to the heavenly **Judge**, knowing that even if people judge the Son falsely, the Father will reverse their verdict and vindicate Him.

8:51. Again Jesus said, **I tell you the truth** (cf. 1:51). **Keeps My Word** is another way of expressing a positive response to His revelation. (Similar expressions are "hear" His Word [5:24] and "hold" to His teaching [8:31].) It means to observe, pay attention to, or to fulfill. A person who obeys Jesus **will never see death**, that is, **he** will not be eternally separated from God (cf. 3:16; 5:24).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Freedom Defined (John 8:31-38)

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"
34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.
35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.
36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.
37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.
38 I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

Freedom is abiding in the truth (31-33)

Abiding in the truth of God's precepts (Ps 119:43-45)

43 Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws. 44 I will always obey your law, forever and ever. 45 I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.

Abiding in the truth of God's sanctifying word (John 17:17)

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Abiding in the truth as obedient slaves to righteousness (Rom 6:17-18)

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Abiding in the truth of repentance (2 Tim 2:24-26)

24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Abiding in the truth of God's perfect law (James 1:25)

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

Freedom is not being a slave to sin (34-36)

Slaves to sin because of being caught in the cords of sin (Prov 5:22)

22 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.

Not being a slave to sin through crucifixion of the old self (Rom 6:6-7)

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Not being a slave to sin through being a slave to obedience (Rom 6:16)

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Not being a slave to sin through being freed by God (Rom 6:20-22)

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Not being a slave to sin through being made alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-5)

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

Freedom is not through human heritage (37-38)

Not through human heritage but through God's promises (Rom 9:8)

8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Not through human heritage but through circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:28-29)

28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God

Not through human heritage but through being one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28-4:1)

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Not through human heritage but through belief in Jesus' Name (John 1:12-13)

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Not through human heritage but through God's mercy (Rom 9:16)

16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Not through human heritage but through the word of truth (James 1:18)

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Father Abraham (8:31-41a)

31 Then¹⁰⁵ Jesus said to those Jewish people who had believed him, “If you continue to follow my teaching,¹⁰⁶ you are really my disciples 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” 33 “We are descendants of Abraham,” they replied, “and have never been anyone’s slaves! How can you say, ‘You will become free?’” 34 Jesus answered them, “I tell you the solemn truth, everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. 36 So if the son sets you free, you will be really free. 37 I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. But you are wanting to kill me, because my teaching makes no progress among you. 38 I am telling you the things I have seen while with my Father, but you are practicing the things you have heard from your father.” 39 They answered him, “Abraham is our father!” Jesus replied, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the deeds of Abraham. 40 But

now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham did not do this! 41 You people are doing the deeds of your father.”

If the words of verse 12 are addressed to those who have not yet believed in Jesus as the Messiah, verses 31 and 32 are addressed specifically to those who have come to faith:¹⁰⁷ “If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

The fact that this is spoken to believers is noteworthy. Until now, I have always thought these words were addressed to unbelievers and were therefore “evangelistic” in thrust. While they certainly may have some application to the lost, this is not primarily what our Lord has in mind when He speaks to the Jewish believers in the crowd.

These words argue against what we might call “mere Christianity,” as our Lord challenges believers to become true disciples. It is not good enough to simply believe in Jesus as the Messiah, or even to make a public profession of one’s faith in Him. Jesus intends for men to become His disciples, and to do this, they must abide in His Word.¹⁰⁸ Just what it means to “abide in His Word” is not explained here, because His adversaries interrupt Jesus. This matter will be taken up later on in the Gospel of John,¹⁰⁹ and then by the Epistles. For now, we must be content with the statement of our Lord that those who abide in His Word are truly His disciples, and by abiding in His Word, they will come to know the truth, and that truth will set them free.

At this point, our Lord’s enemies come unglued because of what they hear Him say. I am both amazed and amused by how quickly they grasp the inference of our Lord’s words. They seem to reason in this manner:¹¹⁰

- Jesus says that those who abide in His Word will be set free.
- This implies that we are not presently free.
- If we are not free, then we are slaves.
- We are the children of Abraham. We can’t be slaves!
- Jesus is terribly wrong!

