

**JEWISH TRADITIONS AS AN OBSTACLE TO BELIEVING IN JESUS AND ITS
SIGNIFICANCE TO A CONTEMPORARY KIKUYU CHRISTIAN: AN
EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION OF JOHN 8: 31-59**

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented to any other university for a degree.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all who sincerely seek the truth. To all who seek to know the truth of the words of the Lord Jesus in a way that would experientially transform them into the person that God desires them to be.

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Abstract

John, the apostle, uses the context in John 8:31-59 to show how Jewish traditions were an obstacle to believing Jesus. The selected text of John 8:31-59 deals with truth; liberty of true discipleship; the fatherhood of God, of Abraham, and of the devil; and the authenticity and divinity of Jesus. It relates true discipleship to the knowledge of the truth that sets free. By contrasting the fatherhood of God and the devil, it demonstrates how those Jews had subscribed to false discipleship akin to open rebellion against God. This was in contrast to the conduct of Abraham, whom they claimed to be their father. It addresses the question of truth by presenting falsehood as the reality of the devil and truth as the reality of God. This research, therefore, sought to critically interpret the text of John 8:31-59 so as to discover its original and intended meaning; with its theological significance and practical significance to a contemporary Kikuyu Christian in Kenya. The study found that the author used epideictic rhetoric to present the Jews being addressed by Jesus as a foil and Abraham as a mirror of true discipleship. The study highlights that the Jewish claim of Abraham as their father was an indirect justification for practicing their traditions against the teachings of Jesus, which they presumed was a threat to their values and customs. With this understanding, the study established parallelism and contrasts between the biblical Jews and the Kikuyu people's contexts. These have the potential of making it easier or being a hindrance to the Kikuyu Christians in Kenya to appreciate the truths revealed in this text. This study recommends further research to be done on ways of further mitigating the hindrances and maximizing the advantage of the parallels. The study adopted a combination of rhetorical and historical-grammatical methods to interpret the text. The analysis of the text was organised into and presented in a complementary structure.

List Of Keywords And Acronyms

Jews: refers to the religious leaders/ Pharisees in Judea during the first century AD that engaged in the dialogue with Jesus in the selected text of John 8:31-59.

ESV: English Standard Version of the Bible

SBL: Society of Biblical Literature

Chapter One

Introduction And Background To The Study

Introduction

The message of the gospel is centered on the truth of the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel according to John (Barclay, 1975). However, Jesus encountered resistance from the Jews he addressed during his earthly ministry, as recorded in John 8:31-59 text. Likewise, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by his disciples encountered great resistance in the various cultures of the world it encountered as well as great acceptance (Mugambi K. , 2020). As such, conducting research that would add knowledge in this field of study would provide relevant skills for scholars and non-scholars alike in applying the message of the gospel in their Christian life.

This chapter has provided the background for the study, the problem statement, and the objectives and research questions of the study. It also includes a brief description of the research approach, its significance, and the justification of the study. Finally, it concludes with the chapter summary and organization of the study.

Background to the Study

The Apostle John, like other disciples of Jesus, used the prevailing cultural setting to communicate the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ both to the first-century Hebraic Jews and to Hellenistic Christians (Lamb, 2014). This enabled the Jews to understand the message by identifying with the cultural setting of the gospel. It also served to persuade the Gentiles to believe in Jesus without being compelled to change their cultural thinking (Barclay, 1975). He did this through the use of symbols and terms that were

understandable to every culture in the world. A good example of such terms is the imagery of the fatherhood of God and the devil to communicate the gospel's message to his audience. Moreover, the issue of the fatherhood of Abraham to the Jews in relation to faith - which was well captured by the author in the focal text of John 8:31-59 - is an issue that every culture in the world can identify with.

Similarly, in John 8:31-59, the Apostle John shows how Jewish traditions were an obstacle to believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. By clinging to their traditions, the Jews resisted the words and teachings of Jesus because they found the values of Jesus a threat to their traditional values and cultures (Jamieson, 1997). The argument of the Jews revolved around the question of the fatherhood of Abraham as their central identity. They argued that having Abraham as their father did not obligate them to fulfil the requirements demanded of them by the words of Jesus for salvation. In response, Jesus presented the idea of the fatherhood of God and contrasted it with the fatherhood of the devil. He did this by presenting God as the father of truth and the devil as the father of lies. The idea, as H. Harris (2004) also puts it, is that conduct is a clue to someone's paternity. That is to say that the conduct of a person is a direct reflection of his father's character and conduct. Just as we bear a physical resemblance to our biological fathers, we likewise bear the character and nature of our spiritual father - good or evil. That is why Jesus said that the Jews he was addressing could not be Abraham's spiritual children (though they were his biological children) because their conduct was contrary to Abraham's (John 8:39-40).

Moreover, the author pointed out that only those who are of God can be called the true children of Abraham because the conduct of Abraham was a true reflection of the conduct and character of God; and these are they who would believe in Jesus' words. The implication was that Jesus' Jewish audience was, therefore, not God's children because

they did not imitate the godly conduct of Abraham. Thus Jesus declared that their rejection of his words was an indication that they were children of the devil because their conduct was a reflection of the character and nature of the devil. Furthermore, he alluded to the fact that his words were words of truth and of God. Therefore they rejected the knowledge of the truth of his words because their father, the devil, did not abide in the truth from the beginning, for the fatherhood of a person determines how one hears (Ridderbos, 1997). Jesus affirmed the truth of his words by revealing his divine identity as the I Am (John 8:58); the Son of God.

In addition, the Apostle John has effectively underscored the significance of the knowledge of truth in the selected texts of John 8: 31-59. According to the Bible, knowledge is more than just a cognitive awareness; it is experiential (Frame, 1987). By relating truth with the words of Jesus Christ, John the apostle effectively demonstrates that truth is not just about mere facts and information but is, in essence - the reality of God - thereby addressing the question; what is truth? (John 18:38). This truth can only be known and experienced through the revelation of Jesus Christ. He further contrasts the inability of the devil - and those who are his - to know and to have the truth with the readiness to receive the truth from God by those who belong to God. The author was able to present the words of Jesus and the sign of his immaculate divinity as a window that allows us, the readers, to see into this reality, which is God (Barclay, 1975). By elaborating that the knowledge of God is tantamount to becoming like God in character and nature, John the apostle has demonstrated - in the focal text of John 8:31-59- the significance of the knowledge of truth and its ramification to our lives on earth and the eternal consequences. In light of this, this study is being conducted to properly understand contexts with

challenges similar to the Jewish context within the contemporary African context, where tradition becomes a stumbling block to faith in Christ.

Through a combination of the historical-grammatical and rhetorical criticism approaches, this study sought to discover the meaning of the text and explore its significance. This was done by tracing the arguments of the Jews and how Jesus addressed them. The expected response of the Jews to Jesus leads to the argument of Apostle John, the author of the text of John 8:31-59, as observed by J. Painter (2011). He relates this response to believing and abiding in the words of Jesus - a true discipleship that results in the knowledge of the truth - that would eventually set them free from the bondage of sin (John 8: 31-32).

By identifying the Kikuyu African context and discovering its points of contact with the biblical context, this study identified cues that allowed for a more authentic interpretation of the text's practical significance by comparing the two contexts and analysing the findings. The Kikuyu people are an ethnic community mostly found in Central Kenya; their ancestral land - the land surrounding Mount Kenya - extends to some extent to the Central Rift Valley and into Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. According to some authors, the missionary era of the late nineteenth and half of the twentieth century marked a paradigm shift in the African societies in Kenya through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Kikuyu ethnic community stood out as one of the most reached people groups in Kenya with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gathogo, 2017). This success can be attributed to the ease with which the missionaries proclaimed the gospel to them. This is because the Kikuyu people were monotheistic and had many similarities with the Hebrew culture, as outlined by Karangi (2005) and Kenyatta (1978). However, in some cases, there was also resistance to the gospel by those who wished to cling to their traditional African

religion because of the conflict between Christianity and the Kikuyu culture (Gathogo, 2014).

Drawing out parallelisms between the Jewish and the Kikuyu contexts has helped in the practical application of the text. On this premise, the parallel is drawn: of the resistance to the gospel by the Kikuyu people who first heard the gospel and how this was similar to the Jewish attitude toward Jesus and his teachings as recorded in John 8:31-59. There is a possibility that the same attitude prevails significantly in the contemporary generation of the Kikuyu people. As such, scholars, ministers, and Christians alike can use this study to add to their knowledge in applying the message of the Gospel according to John. Therefore, the instructions provided in the text serve as a cue for the African church in contexts with similar challenges.

Statement of the Problem

According to John 8:31-59, the Jews were resisting the teachings of Jesus based on their Jewish heritage and customs. In their opposition to the words of Jesus, the Jews claimed that they did not need to be freed because of their Abrahamic heritage. Fausset (Jamieson, 1997) emphasizes this fact by observing that the Jewish teachers taught that Abraham always stands near the gates of hell to save those who are of the Jewish race from perishing. The implication was that these Jews supposed that their salvation was ensured by being Abraham's descendants - irrespective of their conduct. Ironically, this was an attitude that was contrary to the attitude that Abraham had - a view that they were willing to defend at all cost - being ready to even murder (Pink, 1975). Thus by focusing on their physical state, these Jews could not understand nor receive the spiritual implications of the message of Jesus. This can also be observed in John 6:60, 66, in which

many of the disciples of Jesus went back to their traditions ‘and walked with him no more.’

Moreover, the claim of Abraham as their father by the Jews was also a direct reference to their traditions and customs. According to Genesis 18:17-19, the descendants of Abraham were to be disciples of their fathers, with Abraham as the most prominent. This was to be practiced by keeping the traditions and customs handed over to them by their fathers. So they resisted Jesus because they found the teachings of Jesus as a threat to their values and traditions. However, according to John 8:39-40 (also recorded in Matthew 15:1-9), Jesus pointed out that the traditions they were referring to were not really from Abraham, who kept the traditions commanded to him by God, but were traditions handed over to them by commandments of men and not God. For they used the said traditions as an excuse for not keeping the commands of God, and consequently – to resist the words of Jesus, which were words of God.

The author sought to address this attitude by highlighting the truth of the words of Jesus to the Jews. This is because the Gospel, according to John, pre-eminently concerns the revelation of God through Jesus Christ, which calls for a response from those who encounter this revelation (Painter, 2011). The study looks at how the Jewish tradition was an obstacle to believing in Jesus and how the message applies to the Kikuyu culture in their response to the gospel during the missionary era and subsequent generations.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to critically interpret the text of John 8:31-59 to discover its original and intended meaning and significance to a contemporary Kikuyu Christian in Kenya through an exegetical examination.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine Apostle John's intended meaning to his original audience in the text of John 8:31-59 through a historical-grammatical approach.
2. To discuss the theological issues of contemporary relevance raised in the John 8:31-59 discourse through rhetorical criticism, especially those highlighted by the conflict between Jesus' teachings and Jewish traditions.
3. To explore the practical significance of the selected text of John 8:31-59 to the contemporary Kikuyu Christian in Kenya through rhetorical criticism.

Research Questions

1. What is the meaning of the selected text of John 8:31-59 as originally intended by the author to his audience?
2. What theological issues of contemporary relevance are raised in the John 8:31-59 discourse, and how are these highlighted by the conflict of Jesus' teachings and the Jewish traditions?
3. What practical significance of the biblical truths from the selected text of John 8:31-59 can be applied to the contemporary Kikuyu Christian in Kenya?

Research Approach

The approach used in this research is a combination of historical-grammatical and rhetorical criticism approaches. The study sought to discover the author's original and intended meaning to his original audience through the historical-grammatical approach. This involved the study of the historical and cultural backgrounds of the author, text, and original audience. It also included the classification of the type of literary genres and analysis of grammatical and syntactical features in the text. To complement the historical-

grammatical approach, this study discussed and explored the theological and practical significance of the text, through the rhetorical criticism approach. This involved identifying the theological context by outlining the author's argument and assessing its impact on its audience. This is based on the assumption that the author of the text has a perspective informed by their historical context (Murphy, 2020). It is also based on the assumption that the perspective is uniquely articulated by the author with the goal of persuading his contemporaries.

The interpretation of the text was governed by a set of four presuppositions, which have also been identified by Gary Smith (2008). First, that scripture is the inspired Word of God and inerrant. Second, the text has one intended meaning by the author but with a variety of applications. Third, that the Bible should be interpreted literary according to the normal rules of communication. Fourth, that the interpretation is not complete without an application that is relevant and valuable to the contemporary Christian believer because it links the meaning to the present.

The outline of the author's argument is integrated into the exegetical analysis and in the preliminary analysis of the text in chapters one and two. A close textual analysis was performed in order to describe how a text functions literary. The identification and analysis of the literary context included literary techniques, language, and flow of the text. The outline of exegetical analysis was organized into a complementary structure. This study, therefore, applied this approach the same way that Jeffery Arthurs (1992) applied it in his analysis of the epistle of James.

Justification and Significance of the Study

The message of John 8:31-59 is relevant to every generation since the days of Apostle John to date. Therefore, by revising existing knowledge in this field into terms that are understandable and familiar to the current generation, the results of this study will provide relevant knowledge and skill for contemporary scholars and church ministers to convey the same message to their audiences. It will be useful to the novice as well as the mature Christian in their quest to discover the meaning of the text in the Gospel and apply it in their Christian walk.

Moreover, by tracing the argument of John the apostle in John 8:31-59, this study's results will help extend existing knowledge in this field. This is key to finding solutions to conflicts between traditional culture and Christianity. Consequently, the conclusions of this study will help in reassessing the theological approaches of the church leadership to be more effective in the multicultural populace of their churches.