The reasoning here is fascinating. On the one hand they seem to argue from history, insisting that they have never been anyone’s slaves, but this assertion is far from convincing. At this present moment, the Jews may not be “**slaves**” in the technical sense of the term, but neither are they completely “**free**,” either. Why do they have to obtain permission from Herod and Pilate to have Jesus crucified, unless they are subject to Roman rule? Israel’s slavery in Egypt (from which they were delivered at the exodus) and her captivity by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians certainly inclines us to think that history would show that they have been “**slaves.**” These Jews seem willing to rewrite history to maintain their claim that they have never been slaves to anyone.

On the other hand, they attempt to employ *a priori* reasoning. The basis for their denial is biological: “**We are descendants of Abraham**” (verse 33). The inference they draw from this is that because they are Abraham’s seed, they can never become slaves to anyone. In effect they are saying, “Because we are the descendants of Abraham, we can’t be slaves, ever. Therefore we have never been slaves, ever.” I believe they are reasoning on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant, as summarized in Genesis 12:1-3.

1 Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3, NKJV).

It is interesting to me that these Jews, so devoted to the Law of Moses, do not refer to the Mosaic Covenant, especially the summary contained in Deuteronomy 28. The first 14 verses promise God’s blessings and great prosperity if God’s people obey the law and keep their (Mosaic) covenant with God. This would be the portion of Scripture they would offer as their proof text. But the final 54 verses of chapter 28 spell out the certain consequences of Israel’s disobedience. In these verses, the actual term “**slave**” may not be found, but one would be hard pressed not to view these words as describing slavery:

28 “The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. 29 And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save *you*. 30 You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes. 31 Your ox *shall be* slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your donkey *shall be* violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep *shall be* given to your

enemies, and you shall have no one to rescue *them*. 32 Your sons and your daughters *shall be* given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail *with longing* for them all day long; and *there shall be* no strength in your hand. 33 A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land and the produce of your labor, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually. 34 So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. 35 The LORD will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head. 36 **The LORD will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. 37 And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will drive you**” (Deuteronomy 28:28-37, NKJV, emphasis mine).

This objection that is raised by our Lord’s opponents is not a new issue in the Gospels. It is one John the Baptist addressed in his preaching:

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Offspring of vipers!¹¹¹ Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit worthy of repentance! 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ because I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! 10 Even now the ax is ready at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:7-10).

This same error is so deeply ingrained within Judaism that Paul must emphatically denounce it, both in terms of his own life and testimony (Philippians 3:1-10), and in terms of the gospel (Romans 9:1-8; Galatians 3:24-29). Many of the Jews assumed that their biological ancestry was the basis for their relationship with God. Put simply, they thought being Jewish was the same as being saved, and therefore that they were entitled to all of God’s blessings. How dreadfully wrong they were! Being Jewish was a privilege, as Paul points out in Romans chapter 9, but it is not the same as being saved. *Being in Christ, by faith in His death, burial, and resurrection, is the basis for being the “true Israel” of God:*

23 Now before faith came we were held in custody under the law, kept as prisoners until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. 26 For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:23-29).

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh—who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed in the body by hands—12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, the one who turned both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility, in his flesh, 15 when he nullified the law of commandments in decrees. The purpose of this was to create in himself the two into one new man, thus making peace, 16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and non-citizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, 20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Jesus responds to the defensive objections of His opponents. Anyone who practices sin is a slave,¹¹² **“a slave of sin.”**¹¹³ I believe the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery in the early part of chapter 8 contributes a great deal to our Lord’s words here. There, Jesus challenged the one who was without sin to cast the first stone. No one dared to take up a stone, and everyone left—self-admitted sinners. If no one there could claim to be free from sin, then those who protest against our Lord’s words here are sinners by their own admission.¹¹⁴ They are sinners, indeed, and thus they are slaves to sin.

The next words of our Lord are somewhat perplexing: “The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be really free” (vss. 35-36). A slave has no permanent place in the family. He can be sold at any moment. He can even be put to death in some circumstances. His position or status in the family is surely tentative. Furthermore, a slave is not **“free”** himself, so how can he possibly set anyone else **“free”**? (That would be something akin to a bald man claiming to possess the power to

produce hair on the heads of other bald men.) Now a “son” is very different. His status as a son is permanent. He can exercise the authority and enjoy the privileges of his father. A son can “free” a slave, and that former slave’s freedom will be “real” and permanent.

I think we would all agree that when our Lord speaks of the “son” here, He is referring to Himself as the Son of God. *As the Son, He can free men from sin, and this freedom is sure because He is the Son.* The question is: “To whom is Jesus referring as a slave?” In a general way, all men are sinners, and thus all men are slaves of sin. It is my opinion here, however, that Jesus may be using the term “slave” to refer more specifically to the Jewish religious leaders. In many of His parables, slaves or stewards (or both) are used to represent His servants. In those parables which rebuke the Jewish religious leaders for their failed stewardship, slaves are again found. The “slaves” of Luke 20:9-19 represent the prophets. I believe Jesus is referring to the religious leaders as slaves, which is very much in keeping with the context of John 8. These “slaves” seem to be those who feel they can pronounce in a way that determines one’s destiny (see 7:13). This seems to be the case with their attitude and actions in response to the man born blind in chapter 9 (see verses 22, 34). Do these religious leaders think they can “loose” or “bind” men in relation to the kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 18:18)? They are but slaves, and slaves cannot free other slaves. This is the work of the “Son.” It is Jesus’ claim of “sonship” which the religious leaders reject and oppose.

Do these Jews claim to be Abraham’s descendants? In a merely physical sense, they are his sons, but that is not what it means to be a true “son of Abraham.” They reject the word of Jesus, which reveals the truth, and which would set them free. Instead of believing in Jesus, they seek to kill Him. Here is a great contrast. They think they speak for God, and yet Jesus is the One who speaks of those things He has seen while He was with His Father in heaven. They claim to be the offspring of Abraham, and yet by their deeds, they show that they do not honor God by trusting in His Son because they are trying to kill Him. They are “sons” of someone, but they are not “sons” of Abraham in the way they believe they are. Their practice reveals their true “father.” We are just about to be told who this “father” is.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/father-son-john-831-59>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Modern discussions regarding the concept of freedom revolve around ideas of personal volition, responsibility, and the ability of people to express themselves without interference. But Jesus was less concerned with freedom in that regard. Instead, Jesus was concerned about freedom and liberation from the insidious grip of sin. Jesus’ audience did not realize that they were experiencing this kind of bondage. While they thought their ethnic heritage provided freedom, they were actually experiencing bondage. Their so-called freedom was an illusion based on a lie. Jesus spoke truth because he spoke the words of his Father—a declaration of true freedom. Freedom that comes from the Father leads to eternal life with the Son. Those who crave this freedom will seek Jesus and his Word and become his disciples. As such, his disciples will know the truth, and the truth will set them free. A new day of freedom has been established.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Some Christian men and women in prison have spoken about being freer behind bars than when they were out on the streets. How is this possible? When a person embraces Christ, they now walk in liberty, in a freedom beyond bondage or iron bars.

Accepting Christ - Jesus desires to be understood. He wants those who associate with His name to experience genuine salvation. Jesus desires for God's children to be steadfast in their faith and not wishy-washy. He loves for God's children to sit at His feet, hanging on to His every word, seeking to know His truth. This kind of behavior results in freedom.

The Truth Will Set You Free - Consistently reading, studying, and seeking to understand the Scriptures is one of the primary steps in becoming a true disciple of Christ. The next step is following His instructions. Those sincerely committed to the Lord are learners who adjust their actions accordingly. Truth is not only an intellectual understanding of words on a page in the Bible. One of Jesus' names is "the truth" (John 14:6). He is the source of all truth, the ultimate standard of what is right. The Lord breaks the chains of Satan's lies and deception.

Freedom Beyond Status - When Jesus talked about freedom, the Jewish people argued they had never been in bondage to anyone. They were Abraham's children. But Jesus was not referring to political or cultural status when He spoke of freedom. All humanity is born in bondage to sin and rebellion against God. Wrongdoing and wrong attitudes toward God control the unbeliever. Freedom from sin is why Jesus came, died on the Cross, and shed His blood. His sacrifice breaks the chains of sin for all who believe in Him (John 3:16).

Experience Jesus' Liberty - Only a few accept the real truth about Christ. Sadly, a lot of people think because they live in America, go to church, and try to do right by their fellowman, they are a follower of Jesus, a Christian. Yet they remain tormented by the shame of their past and bad habits they cannot overcome. This is not the liberty Jesus offers. Individuals often talk about feeling a heaviness within but do not know that it's sin, the rejection of the truth about Jesus Christ weighing them down. Jesus lifts the load. There is no freedom anywhere on earth like freedom in Christ.