Finally, because the message of the Gospel of John cuts across age barriers, it is hoped that by refining existing knowledge in this field of research through an exegesis of John 8:31-59, this work will provide insight and the necessary skills and tools to the contemporary generation of youthful gospel ministers in their ministries. This will enable them to develop their theological understanding of the Scriptures and expand their knowledge in this field, becoming effective in their ministries. This is because every subsequent generation of believers embodies attributes that are uniquely suited to the evolving landscape of the world in terms of technological advancement and access to knowledge (Bible Society, 2018). It is also worth noting that the church of tomorrow lies in the hands of the current young generation of gospel ministers (Cobbins, 2016). This is even more significant in the contemporary African context, which has the youth as the

largest population group (Knoetze, 2017). The information will also be of great importance to other researchers who may use it to enhance their efforts in guiding the formulation of programs and development of strategies geared towards the transformation of youths in the church through the scriptures, as demonstrated by the author of the given text of this study.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter one has provided the background for the study, giving the general area and reasons for this study, with a preview of the different components that form the chapter. It also presented the problem statement, which gives the research gap or problems in the text that the study addressed; by highlighting the passage problems and possible alternate solutions. The objectives and research questions of the study in this chapter show how the research addressed the research problem - it primarily exposed the meaning and significance of the given biblical text by tracing the development of the author's thoughts. It also includes a brief description of the research approach by mainly arguing for the methods that were used in the study. The chapter concludes with the significance and the justification of the study, which gives the practical aspect of the study, such as: who are the beneficiaries of the study and in what ways, and the rationale for the study.

Chapter two deals with the background information of the gospel according to John and a review of the literature associated with it. Chapter three gives a detailed explanation of the theoretical approaches that were used to exegete the text in this study. Chapter four has provided an in-depth exegetical analysis of the given biblical text to bring out its meaning and significance. Finally, chapter five has provided the summary of the findings, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, a review of scholarly research to date on the background of the Gospel according to John has been conducted. The relevant historical and literary contexts of the Gospel have been explored. This includes authorship, date, and audience or recipients. An overview of the theological themes of the Gospel is also provided. Reviewing where the prevailing opinions on the research topic stand and what remained to be explored in this thesis, a gap was identified and proposals on how the research intended to add value to the existing knowledge on the topic was provided.

The Background of the Gospel According to John

In this study, an overview of the authorship, date, and audience of the Gospel according to John will focus on crucial matters to understand the author's argument and ethical reliability.

Authorship of the Gospel

As a follower of Jesus, the Apostle John recounts several eyewitness stories supported by internal evidence. He identified himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved in the Gospel (John 20:2-9, 13:23 and 21:20-24). He was, therefore, part of the Lord's inner circle with Peter and his brother James (known as the sons of Zebedee- John 21:2 and Matthew 10:2). Peter is mentioned as a distinct character from the beloved disciple (John 13:23-24, 20:2, 21:20-21), while James was martyred (Acts 12:2) much earlier than the possible date of the writing of the Gospel. As evidenced by references to popular

Messianic speculations (John 1:21 and 7:40–42), hostility between Jews and Samaritans (John 4:9), and Jewish customs (John 7:22-23), the author was well-versed in Jewish life. He quoted intimate discussions between Jesus and the disciples (John 13:21-26). He was also familiar with Judea's geography (John 2:1, John 11:18 and 21:2). Following Jesus' resurrection, the Apostle John, along with the other apostles, continued to play an important role as pillars of the early church (John 21:21-24, Galatians 2:9).

John, the apostle, is credited as the author of early Church tradition, who recognized him as a powerful and authentic leader with a unique writing style, speech, and anecdotes as a result of his position and popularity (Lewis, 2005). He was an eyewitness to the events in the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1-2), as well as the author of the three epistles of John (Guthrie, 1981). The Gospel of John's apostolic origin and canonical approval were accepted by the early church without debate or dispute (Burge, 2014). Therefore a false author of the Gospel, according to John, was highly implausible (Köstenberger, 2013). The uniformity in Greek grammar and structure, such as the "I am" and "signs," would be hard to explain by the proposed idea of authorship by many scribes (Lewis, 2005). As shown in Revelation, 1 John, and 2 John, the language and structure contain distinct fingerprints that cannot be explained by the "school hypothesis" (Lamb, 2014).

Some scholars have objected that it was John, the apostle who wrote the Gospel by citing the lack of any mention of the name of the beloved disciple (Edwards, 2015). However, the internal, as well as external, evidence by Church fathers (such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria) has proved to be more credible than those used to support alternative views (Guthrie, 1981). The evidence pointing to John, the

apostle, is crucial to this study because it effectively points to the ethical reliability of the author to the original and contemporary generations of readers.

The Date of the Writing of the Gospel

It has been argued that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) come before John's Gospel (Reddish, 2011). Scholars largely believe that the Gospel, according to John's apparently more developed theology, suggests it was written later than the Synoptic Gospels, which had been written before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 (Michaels, 1989). The Gospel of John is generally dated between AD 90 and 100 when it achieved its final form (Robinson, 1985). This position is also supported by John Schultz (2002), based on the finding of a papyrus fragment from the Papyrus Rylands dated AD 140. It is also consistent with church tradition, which states that it was written between AD 85 and AD 90, before John's banishment to Patmos Island, which occurred between AD 90 and 95 (Reddish, 2011). The evidence of such dating helps identify the author's specific historical setting and the Gospel's writing. In addition, it guides this study in identifying the relevant literature that will help to gain a better understanding of the world at the time of writing the Gospel.

The Audience of the Gospel

Outside of Judea, the Apostle John wrote to a mixed Jewish/Gentile audience in which the first generation of believers was dying away and a new generation was emerging (Krejcir, 2010). Thus, by addressing those who were not eyewitnesses, he gave instructions and theology (Kümmel, 1975). This information is helpful to this study in exploring the ramifications of such a generational transition in relation to the contemporary African generation.

According to early Church tradition, John wrote his Gospel at Ephesus (Asia Minor), where he stayed after the temple was destroyed and where his opus, the book of Revelation, was placed (Keener C. S., 2019). The witness of Irenaeus, who claims that John, the Lord's disciple, wrote the Gospel while living in Ephesus, Asia, is an example of this (Harris, 2004). Furthermore, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John have generally been attributed to the Apostle John, with evidence indicating that they were written from Ephesus at the same time as the Gospel (Reddish, 2011). This evidence is helpful in relating the writing of the Gospel according to John to a specific geographical and cultural context. This information offers a better understanding of the audience and close associates of the author.

The Historical Context of the Gospel According to John

According to John, the historical context relates primarily to the quest for the occasion and purpose of the Gospel. This section of the study is necessary to explain various aspects of the book's historical setting (milieu) that are crucial to understanding its message.

The occasion for the Writing of the Gospel

After the destruction of the temple in AD 70, a significant number of Jewish Christians were returning to the ancient practices of Judaism in order to earn favor with the Pharisees and regain their social position, having been banished from the synagogues because of their faith in Jesus (Barret, 1978). This is because the Pharisees had taken over the Jewish customs during this time period and modified the Mosaic Law and temple offerings into many of the Jewish rituals that exist today (Krejcir, 2010). As seen by John's numerous retorts to the Pharisees, the early Church was at odds with them because they

compelled the Jews to go back to their traditions; an issue that also resulted in the great conflict in the early Church before the destruction of the temple (John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2 and Acts 15). Their houses and religious sacrificial systems were lost with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. As a result, they saw a Messiah as a symbol of betrayal and hopelessness because he did not come to deliver them from the Romans as they expected (Guthrie, 1981). This occasioned the author to write to them addressing these issues.

In addition, the author wrote to encourage persecuted Christians who had survived the trials in Jerusalem by fleeing to Asia Minor just before the revolts and poverty between AD 68 and 70 (Burge, 2014). The evidence pointing to a first-century church audience is critical for this research because the argument of this study is analyzed in the context of the first-century Jews and Gentiles. This is because it provides information that is necessary for drawing out a parallelism between the biblical and the contemporary Kikuyu African contexts.

The Purpose of the Gospel

These two verses summarize the purpose of the Gospel according to John: *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* (John 20:30-31, ESV). According to Ruth Edwards (2015), the goal of John's Gospel is evangelistic, as well as to reaffirm and secure Christians in their faith (John 3:16 and 8:24), as is also noted by Werner Kummel (1975).

Thus, John, the apostle attempted to persuade the Jews and their leadership after the destruction of the temple to believe in Jesus (Edwards, 2015). The given text of this

study (John 8:31-59) deals with a similar issue, in which the author sought to bring out the argument of the Jews' resistance to the gospel of Jesus. The author also intended to issue a challenge to the persecuted Jewish as well as the Gentile Christians who were in doubt, encouraging them to have confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ and not to succumb to shallow leaders who twisted realities to suit their own traditions and ideals (Krejcir, 2010). This literature is helpful in the practical application of the John 8:31-59 text to the contemporary Kikuyu Christian. This can be achieved by aligning the goals of the mission of the contemporary Church to the goals of the author of the Gospel, according to John.

The Literary Context of the Gospel According to John

The literary context is significant in this study because an understanding of the overall structure and argument of the book influences how the meaning of the selected text of John 8:31-59 is understood.

The Structure of the Gospel

The genre of this Gospel may be understood as a historical narrative with a theological-biographical character because of its wider salvation-historical scale (Mburu, 2019). The given text of this study falls into this category as well. Specifically, John 8:31-59 is a narrative discourse. According to John, the Gospel provides us with challenges in isolating its genre, not least due to its similarities to Greco-Roman 'lives' or *Bioi* (Mburu, 2010). It is stylistically and thematically similar to the three Johannine epistles (Attridge, 2006). The four volumes, along with the Book of Revelation, are regarded by most academics as a unified *corpus* of Johannine writing (Reddish, 2011). In written biblical accounts, the narrator is frequently the same as the author, and the listener is frequently the same as the reader.

There are certain parallels between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels in terms of material selection, theological focus, chronology, and literary style as well as differences (Burge, 2014). These differences are divided into two categories by Ramsey Michaels (1989): the style and content of Jesus' teaching; and the chronology and organization of Jesus' career. The Gospel begins with episodes from the beginning of the creation that distinguishes it from the Synoptic Gospels; it also provides biographical material that focuses on the ministry of Jesus Christ, like the Synoptic Gospels.

The first section of John's Gospel (John 1-11) takes place over three years, and the concluding section (John 12-20:23) takes place in one week (Edwards, 2015). The Prologue (John 1:1-18) summarizes the content of the whole book (Schultz, 2002). John 1:19-51 gives a record of John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus and the calling of some of Jesus's disciples. Much of John's Gospel (chapters 2-12) may be dubbed the "Book of Signs", because it describes Jesus performing seven distinct miracles (Painter, 2011). John 13-17 gives a record of intimate conversations between Jesus and his twelve disciples. John 18-19 is a record of the betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, and death of Jesus. John 20-21 is a record of the resurrection of Jesus and how he appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, giving final instructions to them. The epilogue (John 21:1-25), which is the last chapter of the book, appears to be out of place on the surface, as the last few lines of the twentieth chapter (John 20:24-31) appear to conclude the Gospel. Some have speculated that the epilogue was added later by John the apostle or one of his disciples. There's no reason to believe it wasn't written by John, the apostle.

John also has a distinct way of documenting Jesus' teachings (Michaels, 1989); this includes his reference to Jesus' seven "I Am" declarations (e.g., John 8:12, 8:58, 11:25, and 14:6). The given text of John 8:31-59 falls within the section of the Gospel

that records a series of the signs and teachings of Jesus that happened during a period of great resistance to Jesus by the Jews (John 5-12).

The Apostle John, therefore, sets the story of Jesus in a narrative, chronological sequence within a historical framework (Pink, 1975). He sought to present the gospel in a way that could be appreciated by the Hebraic as well as by a Hellenistic way of thinking (Barclay, 1975). The Gospel, therefore, served as a record of the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus, which is the objective of the four Gospels in the New Testament canon of the Bible. This information is helpful in placing the given text of John 8:31-59 in a literary context within the Gospel, according to John.

The Literary Flow of the Author's Argument in John 8:31-59

The discourse in John 8:31-59 revolves around Jesus and the Jews as the main characters; this includes his disciples, who, though not actively involved in this dialogue, play a significant role in the setting. The conversations provided a learning experience for the disciples of Jesus. This can be clearly seen in the role that the author, the beloved disciple, played in recording this eyewitness account of the words of Jesus to the Jews. The disciple's role was not only to learn from the teachings of Jesus to the Jews but to also teach others as seen in the book of Acts and the writing of the words of Jesus by the author of this text. Therefore the disciples, being Jews themselves, had been set up by the Lord to both witness and learn from his teachings, an aspect that is also observed by Samuel Ngewa (2003).

From chapter five onwards, the author of the Gospel according to John, records how the resistance of the Jews against Jesus began (Carson, 1991), in which the Jews sought to kill Jesus because he had healed a man on the Sabbath (John 5:16, 7:19-23). The

resistance also came about because Jesus had said that God was his Father, making himself equal to God (John 5:18). Misunderstandings of his teachings further complicated matters, in particular his teaching on being the bread of life. This caused many of his disciples to go back and stop following him (John 6:66). Although the rulers and Pharisees tried to arrest him, they could not (John 7:30-32, 7:44-46). Amid this resistance by the Jews, many believed in him (John 7:31, 8:30). However, there was a lot of confusion about his real identity, even among those who had believed in him (John 7:40-43).

The given text of this study (John 8:31-59) is a continuation of the conversation that Jesus was having with the Jews at the temple treasury in Jerusalem (John 8:12-30). The Jews were responding to the declaration by Jesus in which he said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12, ESV). The discourse between Jesus and the Jews touched on issues about his identity and that of the Father, true witness, believing in him, and the sinful state of his Jewish audience (also referred to as Pharisees) (Lewis, 2005). As Jesus was responding to the questions of the Jews, many of them believed in him (John 8:13-30). The given text begins with the response of Jesus to those who believed in him when he declared to them, *“if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31-32, ESV).

The dialogue between Jesus and the Jews in the John 8:31-39 text began with the issue of truth and its work of salvation through true discipleship, which he links to the saving work of the Son of God. The objections to this by the Jews in which they based their relationship and eternal salvation on their biological heritage from Abraham, prompted Jesus to respond with his idea of Fatherhood. In his response, Jesus pointed to the fact that the fatherhood of God is about obedience to his word, imitating his conduct

and character like Abraham (Sanders, 1943) and having the right response toward Jesus. He contrasted this to the fatherhood of the devil, who was a murderer and father of lies, a fatherhood that the Jews he was addressing had subscribed to. Their evil conduct is displayed in their ironical insults and hypocritical accusations against Jesus, which is characteristic of their resistance against Jesus throughout the Gospel narrative. Thus Jesus related truth with God and falsehood with the devil. Furthermore, he demonstrated his authenticity by revealing his divinity at the end of the discourse. Unfortunately, these Jews did not accept his words but hypocritically attempted to execute judgment against him, which was against their law (John 8:59).

The author's argument continues in the following chapter 9 recording of the sign of the healing of a blind man at the pool of Siloam, which Jesus performed immediately after the events recorded in this study's pericope (John 8:31-59). This sign served as a means of further explaining the teaching of Jesus, which he taught in the temple treasury (John 8:12-30) just before the events of this study's pericope (Keener C. , 2012). This can clearly be seen in the declaration of Jesus just before he healed the blind man, "*as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*" (John 9:5, ESV), a direct reference to his claim in John 8:12.

The Literary and Structural Devices in John 8:31-59

The author uses several literary and structural devices to weave his story in John 8:31-59. They include the use of a foil, antithesis, verbal cues, and irony, among others. Other significant devices include the use of narratorial comments and misunderstandings. These serve to propel the argument forward and shift direction in unexpected ways. The author uses both deliberate and epideictic rhetoric and deductive reasoning, a movement

that is not purely linear (Mburu, 2010). There is an alternation between narration and dialogue, with dialogue occupying the greater proportion of the text. This serves to slow down narrative time so the reader can experience a sense of the *pathos* in the scene. He employs traditional Jewish narrative and symbolism that, like a modern movie, rushes forward and back via polemic incidents, presenting a plot with dialogues that connect to the original audience's queries and complaints (Krejcir, 2010).

Using epideictic rhetoric, the author uses the Jews as a foil on the one hand and Abraham as a mirror of the right conduct on the other hand to bring his message home. Considering that the author was using symbols and images common to them, this shared piece of knowledge would have been in the minds of the original hearers of this narrative and the import of the interaction, therefore even more significant (Reddish, 2011). The author also uses an antithetical style (Harris, 2004) in the given text through the contrastive dialogues to reveal the respective ideological dimensions of each character and to bring out the strong contrasts that have been progressively developed in the dialogue.

Overview of the Theological Themes of the Gospel According to John

According to John, a survey of the major themes and motifs of the Gospel was necessary for this study because it highlights an analysis of what the entire book teaches about themes relevant to the focal point of the selected passage. This laid the groundwork for aligning the themes found in the selected text with the book's major themes.

The narratives in the Gospel have been written with a synchronic theological structure where all the themes enter and exit again and again throughout the gospel (Painter, 2011). Terms such as light, knowledge, truth, love, disciples, belief, life, and

freedom are used to bring out the various themes in the gospel. The Apostle John uses these words, as well as actions and people, symbolically to communicate to his readers (Ngewa S. , 2006). Many of these terms repeat to form motifs throughout the book. These symbols and motifs are set within larger “themes” and “meta-themes” throughout the Gospel. Out of these “meta-themes” flow the themes which roughly correspond to one or the other of the “meta-themes.” The themes intertwine and interact with each other to develop the “meta-themes” by creating complexity and depth rather than an extension of Christology in the gospel, as revealed in the prologue.

Jackson Painter (2011) defines these “meta-themes” (the two overarching ideas) as the basic structural ideas in the gospel developed by the themes. He also observes that many scholars have identified the “meta-themes” in this Gospel as revelation and response. The signs, clustered with the teachings attached to them, were intended to demonstrate and reveal the kind of person the Gospel seeks to focus belief; Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus the words and the signs of Jesus serve as a revelation of spiritual truths relating to the identity of Jesus.

The truth and the life themes are major themes in the Gospel and the John 8:31-59 text. The truth is the word of God, embodied by Jesus (Schultz, 2002). The life theme concerns the revelation of Jesus as the Saviour and the result of the right response to him. The Apostle John later defines life as the knowledge of God and of Jesus (John 17:3). This intertwines with the other major theme of truth because Jesus is identified as the embodiment of both life and truth in John 14:6. Thus, knowing the truth is to know Jesus, which is eternal life according to John 17:3 and true freedom or salvation according to John 8:32. The themes of life and truth are also closely related to the theme of Jesus as the

light of the world, a major theme. This light is also referred to as the light of life (John 8:12); and the life in Jesus as the light of men (John 1:4).

The ‘believe’ theme, which is about the responses to Jesus, is another major theme (Tenney, 1981). It represents many terms of response to Jesus, such as seeing, knowledge, discipleship, abiding, and following, among others. Authentic belief in Jesus is associated with abiding in the words of Jesus (John 8:31), which are words of truth (John 8:40) and words of life (John 8:52). This results in the knowledge of the truth, which is eternal life, and true freedom or salvation. The theme of love, another major theme, is also about the right response to Jesus and to God (John 8:42) (Barclay, 1975). This intertwines with the knowledge of the truth because the author associates it with the knowledge of God through the words of Jesus in John 8:55. The love theme also intertwines with two other major themes: discipleship (right conduct and keeping the words of God) and identity (those who are of God and those who are of the devil). This literature is helpful in bringing out a broad picture of the major themes in the Gospel, according to John.

The Summary of Literature Review

The evidence pointing to Apostle John is crucial to this study because it effectively points to the author's ethical reliability (ethos). This is because he has been documented as having been a close associate of Jesus in the New Testament canon of Scriptures. The evidence pointing to a first-century church audience is critical for this research because the argument of this study is analyzed in the context of the first-century Jews and Gentiles. The observations have been useful as the premise of the contemporary significance in this study is based on the relationship between the historical and cultural setting of the Jewish Christians and its significance to the contemporary Kikuyu Christians contexts. The

evidence shows that the author's audience were descendants of the Jews who first heard the gospel of Jesus, spanning over a century. Likewise, the literature (in chapter one) points to the likelihood that the contemporary generation of Kikuyu Christians are descendants of the Kikuyus who first heard the gospel from the missionaries, covering a period of approximately one century. This has been crucial in linking the significance of the biblical text to the present.

The literary context of the book and the theological themes have provided information that is very relevant to the analysis of the focal point of the selected passage in this research. The literature has clearly shown why John wrote to his audience and even pointed out the effectiveness of his argument. This evidence is useful in propelling the premise that the persuasive techniques used by the author can be applied to the contemporary context as presented in the text.

The Research Gap

There was need for this study to revise knowledge in this field into terms that are understandable and familiar to the current generation of Africans. Similarly, there was a need for this study to clearly spell out the relation between the Jewish resistance to Jesus and the Kikuyu people's resistance to the gospel in the missionary period in Kenya; thereby adding to the value of this information by relating it to a contemporary African context. In addition, it was necessary to demonstrate the significance of proper transition from one generation to another in the first-century church. This is because the study sought to review this knowledge by elaborating on the ramifications of such a transition to the contemporary generation among the Kikuyu Christians in Kenya.

There was need for this study to link the themes found in the text to the themes of the Gospel and the Bible as a whole. There was further need for the study to refine the knowledge relating to the author's argument by demonstrating the possible effectiveness of the argument he was presenting in the gospel to the contemporary African context in the application. Finally, there was need for this study to demonstrate the significance of Jesus' definition of truth to the contemporary Kikuyu Christian. This will extend the existing knowledge in this field to help in finding solutions to conflicts between traditional African culture and Christianity.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical approach that was used to exegete the text in light of other possibilities has been explained in detail. These include definitions, theories, parts, and forms of the approach. It also includes assumptions and scope of the approach, justification of the approach, and the methodological aspects and structure.

Overview of the Approaches

The interpretation method used in this research is the combination of the historical-grammatical and rhetorical criticism methods. The study employed the historical-grammatical approach to discover the author's original and intended meaning to his original audience. The study also used the rhetorical criticism approach to trace the author's argument in the given text in a way that integrates the logical flow of the argument in every step.

The Historical-Grammatical Approach

The traditional historical-grammatical method is designed to bridge our minds with the minds of biblical writers by explicating the ancient, foreign texts of the Bible through philological and cultural studies as E.D. Hirsch stated, "a text contains one meaning and that meaning is synonymous with the author's intent" (Arthurs, 1992). It tries to figure out what the biblical author meant when he wrote the passage. It is an exegetical method that incorporates research into the author's historical and cultural contexts and the text's original audience. Other studies in this method include classifying the literary genres

provided in the text and examining the text's grammatical and syntactical characteristics.

The roots of this method can be found in the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, in which Martin Luther claimed that this method reveals the meaning of a text, the 'real and true one.' As noted by Arthurs (1992), the strengths of this method are clarity and precision of methodology- which illumines discourse according to everyday conventions of language use. That is why this study adopted its methodology- and this approach is in line with this study's set of presuppositions.

The Rhetorical Criticism Approach

Much of the Bible is unapologetically rhetorical- it is persuasive and ideologically singular and uses rhetoric to bring that ideology home (Arthurs, 1992). This can be clearly seen in the Gospel according to John and in the selected text. The author seeks to bring out the theological context through an argument, especially in the selected text. Therefore, the analysis of the argument/ rhetoric being presented by the author has constituted a major part of this study. Hence the use of rhetorical criticism to augment and complement the historical-grammatical approach.

The art of persuading is known as rhetoric (Murphy, 2020). Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the capacity to identify all potential ways of persuasion on any topic. Quintilian, on the other hand, described rhetoric as "the science of eloquence" or "the art of speaking properly" (Cornelius, 2000). Rhetoric is frequently included in current augmentation theories. Some scholars regard it as persuasion in general or the art of persuasion in particular. Rhetoric, according to Foss, is the use of symbols to sway people's minds and actions, or just an ancient name for what is today known as communication (Foss, 1989). On the other hand, George Kennedy associates rhetoric with

the vitality of communication (Kennedy, 1992). This research identifies rhetoric with persuasion and communication, hence the use of rhetorical criticism in the study.

Persuasion is divided into three components in rhetoric. *Ethos*, *Pathos*, and *Logos* are the three primary components or types of attraction (Marshall, 2018). *Ethos* refers to the speaker's excellent character and trustworthiness; it is connected to "ethics," or the writer's/speaker's moral beliefs. The appeal to the emotions of the listener/reader is referred to as *pathos*. *Logos* appeals to the intellect as it tries to provide clear and convincing proof for the argument being offered. According to Aristotle, rhetoric can have three different forms. The forensic, intentional, and epideictic forms are the three types (Marshall, 2018). The first type of rhetoric is forensic (or judicial) rhetoric, which is speech or writing that analyzes the fairness or unfairness of a charge or allegation. The next one is intentional rhetoric, which is speech or writing that tries to convince an audience to do or not do something. The third is epideictic rhetoric, which involves praise or blame speech/writing. In the approach to this research, these elements or types of appeal, as well as the numerous styles of rhetoric, have been implicitly explored.

The basis for rhetorical criticism is provided by a theory of rhetoric that a critic should uniquely explain. This should include a theoretical framework for how rhetoric can be conceptualized for rhetorical criticism (Cornelius, 2000). The traditional or classical rhetoric established by Aristotle (which examines the transactions between the rhetorical situation, rhetorical strategies, and rhetorical effects) and the new rhetoric are the two main groups of rhetorical theories (Arthurs, 1992). The classical theory is the only systematized system accessible, but modern rhetoric theories are all attempts to break away from conventional theories. This study has defined its unique theory that utilizes the classical

components by integrating them in the outline of the argument in a way that breaks away from the conventional theory like the modern theories.

There are several rhetorical critique viewpoints, just as there are various rhetorical theories (Cornelius, 2000). Rhetorical critique of the Bible may be traced back to St. Augustine, who believed that the pagan rhetorical tradition, which was so essential to ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, had a lot to teach Christian preachers about the art of excellent preaching. As a result of this, the church has used Greek and Roman notions as part of its hermeneutical processes. In 1968, James Muilenburg pioneered the contemporary use of rhetorical analysis techniques in biblical texts as a correction to form criticism (Marshall, 2018). Rhetorical criticism can thus be used to show how a text functions as a persuasion effectively. This is because a rhetorical perspective is ideally suited to reveal how the ancient documents functioned as a persuasion to change the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of its readers. Therefore, this research has adopted rhetorical criticism in applying the given text.

Assumptions and Scope of the Methodological Approach

The approaches used in this research have been concerned with the description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the argument of the given text in this study (Croft, 1965). This is in an attempt to figure out the author's point of view by examining the author's argument and evaluating the influence on the audience based on two assumptions. The first assumption is that the text's author has a unique perspective shaped by the historical context of the period and that the author is attempting to persuade their contemporaries of that position (Murphy, 2020). The second assumption is that language, despite its flaws, is suitable for communicating human goals and that the present form of

the biblical text is reliable. Therefore this study did not involve the textual/form criticism approach of the given text. The practical significance of the text was limited to its application to the Kikuyu Christian in Kenya, which serves as an example of the contemporary application of the text.

The approach used in this study had the crucial purpose of demonstrating how propositions and audiences are linked, as well as how speakers strategically apply tactics to best impart their ideas to the minds of their audiences. This was done in light of traditional and cultural predispositions as premises in arguments, as well as taking into consideration the audience's responses to cultural myths or imagery and nonverbal clues.

Justification for the Approaches

The message of the Gospel, according to John, has been communicated mainly through the various terms used by the author. Therefore, because of the need to understand why the author used the various terms in his historical and literary context, it became necessary for this study to use the historical-grammatical method to bring out the original meaning of these words from the original languages of the Bible. However, because of the in-depth characteristic of the historical-grammatical approach, this approach was applied to select verses and terms because of the volume of the text, hence the need to augment it with the rhetorical criticism approach. Therefore, it was more practical for this study to use the rhetorical approach to summarize the literary and logical flow of the text. In addition, this study used the rhetorical approach because the author has presented the message through an argument and also because the approach clearly explicates the persuasive significance of the text.

Contrasting the Approach with Other Approaches

The approach focuses on the interpretation and application of the text and therefore uses methodologies that are well-suited to bring out the meaning and significance of the text.

The Literary Approach and the Study's Approach

The literary approach to biblical interpretation has produced fascinating and insightful criticism. However, although literary studies of the Bible have brilliantly explicated schemes and tropes, conventions, and artistry, they have neglected how to relate style to the invention or verbal skill with persuasion (Arthurs, 1992). Style is a traditional and important aspect of rhetoric, but literary scholars sometimes view it as an end in itself rather than as an available means of persuasion. The grammatical-historical and rhetorical criticism approaches to biblical interpretation help critics describe not only a text's features but also its functions, especially because the contrasts of literature with rhetoric are not dichotomous but may represent two points on a continuum. Moreover, form and content cannot be separated; as Amos Wilder puts it, 'not so much what the early Christians said as how they said it' (Arthurs, 1992). This study used rhetoric to mean the verbal strategies a biblical author uses with a view toward persuasion. Accordingly, the rhetorical approach in this study involved the analysis and evaluation of literary and rhetorical components in biblical texts and is therefore not limited to literary criticism only.

Interdisciplinary Method and the Study's Approach

According to scholars, in order to address concerns regarding the possible efficacy of a rhetorical act, a contemporary critic needs to establish an interdisciplinary technique of biblical criticism (Cornelius, 2000). The suggestion is that in order to address "new"

problems, a biblical critic must employ a combination of "old" approaches. A good example of such an interdisciplinary method is the combination of the strengths of rhetorical criticism and those of the historical-grammatical approach. In this approach, a contemporary critic will perform what can be rightly referred to as rhetorical hermeneutics (Kennedy, 1992). This method of biblical interpretation uses rhetorical methods to augment the grammatical-historical approach. That was because both the performative and past and present approaches to textual criticism underline the significance of careful manuscript reading, cultural aspects, and utterance connections as indicators of meaning. In literary analysis, Abrahamic scriptural interpretation theory, and homiletical use of the Bible (Cornelius, 2000); a rhetorical approach complements the grammatical/historical technique. For this reason, this study opted for the interdisciplinary method of combining the strengths of the rhetorical and the historical-grammatical approaches.

The Methodological Aspects and Structure

The study involved the identification of the theological context by outlining the author's argument; and a recognition of the historical and cultural context of the author, text, and original audience/readers. This research also performed a detailed textual analysis in order to describe how a text functions literary. This involved the identification and analysis of the literary context, which includes the genre, literary techniques, language, and flow of the text. The language analysis included translating the passage from the original Greek and a lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic analysis of the text. This study, therefore, applied this approach the same way that Arthurs (1992) applied it in his criticism of the epistle of James. In this study, the interpretation of the text was not complete until it

addressed the contemporary significance of the passage. The study has, therefore, discussed and explored the doctrinal and practical significance of the text.

The outline of the exegetical analysis in this study was organised into a commentary structure. This approach moves through the given text verse-by-verse, presenting relevant exegetical insights as they occur in the pericope (Smith, 2008). It began with an introduction section, discussing the pericope's overarching background issues and contextual setting, and presented most of the exegetical details in the verse-by-verse discussion. The elements of analysis that typically fall under main sections were integrated into the commentary. Discussions of the doctrinal significance were integrated into the historical-grammatical analysis. The discussion of the practical significance is a separate section.

Chapter Four

Findings And Discussion

Introduction

This chapter deals with the interpretation of the meaning and significance of John 8:31-59 text. Discussion of the theological/doctrinal significance has been integrated into the historical-grammatical analysis, which is the first section of the chapter. The practical significance has been addressed in the second section of this chapter. As such, the first section fulfils the first and second objectives, and the second section fulfils the third objective of this study.

Interpretation of the John 8:31-59 Text and its Doctrinal Significance

The outline of the historical-grammatical analysis has been organized into a complementary structure - divided into eleven literary units and three rhetorical units. The first rhetorical unit consists of two literary units; the second, five; and the third, four. The language analysis includes the translation of the passage from the original Greek and a lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic analysis of the text. Further explanations have been given where necessary to bring out more clarity on the choice of words in translation. The analysis of each literary unit begins with the translation of the Greek text into English and has been integrated with the logical flow of the text and the doctrinal significance of the specific texts.

Various authors have explained the various forms of biblical Greek grammar, syntactical nominal and verbal shades, and the semantic functions of cases adopted in this research. The main resources that have been beneficial in this study are books written by

Daniel B. Wallace (1996), (2000) and Clayton Croy (1999). Others include Joseph Dongell (2014), William D. Mounce (2009) and Jeremy Duff (2005). The scholars are generally in agreement. In cases where the authors have used different terms to explain the same idea, this research has opted for terms that give more clarity on the specific context of the text. Thus, the works of these scholars have significantly informed the exegetical decisions made in this study. The Greek text has been adapted from the SBL edition of the New Testament (Holmes, 2011–2013). In cases where certain helping words were needed to do a smooth translation in English, italics were used, especially the helping words that translate a particular Greek word in another context.

The selected text of John 8:31-59 is one of the discourses recorded by Apostle John that give a record of a period in which Jesus was facing great resistance from the Jews, especially from the Jewish rulers - also referred to as Pharisees, chief priests, and scribes (John 7:32, 45, 8:3) (Carson, 1991). The events in the selected text happened during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem (John 7:2-14, 37; 7:53-8:2; 8:20, 59), at the treasury, as Jesus was teaching in the temple (John 8:20).

Many scholars observe that the events recorded in the selected text happened against the backdrop of contentions among the Jews about the real identity of Jesus (Guthrie, 1981). This can be seen in the conversations of the people who heard Jesus' teachings, who were amazed at the boldness with which he spoke because they were aware that the Jews were seeking to kill him (John 7: 19-31, 40-44). The fact that they sought to kill him indicates these are the same Jews (or at least most of them) that Jesus was addressing in chapter 5 on a previous occasion. The Jews sought to kill Jesus - accusing him of breaking the Sabbath (John 5:16 and 7:21-24), and for blasphemy (John 5:18); for

the Law of Moses required those who were guilty of such be condemned to death (Exodus 31:14 and Leviticus 24:16).

The selected text begins after Jesus's dialogue with the Jews at the temple treasury (John 8:12-30). These verses are a record of how Jesus defended his self-witness to the Jews as the light of the world (John 8:12-20), and also how he witnessed against their unbelief, in which he declared that they would die in their sins if they did not believe in him (John 8:21-29). As he spoke these words, many believed in him (John 8:30). Then Jesus began to address the Jews who believed him (John 8:31) - igniting a response from them, which resulted in the dialogue that is the focus of this study (John 8:31-59).

The internal evidence of the Gospel, according to John, shows that there were two groups: those who were simply referred to in Greek as ὁ ὄχλος, 'the people' or 'the crowd' (John 7:12, 20, 25, 31-32, 40, 43 and 49), and the οἱ ἄρχοντες (plural of ἄρχων), the Jewish 'rulers'/'leaders' - chief priests, Pharisees, and scribes (John 7:26, 32, 45-52 and 8:3, 13). Some of the people believed that he was the Christ while others did not (John 7:12 and 40-43); however, the Pharisees were not willing to believe in him (except Nicodemus - John 7:47-52).

Moreover, the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (plural of Ἰουδαῖος), 'the Jews' (John 7:1), was used interchangeably to mean ὁ ὄχλος, 'the people/crowd' (John 7:19-20; 8:31-33 and John 8:39-40, 48, 52) or οἱ ἄρχοντες, the Jewish 'rulers'/'leaders' and οἱ Φαρισαῖοι (plural of Φαρισαῖος), 'Pharisees' (John 7:11, 13, 25-26; 8:13, 19-21; 9:13-16 and 8:22, 31; 9:18-24,34). However, those who engaged Jesus in the dialogues were mainly the Pharisees (John 8:13) and the 'people' who resisted his teachings (John 7:19-20). It is this group that Jesus was addressing in the selected text of John 8:31-59- referred to as "those Jews" in

this study. This can also be attested to by the third-class conditional statement in verse 31, which casts doubt on the genuineness of their belief.

Scholars are divided on whether the Jews Jesus was addressing in verse 31 are the same as the ones who believed in him in verse 30, or a mixture of two groups- those who were ready to become his disciples and those who had simply acknowledged the truth of his words but were not ready to continue as his disciples, as seen in the works of D. Carson (1991) and L. Morris (1995). However, H. Ridderbos (1997) identifies the two nuances of the term “Jew” that are comparable to the internal evidence above. First, he identifies the usage with the post-Old Testament period, where both ‘Jew’ and ‘Israelite’ were used to indicate that a person belonged by ancestry to Israel both as a people and as a religious community- in which ‘Jew’ increasingly replaced ‘Israelite.’ Second, he identifies its usage with ‘Jews that were hostile to Jesus’ or, more specifically, to the Jewish rulers and authorities, who are also referred to as Pharisees. Moreover, he demonstrates the impossibility of a sharp line of demarcation between these two nuances by observing that the pilgrims (the people/crowd) in Jerusalem, being themselves Jews - dared not speak of Jesus “for fear of the Jews” (John 7:13).

The Truth and Freedom (Verses 31-36)

Knowledge of Truth through Discipleship (Verses 31-33)

Greek text. (31) Ἦλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους· Ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μου ἔστε, (32) καὶ γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς. (33) ἀπεκρίθησαν πρὸς αὐτόν· Σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἔσμεν καὶ οὐδενὶ δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε· πῶς σὺ λέγεις ὅτι Ἐλεύθεροι γενήσεσθε;

Translation. ³¹Then Jesus began saying to the Jews who had believed him: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free”. ³³They replied to him, “We are Abraham's offspring, and no one has enslaved us at any time: how do you say that we shall become free?”

Interpretation. Since the time of the Jewish resistance against Jesus as recorded by the author from chapter 5 onwards, this is the first time that Jesus addressed the Jews (Ιουδαίους, accusative direct object) who had believed (τοὺς πεπιστευκότας, perfect attributive participle) in him as shown by the inceptive imperfect Ἔλεγεν (from λέγω, I say) and the logical inferential conjunction οὖν. The use of the perfect participle denotes completed action prior to the main verb Ἔλεγεν with a continuing result.

The third class conditional statement in verse 31 (If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples) treats the premise as not certain (that those Jews were not his true disciples), but very probable (that those who continue in his word were his true disciples indeed). The condition is proverbial in quality, expressing what can be expected to occur (ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μου ἐστε, true discipleship) under certain circumstances (Ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, continuing or abiding in his words). The adverb ἀληθῶς (truly) implies that there is a false discipleship that those Jews had ascribed to. The predictive future γνώσεσθε (from γινώσκω, I know) indicates an action affirmed as to happen in the future, that is, continuing in his word would certainly result in the knowledge of the truth. This knowledge is experiential, not merely cognitive, as indicated by the use of the Greek word γινώσκω in the Bible (Frame, 1987). The gnomic future ἐλευθερώσει (from ἐλευθερώω, I free/set free/liberate), indicates a generic event/timeless truth to take place in the future, that is, the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια), will always set free those who come to know it.

Believing him in this context refers to the fact that they believed him simply as a prophet, as someone sent by God (Ngewa S. M., 2003) - which was acceptable to Jesus as long as they were willing to proceed further in their faith. In other words, their acceptance of Jesus as one who God sent was a good starting point for the Jews. That is why Jesus was urging them to continue in his word so that they could get to know more in the process. And since the Jews understood the concept of discipleship well (Laan, 2012), by calling them to true discipleship, Jesus was basically telling them that there was more than just believing in him as a prophet - that could only be known through the discipline of discipleship.

The interrelationship between abiding in his word and knowing the truth is theologically significant here. According to D. A. Carson, Jewish religion taught that the study of the law made a man free (Carson, 1991), but the teachings of Jesus point to his words. First, Jesus defines true discipleship as abiding in his word (verse 31). Second, through this discipleship, they would get to know the truth. The resultant state that comes as a result of knowing the truth is freedom; hence knowing the truth is liberating. The logical connective conjunction καὶ links the idea of true discipleship in verse 31 with the knowledge of truth in verse 32, which is also linked to freedom by another logical connective καὶ. The context in which Jesus was addressing the Jews implies that it is through abiding in his word that the Jews would attain the saving faith (Morris, 1995)- through the knowledge of the truth- a progression from just recognizing him as one who sent to accepting him and acknowledging him as their master and teacher (Ngewa S. M., 2003).

In response, the Jews questioned why Jesus would tell them that they would be made free, considering that they were Abraham's offspring and were never in bondage to

any man. The stative present ἔσμεν conveys the state of being, that they are biological offspring of Abraham (Ἀβραάμ, a genitive of relationship). The extensive perfect δεδουλεύκαμεν puts emphasis on the past action/process (of their biological birth) from which their present state emerges (that no one has ever enslaved them). The interrogative adverb πῶς and the deliberative future γενήσεσθε implies some doubt about the response expected by the Jews to their question.

If the Jews were simply referring to the fact that they were born free according to the laws of slavery in their cultural context, as indicated in verse 34 below, it would be understandable, but they made a further claim. They also ascribed their freedom to the fact that their biological descent was from Abraham. This implies that the Jews embraced the ideology that freedom was part of the heritage of Abraham's seed. C. K. Barret (1978) observes that there was a Jewish belief that all Israelites were kings by virtue of being descended from Abraham. The implication is that they were, and always have been, free - because Abraham was their ancestor.

Moreover, in his promise to Abraham, God promised that the nations would be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3); which in this context included freedom (according to those Jews). Therefore, if the freedom of the nations would come through them (as Abraham's offspring), then how Jesus could say that they needed to become free themselves? This is the most likely argument by these Jews because only a free person can set others free and does not need to be made free. Whether this ideology by the Jews refers to spiritual or physical freedom - or both - will become more apparent in the discussion of the subsequent verses.

Truth Embodied by Jesus (Verses 34-36)

Greek text. (34) Ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας· (35) ὁ δὲ δοῦλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· ὁ υἱὸς μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. (36) ἐὰν οὖν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ, ὅντως ἐλεύθεροι ἔσεσθε.

Translation. ³⁴Jesus replied to them, “Verily, verily, I say to you that everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin: ³⁵but the slave does not abide in the house forever, the Son abides forever; ³⁶if the Son therefore should set you free, you shall be free indeed.”

Interpretation. Then, in response to them, Jesus introduces a spiritual concept by explaining the fact that he was not referring to their physical bondage but to their spiritual bondage of sin because (ὅτι), πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας. The declarative indicative mood in verse 34 and the particle ἀμὴν shows that Jesus wanted to present the assertion as a non-contingent statement. The present participle ὁ ποιῶν (everyone who practices) indicates a continuous action in view - habitual sinning by a slave of sin.

He goes on to appeal to them through their understanding of their cultural laws of slavery to bring out the assurance and certainty of the freedom he is referring to; a slave's status or position in the house is not permanent (ὁ δὲ δοῦλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα), but the status and position of the son is permanent (ὁ υἱὸς μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα); therefore if the son of the house sets the slave free, then the freedom granted is sure (Ngewa S. M., 2003). The gnomic present μένει in both clauses is used to present a general timeless truth. The dative of sphere in the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ is figurative.

The third class conditional statement in verse 36 (If the Son therefore should set you free, you shall be free indeed) treats the premise as not yet actualized (that those Jews had not yet been set free by the Son), as indicated by the conjunction ἐὰν and the

conditional subjunctive ἐλευθερώσῃ; but very probable in the future (that they could actually be set free in the future), as indicated by the gnomic future ἔσεσθε and the adverb ὄντως.

Moreover, since this was in response to their question in verse 33, this was an allusion to the fact that Jesus (the Son in the house of God) is the embodiment of the truth that sets free (verse 32). The explicit revelation of this claim by Jesus is recorded by the author in John 14:1-6 in which Jesus declared in verse 2, ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου μοναὶ πολλάι εἰσιν - “in my Father’s house are many mansions”; and in verse 6, Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ - “I am the way, the truth and the life.” By referring to the Son of God - the Son in the house of God - Jesus is giving the assurance of this freedom because the concept of the Son of God was not new to the Jews (John 9:35-38; 10:36). Thus Jesus introduces the subject of salvation in this discourse because the statements in verses 32 and 36 relate the saving act of the truth with the saving act of the Son of God. This is a concept that will become more apparent in the subsequent verses.

The Jewish cultural concept of sonship with reference to the Son of God had great theological significance to the Jews. The concept was taught to them through the Scriptures (Psalms 2), and therefore, it was possible that they had an understanding of the Son of God and the fact that he was equal with God (Psalms 110:1). John Gill observes that there was a Son of God, a divine person known by the Jews under this character and that the expected Messiah would appear as such (Gill, 2016). The contention, as we will see later, has to do with the real identity of this Son of God. Although external evidence points to the fact that the previous generations' Jewish teachers had correctly linked the identity of the Son of God with the Messiah who was to come (Gill, 2016), the matter was contentious in the days of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels.

Moreover, Jesus was, in effect, telling them that they were not sons in the house of God, as indicated by the third-class conditional statement in verse 36. Many Jews assumed that their biological ancestry was the basis for their relationship with God and, therefore, sons in the household of God (Morris, 1995). Put simply, they thought being Jewish was the same as being saved, and therefore they were entitled to all of God's blessings. But they were in error; that is why Jesus was pointing out their slavery to sin because salvation was a matter of faith in God. Furthermore, there was the hope of salvation for those in bondage to sin because a slave does not abide forever – meaning that their slavery to sin was temporary. The statement of Jesus from verses 34 to 36 is, therefore, an example of double entendre: speaking of the wretched state of slavery to sin without the permanence of sonship in the house of God and speaking of the hope of salvation at the same time because of the temporary state of slavery and permanence of the Son that sets free.

The appeal by Jesus through their culture is also an implicit way of demonstrating to the Jews that certain truths can be revealed from their own culture, a principle applicable to every culture in the world (Walls, 1996). This is a concept that Paul taught in his preaching (Acts 14:16-17) and teachings (Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-15), in which he taught that God had ensured he was not without a witness in all nations. This is despite the fact that they were using their culture and traditions as a basis for resisting Jesus.

The Truth and Fatherhood (Verses 37-47)

Contrasting Fatherhood through Conduct (Verses 37-38)

Greek Text. (37) οἶδα ὅτι σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐστε· ἀλλὰ ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι, ὅτι ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐμὸς οὐ χωρεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν. (38) ἃ ἐγὼ ἐώρακα παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ λαλῶ· καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν ἃ ἠκούσατε παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ποιεῖτε.

Translation. ³⁷I know that you are Abraham's offspring; but you seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you. ³⁸I speak that which I have seen with *my* Father: and so you practice that which you have heard from *your* father.

Interpretation. The acknowledgment by Jesus of their biological descent from Abraham as indicated by the perfect with a present force οἶδα and the substantival ὅτι clause, that (ὅτι) offspring (σπέρμα, predicate nominative) of Abraham (Ἀβραάμ, genitive of relationship) you are (ἐστέ, stative present), underscores the significance of such a relationship. However, the contrastive conjunction ἀλλὰ and the phrase ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι, shows that their state is not as expected. The reason is given in the causal/adverbial ὅτι clause; because (ὅτι) the word of Jesus did not have a hold/progress in them, as shown by the negated progressive present οὐ χωρεῖ, which involves a continuous action - revealing their true spiritual status. The implication here is that even though the Jews were aware of the genuineness of Jesus as one who was sent by God (Ridderbos, 1997) (which the author refers to as them having believed him in verse 31), they were not willing to change their ways by becoming his disciples, instead, they were seeking for a way to get rid of him by killing him - which was not expected of Abraham's offspring.

To distinguish himself from them, Jesus speaks of what he has seen (ἐώρακα, extensive perfect that puts emphasis on the past action/process from which his present state emerges) with his Father. Then by using the logical connective conjunction καὶ and the logical inferential conjunction οὖν, he contrasts it with what they have heard (ἠκούσατε, a resultative aorist that focuses on the conclusion or result of their action) from their father. The different use of the preposition παρὰ with the dative of association (παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ) with reference to Jesus and with the genitive of source (παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς) with reference to the Jews emphasizes the contrast between the two parties. However, the use of the dative

τῷ πατρὶ and genitive τοῦ πατρὸς also denotes a familial relationship. Thus Jesus ascribed the rejection of his words to the fact that they had a father who was different from his own Father; and that by practicing what they had learned by hearing from their father, they were acting contrary to the words that Jesus had learned by observing and imitating his Father.

Jesus introduced here an aspect worth noting with reference to spiritual fatherhood; it involves the choices of those being fathered. It is not a matter of inheriting the father's characteristics through genes but rather an imitation of the words or conduct of the spiritual father. Therefore, conduct is a clue to paternity, an idea explored by J. N. Sanders (1943) and Hall Harris III (2004). This was a way of introducing his idea of fatherhood, as outlined in the subsequent verses.

Contrasting Fatherhood through Imitation (Verses 39-41a)

Greek Text. (39) Ἀπεκρίθησαν καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· Ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ ἐστίν. λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Εἰ τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἐστε, τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἐποιεῖτε· (40) νῦν δὲ ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι, ἄνθρωπον ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα ἣν ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ· τοῦτο Ἀβραάμ οὐκ ἐποίησεν. (41a) ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν.

Translation. ³⁹They answered and said to him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would practice the works of Abraham: ⁴⁰but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I have heard from God: Abraham did not practice this. ^{41a}You practice the works of your father.”

Interpretation. The Jews responded to this by reiterating their claim that Abraham was their father. This was in an attempt to refute the claim by Jesus that they had another father who was different from the Father that Jesus was associating himself with. The

‘present’ second class conditional statement in verse 39b treats the premise as unreal in the protasis, as far as the speaker is concerned, that those Jews were not Abraham’s children (τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ). The term τέκνα (children) is used instead of σπέρμα (offspring) to emphasize the aspect of the imitation of conduct rather than mere biological descent. The durative present ἐστε conveys that the state of being started in the past and was still continuing at the time of speaking. This statement effectively presented the claim by the Jews in verse 39a as unreal, that they were not and had never been Abraham’s children. The apodosis expresses what would have occurred if the circumstance in the protasis had truly existed; that the true children of Abraham would always practice his works.

Despite the absence of the particle ἄν in the apodosis, the second class condition is indicated by the “pluperfect” imperfect ἐποιεῖτε, which, in this context, indicates a time prior to the action occurring in the discourse narrative. This means that those Jews were, in reality, not practising the works of Abraham, as shown in verse 40 by the clause νῦν δὲ ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι. By seeking (ζητεῖτέ, a descriptive present, which paints a scene in progress) to kill (ἀποκτεῖναι, an aorist infinitive of purpose) Jesus, they were acting contrary to the conduct of Abraham. Their action is affirmed in the declaration by Jesus that Abraham (Ἀβραάμ, nominative subject) did not practice this, as shown by the negated continuous aorist οὐκ ἐποίησεν and the accusative demonstrative of direct object τοῦτο.

Instead, they were practicing the works of their father, as shown by the durative present ποιεῖτε as well as the descriptive genitive τοῦ πατρὸς and the genitive of relationship ὑμῶν, who was certainly not Abraham. Craig Keener (2012) observes that the Rabbis also spoke of those who were disciples of Abraham and Moses by walking in their ways. The idea was, therefore, not new to them, as shown by the claim of the Jewish

leaders in John 9:28, where they claimed to be disciples of Moses. Thus Jesus responded by explicitly reiterating what he had just implicitly said to them in verses 37-38.

The interchangeable use of truth and his word in the statement ἄνθρωπον ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα ἣν ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ is theologically significant here because what Jesus is saying is that his word is truth. This is a statement he expressly states in John 17:17, in which he referred to the word of God as truth. L. Morris (1995) observes that ‘word’ in Jesus’ statements refers to the sum of his whole message, words which Jesus says are from God - words of God. Therefore, the word of God does not just cause a person to know the truth (verse 31), but is truth (verse 40).

Contrasting Fatherhood through Love (Verses 41b-42)

Greek Text. (41b) εἶπαν αὐτῷ· Ἡμεῖς ἐκ πορνείας οὐ γεγεννήμεθα· ἓνα πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν θεόν. (42) εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν ἠγαπᾶτε ἂν ἐμέ, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἤκω· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐλήλυθα, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνός με ἀπέστειλεν.

Translation. ^{41b}They said to him, “We were not born through fornication; we have one Father, God.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me: for I came forth from God and I am here; for I have not even come by myself, but he sent me.

Interpretation. The use of the personal pronoun Ἡμεῖς with the prepositional phrase ἐκ πορνείας (genitive of means) in relation to the negated extensive perfect οὐ γεγεννήμεθα is an attempt by the Jews to justify their purity in their response to Jesus. Through this claim, they meant that the law did not disqualify them from being counted among the Israelites, the people of God, whose heritage was from their father Abraham (Hosea 1:9, 2:2-5).

The claim of having one Father- God, meant that they understood that the children of Abraham were also the children of God by implication. The claim by the Jews also points to the monotheistic basis for their religion and national existence in Deuteronomy 6:4 (Ridderbos, 1997). This is shown in the clause ἓνα πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν θεόν, which means that they were relating the Fatherhood of God to them with their biological birth, a fact that Jesus refutes in the subsequent verses.

The ‘present’ second class conditional statement in verse 42 (If God were your Father, you would love me) treats the premise in the protasis as being contrary to fact; that God was not the Father of those Jews. The apodosis expresses what would have occurred if the premise was true, they would have loved him. Therefore those Jews did not love Jesus. In other words, they would have had the same love for Jesus that they would have had for God if God was their Father, an idea that the author expounds further in 1 John 5:1b. Jesus was basically stating that the true heritage of Abraham was not determined purely by their biological descent from Abraham but by imitating the relationship that Abraham had with God. Thus, Jesus declared that being a child of God is not a racial matter - of being born into the Jewish race - but a matter of having the right relationship with God, loving God. These verses also show the sharp contrast between the perspective of Jesus and his Jewish audience.

Moreover, to emphasize his origin and mission, the extensive perfect ἐξῆλθον was used to emphasize the past action/process from which his present state emerges, in a clause that begins with the logical explanatory conjunction γὰρ and the prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ that includes a genitive of source τοῦ θεοῦ. That Jesus both originated from God and had been sent by God (Morris, 1995). The reflective pronoun ἑαυτοῦ magnifies this in the phrase οὐδὲ γὰρ ἅπ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐλήλυθα (extensive perfect) and the contrastive

conjunction ἀλλ' that is followed by the phrase ἐκεῖνός (used as a pronoun - he) με ἀπέστειλεν (constative aorist).

That is to say that those who truly come in the name of God cannot do so on their own accord but by the express will and commissioning of God, as expounded by Paul, the apostle in Romans 10:14-15. It was also a way of reiterating to them that his doctrine was from God, who had sent him (John 7:16-17). In addition, ἐξῆλθον (came forth) was often used for the dawning of great events in their Jewish traditions, the appearance of important personages and the like (Ridderbos, 1997), therefore, the speech by Jesus had a certain solemnity in their manner of speech.

Contrasting Fatherhood through Nature and Character (Verses 43-44)

Greek Text. (43) διὰ τί τὴν λαλίαν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐ γινώσκετε; ὅτι οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμόν. (44) ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν. ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἔστηκεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ. ὅταν λαλῇ τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ, ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ.

Translation. ⁴³For what *reason* do you not understand my speech? *It is* because you are not able to hear my word.⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you want to practice. He was a murderer from the beginning, and he does not stand in the truth because the truth is not in him. Whenever he speaks *a* lie, he speaks from his own: for he is a liar and the father of it.

Interpretation. The use of the causal preposition διὰ and the interrogative pronoun τί is used to show an emphasis on a specific reason in response to the speech of Jesus (in particular) as shown by the emphatic personal pronoun τὴν ἐμὴν. The use of the negative

particle οὐ in verse 43 to negate the descriptive present γινώσκετε shows that Jesus expected an affirmative to his question; that the Jews did not understand his speech for sure. This was certainly intended to cause them to reflect on themselves because he gives the reason, as shown by the adverbial/causal ὅτι clause and the negated stative present οὐ δύνασθε, that they were unable to hear. The present infinitive ἀκούειν (to hear/to attentively listen to his words) can also be translated as ‘to obey,’ that is, they were not willing to accept or obey his words- a fact that he elaborates in the subsequent verses. The same idea is expressed by Harris III (2004), who observes that the Greek word ἀκούω (I hear) can also be translated as ‘I obey’ in such a context.

Having established that the Jews he was addressing were not children of God because of their evil conduct, Jesus makes a bolder statement: that their father was the devil because they wanted to practice his desires. The declaration ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς (genitive of relationship) τοῦ διαβόλου (genitive of source) ἐστὲ (stative present) by Jesus is, therefore, a culmination of what he had been trying to communicate to those Jews. This thought is completed by the clause καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας (accusative direct object) τοῦ πατρὸς (genitive of source) ὑμῶν (genitive of relationship) θέλετε (conative present) ποιεῖν (infinitive of purpose). This is in reference to their attempt to kill Jesus, as indicated by the subsequent sentences describing the nature and character of their father, the devil.

The progressive/descriptive imperfect ἦν is used to describe a state in progress (ἄνθρωποκτόνος, predicate adjective) from the past, as shown by the genitive of time in the prepositional phrase ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. The same thought continues in the subsequent clause καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ (dative of sphere, indicating the realm) οὐκ ἔστηκεν (negated perfect with a present force, which has little difference between the act and its results). The adverbial causal ὅτι clause: ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν (durative present) ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ (figurative

dative of sphere) is used to explain why. This means that the devil was a murderer from the beginning and continues so because the truth is not in him. The present force of the perfect ἔστηκεν is strengthened by the durative present ἔστιν.

To further expound the nature and character of the devil, a present active subjunctive λαλῇ in an indefinite temporal clause (as shown by the temporal conjunction ὅταν) is used to demonstrate his habitual actions of speaking lies from his own nature (as shown by the substantive adjective genitive of source τῶν ιδίων). The reason for these habitual actions is explained in the adverbial causal clause: ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ. The use of the gnomic present ἐστὶν with the genitive of source αὐτοῦ presents the general timeless truth that the devil is always a liar and the father lies, which explains why he habitually speaks lies.

The reference to the devil and his characteristics in relation to the truth reveals a profound, theologically significant concept that can greatly help us to understand Jesus' definition of truth in this discourse. He describes the devil as a murderer from the beginning and a liar and the father of lies - which are attributes of his evil character and nature. And he abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him so that when he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature. This is profound; what Jesus is saying here is that truth is not just about facts and information - which the devil certainly has - but is more than that. Truth proceeds out of the divine nature and character; therefore, an evil being like the devil cannot possess truth or even receive it. In Jewish speech, knowing truth could refer to the truth about God. This is because God - in their understanding - epitomizes truth by his nature (Keener C. , 2012). Thus Jesus was using a manner of speech that was easily understandable to the Jews.

Moreover, the emphasis by Jesus on words of truth in verse 40 demonstrates that the truth is to have the mind of God, and to think like God since words are an expression of someone's thoughts or mind/heart. This means that the devil's mind and heart are so twisted because of his evil nature and character that every perception of his mind and heart is so skewed that all he perceives or thinks about anything or anyone is false - hence there is no truth in him. Thus whatever he thinks or speaks is falsehood because he does not have the capacity to think like God or perceive the way God perceives. Truth, therefore, is the reality of God just the same way falsehood is the reality of the devil.

The call by Jesus to know the truth in verse 31 is, therefore, the call for his hearers to embrace the mind/reality and the nature of God expressed through his words - which are the words from God. And by calling them to be his disciples, Jesus is revealing himself as the embodiment of the mind/reality and nature of God that men should imitate; in other words, Jesus is the embodiment of the truth; the word (λόγος) of God (John 1:1,14 and 14:6). This idea must have been fresh in the minds of the believers that John the apostle was addressing. This is because the same idea of Christ embodying the word (λόγος) of God had been propagated by Philo, who related λόγος to Yahweh, the God of Israel, before the coming of Christ (Barclay, 1975). He specifically connects it to the Old Testament reference to the Word of God (Genesis 15:1, 1 Samuel 3:21), as well as the Wisdom of God, which is personified poetically (Proverbs 8) (Schultz, 2002). The idea of the λόγος embodying the mind of God had also been propagated by the Stoics (Barclay, 1975). So becoming a disciple of Jesus is to learn how to think like Christ or to have the mind and heart of Christ - which is, in effect, learning how to think like God or to have the mind and heart of God. Perhaps this was the same idea that Paul the apostle had in mind when he wrote about Christ being formed in the Christian believers (Galatians 4:19).

Contrasting Fatherhood through Obedience (Verses 45-47)

Greek Text. (45) ἐγὼ δὲ ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω, οὐ πιστεύετε μοι. (46) τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐλέγχει με περὶ ἁμαρτίας; εἰ ἀλήθειαν λέγω, διὰ τί ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε μοι; (47) ὁ ὢν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούει· διὰ τοῦτο ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἀκούετε ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστέ.

Translation. ⁴⁵So because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which of you convicts me concerning sin? If I say the truth, for what *reason* do you not believe me? ⁴⁷He that is of God hears the words of God: therefore you do not hear because you are not of God.”

Interpretation. The use of δὲ as an adverbial conjunction ‘so’ and the adverbial ὅτι causal clause in verse 45 was a way of emphasizing that the reasons he had given in the previous verse 44 were the ones that caused them not to believe the truth. This implies that those Jews were neither seeking nor able to know the truth because the nature and character of their father the devil, was now inherent in them. The first question in verse 46 was open-ended, a challenge to any one of them to answer in the affirmative or otherwise, as indicated by the interrogative pronoun τίς and the prepositional phrase ἐξ ὑμῶν (genitive of separation). The descriptive present ἐλέγχει is used to paint a picture of the scene that was happening then. This was a way of distinguishing himself from them. Thus Jesus was explicitly telling them that his sinless conduct proves that they were not of the same Father, which was also a way of telling them that his immaculate nature was enough reason for them to believe him. This was also a theologically significant clue for the Jews to recognize his divinity, as elaborated in verses 57-59 below.

The second question in verse 46 has two aspects. First, it is a first-class conditional statement; in which Jesus treated the premise in the protasis as a fact - that he was telling the truth. Second, Jesus expected them to respond to the question in affirmation of the fact

that they did not believe in him - as shown by the use of the negative particle οὐ and the indicative mood in the sentence. The second aspect also completes the thought contained in the first aspect; the apodosis of the conditional statement- that they did not believe him.

To conclude his idea of fatherhood, he made a declaration that contrasted those who are of God and those who are of the devil (by implication) in verse 47, as shown by the genitive of source in the prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ and the negated stative present οὐκ ἐστέ. The customary present ἀκούει presents a generic timeless truth concerning those who are of God in contrast to the negated descriptive present οὐκ ἀκούετε with regard to those who are not of God. The prepositional phrase διὰ τοῦτο (because of this) is causal; hence it is best translated as therefore in this context. He thus argues that because they that are of God hear God's words, their rejection of God's words goes on to prove that they are not of God. The terms ῥῆμα and λόγος both mean word; however, ῥῆμα is used instead of λόγος in this context because it is a concrete expression of λόγος (Souter, 1917). Thus by becoming like the devil in their character, those Jews were no longer able to receive or obey the words of God, as indicated in verse 43 above. Therefore, the fatherhood out of which a person lives determines how that person hears, as is also observed by H. Ridderbos (1997).

The Authenticity of Jesus (Verses 48-59)

Jesus Honours God (Verses 48-50)

Greek Text. (48) Ἀπεκρίθησαν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· Οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἡμεῖς ὅτι Σαμαρίτης εἶ σὺ καὶ δαιμόνιον ἔχεις; (49) ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· Ἐγὼ δαιμόνιον οὐκ ἔχω, ἀλλὰ τιμῶ τὸν πατέρα μου, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀτιμάζετέ με. (50) ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ ζητῶ τὴν δόξαν μου· ἔστιν ὁ ζητῶν καὶ κρίνων.

Translation. ⁴⁸ The Jews answered and said to him, “Do we not rightly say that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me - ⁵⁰and I do not seek my own glory - he is the one that seeks and the one that judges.

Interpretation. The negative particle Οὐ shows that the Jews were ironically expecting Jesus to answer their question in the affirmative. Jesus did not expressly deny the accusation that he was a Samaritan; ὅτι Σαμαρίτης εἶ (stative present) σὺ, which implies that he recognized their ironical expression. However, the accusation of having a demon necessitated a response because of the explanation that followed. He answered part of the question with a negation οὐκ and a stative present ἔχω; that he did not have a demon (δαιμόνιον). The accusation was a direct insult by those Jews in response to the bold declaration by Jesus in verses 42-47. Being referred to as a Samaritan was very offensive in the Jewish world then because the Samaritans were considered unclean and inferior in status to the Jews; they were also counted as enemies by the Jews, and therefore, they were actually calling Jesus a traitor (Mburu, 2010). Worse still, these Jews accused Jesus of having a demon, the most debased state that a man can ever be in their understanding (Ngewa S. M., 2003). Therefore the Jews were not just insulting Jesus; they were insulting him with the worst kind of insult they could. This goes on to demonstrate the truth of what Jesus had spoken about them; that they were as evil as their father, the devil.

In his response, Jesus pointed to the fact that although he was honouring his Father - something that they should have been doing themselves - they were instead dishonouring him with their insults. The fact that Jesus was counting their words as dishonour means that they were doing it deliberately. This is shown by the way Jesus contrasted his conduct; τιμῶ (habitual present) τὸν πατέρα μου (genitive of relationship), and theirs; ὑμεῖς

ἀτιμάζετέ (descriptive present) με. Thayer defines τιμῶ as reverence, to venerate or value (Thayer, 2016). Mounce adds the aspect of offering oneself with reverent service (Mounce, 2020). Thus, by bringing up the issue of honour, Jesus was referring to the Jewish understanding of discipleship, in which the fathers were expected to disciple their children like Abraham (Genesis 18:19) (Gregory, 2008). Hence it was expected of them to honour their fathers the way a disciple should honour his teacher (Matthew 10:24-25). This is because sons were to be the disciples of their fathers, that is, of their father Abraham (Keener C. , 2012) - something they did not do (verses 39-40). The way they dishonoured Jesus can be attributed to this fact. Furthermore, it was an indication of their failure as fathers too, because there were those who were certainly older than Jesus among those Jews, considering that most of them were the Jewish leaders, Pharisees (John 8:13).

Moreover, to emphasize the import of his conduct, Jesus denies (negative particle οὐ) ever seeking (ζητῶ, habitual/customary present) his glory (τὴν δόξαν, accusative direct object) μου (genitive of possession); a sign of his authenticity (John 7:18). The word δόξα means ‘to give/receive credit’ in this context (Mounce, 2020), from the root δοκεω (to think, suppose) (Holmes, 2011–2013); Jesus does not seek credit for himself. Then he goes on to present his Father (God) as the one who seeks the glory (who deserves the credit) and the one who judges (who has the right to judge). This is indicated by the gnomic present ἔστιν, which presents a general timeless truth and the substantive participles ὁ ζητῶν and κρίνων.

The theological implication here is that those who honour their fathers should be honoured as well in society, in the community of God’s people (Gregory, 2008). That Jesus should be honoured the same way his Father is honoured, as he had said to them in his teachings (John 5:23). This is because the act of honouring his Father was a proof to

those Jews that Jesus was authentic (Carson, 1991). Therefore the dishonourable act of insulting Jesus by the Jews indicates how wicked they had become in their conduct, hypocrites, especially because they were claiming to be the people of God. By affirming that his mission was not about him seeking his own glory, as many were doing, he was pointing them to the one who was seeking the glory - who was also the one who judges, that is, has the right to judge. In the Jewish context, the one that Jesus was referring to certainly had to be greater than him in authority and power because he sent him and was his Father (verse 42) (Gregory, 2008). In addition, his claim of honouring his Father in the previous verse gives a clue to the identity of the one he was referring to, as will be confirmed in the subsequent verses.

The Words of Jesus Give Eternal Life (Verses 51-53)

Greek Text. (51) ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐάν τις τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον τηρήσῃ, θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. (52) εἶπον αὐτῷ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Νῦν ἐγνώκαμεν ὅτι δαιμόνιον ἔχεις· Ἀβραὰμ ἀπέθανεν καὶ οἱ προφῆται, καὶ σὺ λέγεις, Ἐάν τις τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσῃ, οὐ μὴ γεύσεται θανάτου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· (53) μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ, ὅστις ἀπέθανεν; καὶ οἱ προφῆται ἀπέθανον· τίνα σεαυτὸν ποιεῖς;

Translation. ⁵¹[*Jesus said*] Verily, verily, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death forever.” ⁵²The Jews said to him, “now we know that you have a demon: Abraham died, and the prophets, and you say, ‘if anyone keeps my word, he shall never taste of death.’” ⁵³You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died, are you? The prophets also died: whom do you make yourself?”

Interpretation. Then, in an attempt to bring the conversation back to his message, Jesus made a declaration that agitated the Jews more. The third class conditional statement

in verse 51 (if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death forever) treats the premise in the protasis as unreal (that those Jews did not keep his word), but very probable (that those who keep his word would never see death). This is indicated by the conjunction ἔάν and the conditional subjunctive τηρήσῃ in the protasis. The use of the particle ἀμὴν and the indicative mood shows that Jesus intended to present the statement as non-contingent. The use of the emphatic negation οὐ μὴ, the aorist subjunctive θεωρήσῃ and the prepositional phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα in the apodosis expresses a condition (that is very certain); that is expected to occur under certain conditions (if the protasis was real).

The declaration was understood by the Jews to mean that he was not only greater than Abraham but also greater than all the prophets - who were dead. By ironically asserting that his words were proof of their claim that he has a demon (Nūn - adverb 'now', ἐγνώκαμεν - perfect with a present force), they reiterated their insults (ὅτι - conjunction indicating substantival content, δαιμόνιον - accusative direct object, ἔχεις - stative present) in verse 52. The use of the negative particle μὴ in the first question of verse 53 shows that those Jews ironically expected Jesus to answer negatively to their question, which is a way of downplaying the statement of Jesus in verse 51 and evidence of the fact that they were not willing to receive his words. The accusation of being a demoniac by the Jews is also hyperbolic, designed to express the seriousness of the claim by Jesus (Tenney, 1981), thereby challenging the greatness of Jesus with ironic questions and again by comparing him with Abraham and the prophets.

The second question was an open-ended challenge to Jesus to prove himself, as indicated by the interrogative pronoun τίνα, the reflexive pronoun σεαυτὸν, and the descriptive present ποιεῖς. That is, they even went further to accuse him of seeking to exalt himself above measure. This contradicts their religious claim as indicated in John 5:39-40 -

a demonstration of their hypocrisy. These Jews searched the scriptures because they believed that in them was eternal life and freedom (Carson, 1991), yet through their accusation, they were implying that they could not receive eternal life through the words of the dead prophets - through whom the Scriptures had been written.

The Words of Jesus are True (Verses 54-55)

Greek Text. (54) ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· Ἐὰν ἐγὼ δοξάσω ἑμαυτόν, ἡ δόξα μου οὐδὲν ἐστίν· ἔστιν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐστίν, (55) καὶ οὐκ ἐγνώκατε αὐτόν, ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδα αὐτόν· καὶ εἶπω ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα αὐτόν, ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης· ἀλλὰ οἶδα αὐτόν καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ.

Translation. ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing: my Father is the one who glorifies me, whom you say that he is your God. ⁵⁵ Yet you do not know him; but I know him: and if I should say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you: but I know him, and keep his word.

Interpretation. Jesus refuted their claim by elaborating on his purpose and the essence of true glory - that true glory is not what one bestows upon himself but that which is bestowed upon him by God. And that his purpose is to glorify his Father. The third class conditional statement in verse 54 (If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing), treats the premise as unreal (that Jesus did not glorify himself) but very probable (there are those who would do so, amounting to nothing). The conjunction ἐὰν and the conditional subjunctive δοξάσω in the protasis indicate this. The conditional statement is a present general condition, expressing what can be expected to occur under certain conditions (that such glory would amount to nothing). And he goes on to show the identity of his Father, that he is actually the one they claim to be their God. This claim did not elicit a hostile

reaction like the incidence in John 5:16-18, perhaps because they understood this claim in the same breath that they were also claiming to be children of God.

To distinguish himself from their hypocritical claim that he is their God, Jesus goes on to elaborate his knowledge of God in contrast to their lack of knowledge of him (Tenney, 1981). The conjunction καὶ at the beginning of verse 55 is used adverbially to indicate the implied time of the speaker. The third class conditional statement in verse 55 is futuristic as indicated by the future ἔσομαι in the apodosis, as well as the conjunction καὶν (καὶ + ἐάν) and the conditional subjunctive εἴπω in the protasis; a generic event likely to take place in the future. That is to say that Jesus did not say that he did not know God and is, therefore, not a liar. He further distances himself from their hypocritical lies by affirming that not only does he know God, but he also keeps his words- as a true child of God should. The affirmation to this statement is shown with the use of the perfect present οἶδα and the habitual present τηρῶ which signals an action that always occurs. This means that the knowledge of God is expressed in the godly character of keeping his words - a continuous action. The conjunction ἀλλὰ is used to show a strong contrast between Jesus and the Jews.

The knowledge of God is theologically significant. The Jews were expected to have a theological response to God by keeping his words. However, these Jews did not (verse 47), which Jesus ascribes to their lack of knowledge of him (verse 55). This means that knowing God is to reflect the very character of God in our lives, which is demonstrated through the keeping of his words, just like Jesus (Frame, 1987). In addition, because knowing the truth was in their manner of speech a reference to the knowledge of the truth about God (Keener C. , 2012), this was an anaphoric reference to the call to true

discipleship by Jesus in John 8:31-32; the call to abide in his words so that they can know the truth that would set them free from the bondage of sin.

Jesus is Divine (Verses 56-59)

Greek Text. (56) Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμὴν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη. (57) εἶπον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν· Πεντήκοντα ἔτη οὐπω ἔχεις καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἐώρακας; (58) εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ἰησοῦς· Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί. (59) ἤραν οὖν λίθους ἵνα βάλωσιν ἐπ’ αὐτόν· Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐκρύβη καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ.

Translation. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced that he should see my day: and he saw *it*, and was *made* glad.” ⁵⁷Then the Jews said to him, “You don’t yet have fifty years, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “Verily, verily, I say to you, before Abraham existed, I am.” ⁵⁹So they took up stones so that they might cast at him: but Jesus disappeared and went out of the temple.

Interpretation. In response to the questioning of his supremacy, Jesus shows his greatness over Abraham by declaring that even Abraham looked eagerly with rejoicing to seeing his day. The reference to Abraham as their father (Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν) is certainly biological in this context. The epexegetical subjunctive ἴδῃ, which can also be translated as an English infinitive (to see), indicates the possibility of a futuristic event and is related to the main verb ἠγαλλιάσατο, a constantive aorist. Abraham rejoiced in the possibility of seeing the day, which he saw as indicated by the constantive aorists εἶδεν and ἐχάρη. The response by the Jews implies that they probably understood this statement to mean that Jesus was there in the days of Abraham and had seen Abraham, hence the

question about the age of Jesus as indicated by the temporal adverb οὐπω and the stative present ἔχεις.

However, the term ἡγαλλιάσατο was often used in Jewish tradition - in a religious sense - for joy in God, especially for eschatological coming to salvation and judgement (Ridderbos, 1997), which, according to Jesus, began its fulfilment in Jesus' coming, as indicated by τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμὴν (my day). Therefore, the thought of Abraham seeing the Messiah was not offensive to the Jews; it was the application to Jesus that was offensive to them. According to L. Morris (1995), the focus of Jesus may simply be that Abraham's attitude to this day was that of exultation, rather than a specific occasion in the life of the patriarch. Other scholars refer to Jewish tradition (Genesis Rabbah 44:25), in which God revealed to Abraham the most distant future, the world to come (a Messianic eschatological coming) (Ridderbos, 1997). Whichever way, the words of Jesus were theologically significant because they identified Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of all of Abraham's hopes, as is also observed by D. A. Carson (1991).

The use of the stative present tense ἔχεις, which conveys a state of being, and the extensive perfect ἑώρακας, which puts emphasis on a past action on which the present state emerges, reveals the error of limiting the existence of Jesus to his human form by the Jews in their response. However, Jesus took this opportunity to explicitly reveal his deity by declaring Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί. The particle ἀμὴν and the indicative mood indicate that Jesus wanted to present this statement as non-contingent. The temporal preposition πρὶν and the aorist infinitive of time γενέσθαι in verse 58 indicate a time prior to Abraham. The gnomic present εἰμί, used to depict a general timeless truth, reveals that Jesus is eternal; that he not only existed before Abraham, but transcends time - without beginning or end, God. The phrase ἐγὼ εἰμί (I am) was

immediately understood by the Jews to mean that he was referring to himself as God, which was the same phrase that God revealed as his name to Moses (Exodus 3:14).

Unfortunately, those Jews did not accept his words but hypocritically purported to execute judgment against him, which was against their law (Leviticus 24:16); a law that required them to put someone that was accused of breaking the law to trial before condemning him or her (John 7:50-51). They reacted by attempting to stone him as indicated by the constantive aorist ἤσαν and tendential aorist subjunctive of purpose βάλλωσιν. The passive voice of the aorist ἐκρύβη (being hidden) is used by the author to focus on Jesus, the subject, to demonstrate his divine ability to disappear, hence strengthening the declarative force of the indicative mood used by Jesus in his explicit claim of divinity in verse 58. In other words, the supernatural disappearance goes on to further prove his divinity before the Jews.

This declaration by Jesus is very significant theologically. Jesus introduces himself as the 'I am' in the text of this study; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel as revealed by the Jewish scriptures in Exodus 14. Thus Jesus was clearly teaching he is eternal, without beginning or end - not a created being - as shown by the present tense in contrast with the aorist tense that is used with reference to Abraham's existence (Krejcir, 2010). Moreover, the fact that he was addressing them in the human form shows that as the eternal one, he is a person they could relate with, though distinct from them - who was also speaking to them. A reference to verse 51 demonstrates that he, as the eternal one, is living - capable of giving eternal life through his words. His challenge to them in verse 46 shows that he, as the eternal one, is absolute - that is why his words were reliable. It also means that he is the embodiment of moral perfection - that is why they could not convict him of sin. This also proves that he is the eternal one that does not change - capable of taking

human flesh without altering his divine essence. While referring to Hebrews 13:8 (Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever), Calvin adds that Christ's power and grace was common in all ages, hence the mention of Abraham (Calvin, 1989).

This declaration by Jesus is also theologically significant with regard to our salvation as believers in Christ. This is because it underscores the basis for our faith in God, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had manifested in human form. For you cannot believe in the salvation that comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus unless you first believe that he was sinless (a characteristic of his deity) and that he had manifested in human flesh on earth. This is the saving faith that Jesus was referring to in verses 31 and 32 - the knowledge of the truth that would set them free (Morris, 1995). This reality is also crucial because it points us to the nature of truth, that truth emanates from the essence of the living and eternal God - the only one that is absolute (Isaiah 40:28).

This understanding would have helped those Jews to embrace the wholesomeness of truth because it would have helped them to appreciate the absoluteness of the words of Jesus in contrast to the teachings of their teachers. It would have also guarded them against the deception of seductive spirits (the lies of the devil leading to the bondage of sin) - whom the author refers to later in his epistles as the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4:2-3). April DeConick (Eve, 2016) has suggested reading John 8:56 in support of Gnostic theology, however, recent scholarship has cast doubt on her reading (Porter & Fay, 2018), because the emphasis here is that of faith in the Son of God. This they would have done by believing that God (that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God) had manifested in the flesh.

Summary of the Section

In summary, Jesus was extending the call to true discipleship to the Jews he was addressing. He went to great lengths elaborating on the example of their ancestor Abraham and his sign of an immaculate life to demonstrate to them the right way. By contrasting the nature and character of the followers of God with those who are of the devil, he was warning them of the ramifications and urgency of their decisions in light of eternity. The Jews needed to have a right response to Jesus by believing in the truth of his words so that they might receive eternal life and a permanent place in the house of God.

However, the Jews he was addressing did not accept his words but resisted him based on their Abrahamic heritage. Their argument against the words of Jesus was based on their own human traditions and interpretations, which they referred to as the traditions of elders (Matthew 15:2-9), and not on the Scriptures. Thus they used their own traditions as an excuse to transgress the command of God - and reject the words of Jesus - so as to fulfil their evil desires. Jesus referred to these desires as the desires of their father, the devil. The implication was that the Jews he was addressing were actually disciples of the devil and not disciples of Abraham or of God - as they had claimed.

The author used his mastery of Greek to present this message to his readers. This included various literary techniques and devices that were persuasive and clear to his readers in their contemporary world.

Practical Significance of the John 8:31-59 Text

This second section of the chapter aims to fulfil the third objective of the study with the application of the John 8:31-59 text to a contemporary African context among the Kikuyu Christians in Kenya. It involves a discussion on the parallelism and contrasts

between the biblical Jewish context and the context of the Christian community among the Kikuyu people in Kenya. This was done by consciously identifying the African context among the Kikuyu people and discovering the points of contact between their culture and the biblical context. In this way, it was possible to identify cues that allowed for a more accurate interpretation of the text through a process of comparing the two contexts (parallelism and contrasts) and analysing the findings.

The Kikuyu people are an ethnic community mostly found in Central Kenya; their ancestral land - which is the land that surrounds Mount Kenya - stretches to the Central Rift Valley and Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya (Kenyatta, 1978). To ensure that the application is expressed in terms that can be understood in African society, care has been taken not to treat trans-contextual truths as relative or to make culture-bound truths applicable to all, as observed by Elizabeth Mburu (2010).

Parallels Between the Biblical and the Kikuyu Contexts

Firstly, for the author of John 8:31-59, conduct is ultimately the clue to paternity, as is also observed by H. I. Harris (2004): how one behaves provides a reliable indicator of who one's father is. This concept was applicable to the biblical Jews, as can be seen in the text discourse of John 8:31-59. It was also applicable to the traditional and modern African communities since the conduct of a person either brought honour or shame to his or her family and community (Mbiti, 1975). The conduct also implied the kind of family which the person came from; for it was believed that an honourable family would raise honourable children and vice versa in both the biblical Jewish and Kikuyu African communities. This can be seen in Jewish claims in the selected text and the culture among the Kikuyu African communities (Kenyatta, 1978). Therefore the concept of Fatherhood as

elaborated by Jesus in the selected text, would make it easier for the Kikuyu people in their African context to appreciate the truths revealed in this text. Some of the passages in the Bible (Genesis 46:8-27, Ezra 9-10) may imply that there was a matriarchal system among the Jews; however, the genealogies prove that the family system among the Jews was patriarchal. Likewise, some of the Kikuyu cultures described by Kenyatta (1978) imply a matriarchal system among the Kikuyu people; however, the genealogies prove that the family system among the Kikuyu people is patriarchal.

Secondly, at the end of the Gospel, according to John, the author refers to himself as a reliable author and narrator of the accounts of the Gospel because of his close association with Jesus. Thus he addresses his audience the way an elder in a Jewish community would address those who are younger than him, as his children, because of the doctrinal implications of his writing and his advanced age (Guthrie, 1981). This tone can also be seen in the other writings of the author, such as 1 John 3:18 and 3 John 1:4, written around the same period (Harris, 2004). This concept is similar to the African culture in which elders refer to those who are younger as children (*mwanangu*) (Ngewa S. , 2006) both in the traditional African society and the contemporary society. Thus, it is easier for the Kikuyu people to understand the implication of the reference by John as a reliable elder, because the apostle qualifies to be an elder in the Kikuyu African society, both by age and by the apostolic authority given to him by the Lord (Kenyatta, 1978). This helps to present the authenticity of the truths found in this text to the Kikuyu people in a manner that they can appreciate.

Thirdly, the generation of the Jews that first heard the gospel from Jesus, as elaborated in the given text of the study, had a religion (Judaism) and a temple, which they prided themselves in, associating their holy heritage with Abraham, their ancestor

(Jamieson, 1997). Those Jews resisted Jesus, an attitude which prevailed significantly among the subsequent first-century generation of Jews, recipients of the author of the Gospel according to John (Jamieson, 1997). However, Jesus was able to make disciples among the Jews. His disciples followed in his footsteps by making disciples among the subsequent generations, as recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts.

Likewise, the Kikuyu people had a traditional religion that their forefathers practiced before the gospel of Jesus was preached to them by the British and is still being practiced by a significant Kikuyu populace (Gathogo, 2017). Just like the Jews being addressed by Jesus, the Kikuyu people associated themselves with their ancestor Gikuyu, whom they believed was created directly by God (Karangi, 2005); and with Mount Kenya- which they believed was the abode of God (whom they referred to as *Ngai*) (Kenyatta, 1978). The missionaries experienced the same challenge as Jesus with the first generation of Kikuyus that first heard the gospel. Among the contemporary generation of the Kikuyu people, there may be those with the same attitude of resistance as their fathers (Gathogo, 2017), so the same challenge could still be faced by the church today. However, just the same way Jesus was able to make disciples in the first generation, so did the missionaries among the Kikuyu people. This means that the approach that the author used to his audience can still be used today by the church to reach out to those contemporary Kikuyu people that might be resisting the gospel like them.

Therefore, it is now the responsibility of the Church in Kenya to maximize these parallelisms to reach out to those in the Kikuyu community that have abandoned their Christian faith and gone back to the Kikuyu African traditional religion. This can be done by following the example of Jesus in the given text and learning from the successes of the missionaries among the Kikuyu people. According to Kyama Mugambi (2020),

Christianity was, from its inception, global, crossing boundaries and incarnating in the cultures while resisting efforts to be limited. Therefore, the church communities in the Early Church were redeemed culture that began as a Jewish sect, later spreading into the Greco-Roman cultures and eventually into other cultures around the world (Kalu, 2007). By identifying opportunities that the missionaries have not fully exploited among the Kikuyu people and exploiting them, the contemporary Church in Kenya can make great strides in further narrowing the gap between Christianity and the Kikuyu cultures in the current generation.

Contrasts Between the Biblical and the Kikuyu Contexts

Firstly, the author refers to the true believers of Jesus as God's children in the John 8:31-59 discourse. The author uses the concept here to describe God's relationship to Jewish believers, as a father to children, points, on the one hand, to God's personal, relational, and loving nature. On the other hand, it defines the status of the Jewish Christians as members of God's household. Since most African traditional religions viewed God in a transactional way (Mbiti, 1975), this African perspective would present a problem in understanding the relational aspect of the Fatherhood of God among the Kikuyu people, as is also observed by Elizabeth Mburu (2010).

Secondly, according to the author, all believers have a hope focused on Jesus (verses 32, 36 and 51), and the Jews were therefore expected to believe in the words of Jesus to receive eternal life, that is, to separate themselves from sin and live lives of moral purity just as Jesus did. This had moral and ethical behavioural implications for their lives in the present age. This is in contrast to the traditional African understanding of time. The traditional African belief system only had the past and the present - it did not have a

futuristic perspective like the Jewish one - in which our conduct would affect our future relationship with God (Mugambi J. , 1989). Kikuyu traditional religion likewise fell short of being a “redemptive” religion since it did not promise the soul’s redemption in the hereafter (Karangi, 2005). This perspective, therefore, would have been a hindrance to the Kikuyu people who first heard the gospel in understanding the hope that Christians have in the future. It is likely that the same attitude still prevails significantly among the contemporary Kikuyu people who have chosen to go back to their traditional African religion, which therefore presents a challenge in reaching out to them with the gospel.

Thirdly, according to scholars, Apostle John’s audience encountered the anti-Messiah movement among the Jews, which arose after the temple's destruction in AD 70 (Krejcir, 2010). With the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, their houses and religious sacrificial systems were all lost. As a result, they saw the Messiah as a symbol of betrayal and hopelessness because he did not come to deliver them from the Romans as they expected (Guthrie, 1981). This presented a hindrance to the furtherance of the gospel to those Jews.

Likewise, the Kikuyu people witnessed or at least heard of the colonial resistance by the generation of their fathers against the British colonialists. However, many disappointments came to many of those who had fought for Kenyan independence because of the equally corrupt and oppressive African leaders who took over from the British- a form of neo-colonialism. This could have likewise resulted in radicalism among many Kikuyu youths in subsequent generations (Gathogo, 2014). Some of them could have been among those who abandoned their Christian faith and returned to the Kikuyu African religion. This is because they could have associated Christianity with their former British colonial masters and thus labeled it as the ‘white man’s religion’ (Ekeya, 1973). Others

could have joined radical religious-political movements such as the *Mungiki* because of this (Glazzard, 2018). This certainly presents a great challenge to the Church and a great hindrance to the message of the gospel to this particular populace among the Kikuyu people.

Therefore, by finding a way to mitigate the hindrance to gospel receptivity among the Kikuyu people, the Church in Kenya can champion the church's mission to the Kikuyu populace that is still resisting the gospel and holding onto their African traditions. They can do this by learning from how Jesus addressed the matter and the mistakes the missionaries may have made. This is because, throughout the history of the Church, the growing Church found ways to strengthen itself, making great gains as well as many mistakes along the way (Mugambi K. , 2020).

One of the mistakes the missionaries made was condemning all the cultural practices of the Kikuyu people, terming them bad and ungodly, and imposing their European culture upon them (Gathogo, 2014). Likewise, the Pharisees were not willing to accept Gentile Christian converts unless they were circumcised according to the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5), which implied their lack of circumcision was ungodly. Although there were cultural practices that were opposed to the Bible, there are those cultural practices and norms that were aligned with biblical teachings and, therefore, redeemable.

However, care must be taken not to succumb to or propagate a syncretism that does not promote the goal of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A good example of this is how the Pharisees in the first century reworked the various religious rituals after the destruction of the temple into the present-day rituals of the Jews (Krejcir, 2010). These Pharisees had caused confusion in the early Church, demanding that the Gentile Christians should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved, which was contrary to the

gospel message (Acts 15:1-5). The same Jews/Pharisees were amazed at the teachings of Jesus because they were not willing to accept someone that had not been schooled in their religious education system to be their teacher (John 7:14-18).

Likewise, the Church leadership among the Kikuyu people adopted the ritual of sacrificing the *Kiama* goat, which, according to Jomo Kenyatta, was an efficient system in traditional Kikuyu culture of coming up with respected judges and priests in the community (Kenyatta, 1978). The ritual became widespread among the clergy because a church minister who has not completed the expected traditional rituals still struggles to find widespread acceptance as a priest and a leader among the Kikuyu communities (Gathogo, 2017). This ritual was banned by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Kenya because it was - according to them - tantamount to sacrificing to false gods, and because they found their ministers to be highly conflicted by this double adherence (Daily Nation, 2018).

In addition, the Church in Kenya should address the negative consequences that have arisen due to the conflict created by the preaching of the missionaries within the Kikuyu culture. For example, the Jews engaged Jesus in debates about divorce (Matthew 19:3-9) and adultery (John 8:1-11), which means that marital issues were a great deal in those days. The teachings – that contradicted the Scriptures (Matthew 16:6, 12) - and adulterous deeds by the Jewish leadership, as described by Jesus in his teachings (Matthew 23:14), were a stumbling block to the common people in their quest for a moral life. Thus they did not promote the spirit of the Law that was exemplified by their father, Abraham, according to Jewish tradition (Gregory, 2008), which could have had a stabilizing effect on their marriages.

Likewise, Ekeya identified the failure of most marriages among the contemporary Kikuyu people as having been caused by the extent to which the Church has adopted or rejected the Kikuyu customary practices that used to have a stabilizing effect on marriage in the past (Ekeya, 1973). She proposed that the contemporary Church in Kenya should address cases in which the Church has failed to take the Kikuyu African social facts and institutions - that are aligned to biblical teachings - sufficiently into account while rejecting those opposed to the Bible. One way this can be done is by using relevant scholarly research - such as this study- and promoting research in areas that have not been sufficiently researched.

Summary of the Section

The parallels between the biblical context and the contemporary Kikuyu Christians context would make it easier for the Kikuyu people to appreciate and apply the various truths found in this text to their Christian lives. This includes concepts such as fatherhood, monotheism, and freedom, among others. However, some of the similarities between the two contexts, such as colonialism and ancestral heritage, could potentially be a hindrance to the Kikuyu people as it was for the Jews in the selected text of the study. The various contrasts between the biblical and the contemporary Kikuyu Christian contexts could be a hindrance to the Kikuyu people accepting Jesus. This includes cultures and belief systems that touch on identity and theology - contrary to the message of the gospel of Christ.

Chapter Five

Summary Of The Findings, Conclusion And Recommendations

Summary of the Findings

John, the apostle, presented the message of the Gospel in a language that was clear and simple to his readers, and yet with a depth that is unique to his writings in general. The message of the Gospel was relevant both to his contemporary readers in their days and the subsequent generations to date. Therefore by revising and refining the message of the Gospel in a language that is understandable to the contemporary generation, this study's results will be helpful to mature Christians and novices alike, as well as to the clergy and laity in their application of the message. Evidence pointing to the authorship of the Gospel by John is significant in this study because it points to the reliability of the author, who was both an apostle and a close associate of Jesus and an eyewitness to the events recorded in the Gospel. Evidence pointing to a first-century audience of the author has been helpful to this study in relating the biblical context to the contemporary Kikuyu African context in the application of the selected text of John 8:31-59. The literature by various scholars on the Gospel, according to John, has been helpful in placing the context of the selected text within its historical and literary contexts, and aligning it to the broad themes of the Gospel, the New Testament Scriptures, and the Bible as a whole.

The Apostle John uses Jesus' Jewish audience in the John 8:31-59 discourse as the foil and Abraham as the mirror of true discipleship. Through this, the author has effectively underscored the significance of having the right response toward Jesus. This is because recognizing or acknowledging the person and identity of Jesus is central to having the right relationship with and knowing God. This is especially significant in relation to

receiving eternal life versus eternal condemnation. The resistance of the Jews to Jesus on the basis of their Abrahamic heritage and Jewish traditions - from men and not God - represents false discipleship that is akin to open rebellion against God. This is because it is based on a doctrine that originated from the devil himself, whom Jesus said was their father in verse 44. However, the author's message offers hope to those who continue in the teachings of Jesus.

Through the historical-grammatical approach, an in-depth analysis of the Greek text of John 8:31-59 has been conducted in this study, fulfilling the first objective of this study. The author used various literary techniques to bring out his message in John 8:31-59 text. The Greek conditional statements have been used to highlight the various cultural nuances. Likewise, the questions expecting a 'no' or 'yes' answer have also been used significantly to bring out the undertones in the discourse. This includes cases where the Jews used irony to downplay the significance of the words of Jesus to them. The mood used in the discourse is primarily the indicative mood, which is especially used to bring out the declarative force of the statements. The subjunctive mood has also been significantly utilized, especially in conditional statements. The voice in the discourse is mainly active, except in a few instances where the passive mood has been used to focus on the subject. The various shades of verbal tenses and nominal cases have been used to highlight the intended meaning of the author and speakers.

By integrating the analysis of the doctrinal significance into the exegetical analysis above, the study's second objective was fulfilled through a rhetorical criticism approach. The most predominant theme in the text is the theme of the truth. This theme has been presented through various metaphors and Greek terms. The truth has been presented as the reality of God in contrast to falsehood which has been presented as the reality of the devil.

Thus God has been presented as the Source and Father of truth, in contrast to the devil, who has been referred to as the father of lies. The words of Jesus, which are also the words of God in the text, have been presented as words of truth. The interchangeable use of the words of Jesus and truth also points to the fact that the words of Jesus are, in essence - truth, a fact that the author points to later in John 17:17. Truth has also been linked with the saving act of the Son of God. This means that Jesus is himself the embodiment of truth. This is a fact that has been penned down by the author in John 1:1 and 14:6, in which Jesus is referred to as the word of God and as the truth. The divinity of Jesus, as presented in this text, attests to these truths because God is the only one who has been presented in the scripture as the absolute one, the unchangeable one whose knowledge and understanding are infinite (Isaiah 40:28).

By fulfilling the third objective through the rhetorical criticism approach, this research has found the given text of John 8:31-59 to be applicable to African contexts with similar challenges, for example, the Kikuyu Christians in Kenya. The study has found that there are several parallels between the biblical context and the contemporary Kikuyu Christians context that would make it easier for the Kikuyu people to appreciate and apply the various truths found in this text to their Christian lives. This includes concepts such as fatherhood, monotheism, and freedom, among others. However, some of the similarities between the two contexts, such as colonialism and ancestral heritage, could potentially be a hindrance to the Kikuyu people as it was for the Jews in the selected text of the study. There are also various contrasts that the study has found between the biblical and the contemporary Kikuyu Christian contexts that could be a hindrance to the Kikuyu people accepting Jesus. This includes cultures and belief systems that touch on identity and theology - that are contrary to the message of the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

John, the apostle, wrote to a mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian audience in the first-century AD. He wrote to affirm their faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the selected text of John 8:31-59, he recorded a discourse between Jesus and the Jews who resisted him at the temple treasury in Jerusalem. The main theme of the discourse is the message of the truth of the words of Jesus, revealed through the call of true discipleship and the imagery of the fatherhood of God, of Abraham, and of the devil. He demonstrated the authenticity of Jesus through the revelation of his divinity and immaculate life.

In the discourse, the author revealed the true state of the Jews that Jesus was addressing, that they had subscribed to false discipleship, whose doctrine had originated from the devil. In contrast, he presented those who abide and continue in the words of Jesus as the true disciples of Jesus and the true children of Abraham and of God. These are the ones that come to the knowledge of the truth that sets them free from the bondage of sin. Several parallels and contrasts were found in the study between the biblical and Kikuyu Christian context that was useful in the application of the text. These made it easier for the Kikuyu people to receive the gospel or otherwise hindered the reception of the gospel by the Kikuyu people.

Recommendations

This study, therefore, offers several recommendations in relation to the study's results. Firstly, further research should be done in interpreting why the Jews related Jesus' seeing Abraham with his age (John 8:56-58) because the matter has not been clearly spelled out in the literature of the Gospel according to John.

Secondly, the study recommends that a review of the past approaches by the Kenyan Church to reach out to the Kikuyu people be conducted. This is to harness the parallels of the biblical and the Kikuyu people's contexts for the purpose of the mission to the Kikuyu people more effectively.

Thirdly, this study recommends that further research be done to identify ways to ensure the hindrances due to the contrasts between the biblical and Kikuyu contexts are overcome/mitigated. This should be done especially in ministering to the Kikuyu populace that is still resisting the gospel of Jesus Christ because of the contrasts.

Fourthly, this study recommends that further research should be done in relation to establishing the significance of the transition from the older generation of Christians to the subsequent youthful generation in relation to the gospel - and relating the biblical context to the contemporary context. This is very necessary because the contemporary Kikuyu populace, and the current African populace as a whole, is predominantly youthful, according to United Nations (United Nations, 2020).

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