

How Can He Be from Galilee?

(John 7:40-53)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background from Prior Lesson: Jesus Goes to Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (from John 7:14-39)

- a. Jesus is at Feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem
- b. There is great controversy among the people regarding whether He may be the Christ, the Messiah.
 - i. Evidence supporting that He is the Christ:
 - 1. the miraculous signs,
 - 2. teaching and speaking with authority, and
 - 3. the rulers aren't shutting Him down.
 - ii. Why some doubt that He is the Christ:
 - 1. where he came from (Nazareth, in Galilee)
 - 2. accused of breaking the Law of Moses by "working" on the Sabbath in healing a paralyzed man, and
 - 3. hated by the religious leaders.
- c. Pharisees and chief priests send officers to grab Him.
- d. On the last day of the feast, Jesus cries out "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures have said, out of his heart [belly, or inner parts] will flow rivers of living water." Here it says the "rivers of living water" refers to the Holy Spirit, which would be given later, after Jesus was glorified. (**John 7:37-39**)
 - i. In our last lesson we looked at what Jesus might have been referring to in the Old Testament when He said, "as the Scriptures have said."

II. How Can the Christ Come Out of Galilee? (Read John 7:40-53)

- a. Summary of the story.
 - i. Many of the Jews were trying to figure out if Jesus was the Christ. They compared His life to what they saw in the prophecies.
 - ii. Jesus was from Galilee (in the north), but didn't the Scriptures say that the Christ would be descended from David, and that He would

come from Bethlehem?

1. This controversy causes great division among the people.
- iii. The officers sent by the Pharisees and chief priests to seize Jesus come back without Him. When challenged why they did not grab Jesus, the officers respond, "No man ever spoke like this Man." (**John 7:46**)
 1. Jesus spoke with a power and authority that overwhelmed the officers sent to arrest Him. They got more than they came for!
 2. What was it about Jesus that produced this kind of reaction?
 - a. Jesus will later explain that He is the good shepherd
 - i. "the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.'" (**John 10:4-5**, NKJV)
 - ii. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (**John 10:27**, NKJV)
 - b. The Son of God was creator of the world, the builder of the house. Those who seek the truth will recognize Him as the one who brings light, who created them.
 - i. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person..." (**Hebrews 1:1-3**, NKJV)
 - ii. "For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." (**Hebrews 3:3-4**, NKJV)
3. In reaching out to a lost world, best thing we can do is to put Jesus and His words in front of people. They will either be drawn and impacted (like the officers sent) or repelled. Open the Bible, share the words and life of Jesus, and call others who are seeking to read the Scriptures daily.
- iv. The Pharisees are upset at this response from the officers.

1. They heap abuse on the officers, and on the crowd.
 2. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews who had come to Jesus at night (**John 3:1-21**), pushes back against the other leaders. They abuse him as well, asking if he also is from Galilee and making the case that coming from Galilee in some way disqualifies Jesus.
- b. The alleged “problem” of Jesus coming from Galilee.
- i. While Jesus was born in Bethlehem (**Matthew 1-2, Luke 1-2**), he grew up in the town of Nazareth. It appears that most of the Jews were unaware of his Bethlehem birth and instead associated him with Nazareth. Thus, Jesus was well-known as “Jesus of Nazareth”, or “Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee”.
 1. “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’” (**John 1:45-46**, NKJV)
 2. When Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, the occasion commonly celebrated as ‘Palm Sunday’: “And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, ‘Who is this?’ So the multitudes said, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.’” (**Matthew 21:10-11**, NKJV)
 3. Consider even the title mounted to the cross. “Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (**John 19:19**, NKJV)
 4. The Jews carried this association with Nazareth even into the early church. Paul is later criticized,
 - a. “For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” (**Acts 24:5**, NKJV)
 - b. The term “Nazarenes” indicates that among the Jews, Jesus and His follower were still associated with Nazareth in Galilee, years after His death and resurrection.
 - ii. Nazareth was in Galilee, in the north; a region near the Sea of Galilee.

- iii. The Jewish crowd understood two things regarding the Christ, from their Scriptures (**John 7:42**).
 - 1. He would come from David's seed. A prophecy that the Lord handed down to king David through the prophet Nathan, 1000 years before Jesus' birth:
 - a. "And it shall come about, when your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will prepare His kingdom" (**2 Samuel 7:12**, LXX, OSB)
 - b. See also **1 Chronicles 17:11**, the parallel account.
 - 2. He would come from Bethlehem, the city where David was from. Read **Micah 5:1-2** (**Micah 5:1** in the LXX)
 - a. Although Bethlehem is a small town, the great ruler will come from there.
 - i. Justin Martyr, a philosopher from Samaria who converted to the Christian faith, tells the Romans that if they search through the taxation records still available at the time he was writing (c. 160 AD), they could verify Jesus' birth there. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Justin Martyr's First Apology*, chapter 34; in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 174)
 - b. His origins were "from the beginning, from days of everlasting."
 - i. Early Christian bishop and historian Eusebius, in *Proof of the Gospels*, book 6, chapter 13, (c. 320 AD) wrote regarding this prophecy:
 - 1. "Note with care how he says that the goings forth of Him that shall appear at Bethlehem are from above and from eternity, by which he shows the pre-existence and essential origin of Him that is to come forth from Bethlehem. Now if any person can apply the oracle to anyone but Jesus, let him show who it is; but if it is impossible to find anyone but our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the only person after the date of this prophecy who came forth thence and attained to fame, what should hinder us from acknowledging the truth

of the prophecy, which directs its prediction on Him only?

2. "For He alone of all men is known to have come forth from the before-named Bethlehem after the date of the prophecy, putting on a human shape, and what had been foretold was fulfilled at His coming. For at once and not after a long time the woes that were foretold fell on the Jewish nation, and blessings in accordance with the prophecies on the nations as well, and He Himself, our Lord and Savior Who came from Bethlehem, was shown to be the ruler of the spiritual Israel, such being the name of all people of vision and piety. Note too that it is said that the goings forth of His divine pre-existence are from the beginning and from the days of eternity, which would not agree with mere humanity."
- c. Bethlehem was the city where King David was from, as noted in **John 7:42**. Read **1 Samuel 16:1** and **16:11-13**.
 - i. David, whom the prophet Samuel anointed king over Israel after Saul, was from Bethlehem (as was his father, Jesse).
- d. Bethlehem is a very significant town in the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - i. That is where Rachel, beloved wife of Jacob/ Israel died in childbirth and was buried. (**Genesis 35:16-20**)
 - ii. Story of Ruth starts and ends with Bethlehem. Naomi's husband was from there; after she and Ruth are widowed, they return to Bethlehem where Ruth marries Boaz. The line to Jesse and David comes from them. (**Ruth 1:1-2, 2:19, 4:11-12**)
3. So, the Jews knew from the **Micah** prophecy that the Christ would come from Bethlehem. Since they mistakenly assumed he had been born in Nazareth, where He grew up, some concluded that He *could not be* the Christ.

- a. Recall that when the magi were looking for the newborn king of the Jews, Herod asked the chief priests and Scribes where this king was to be born. They answered “in Bethlehem”, citing the **Micah 5** prophecy (**Matthew 2:1-7**).
 - b. When Herod later tried to kill the new king, he had all the male children in Bethlehem put to death (**Matthew 2:16-18**).
 - c. We see that all the Jews agreed (the “*good guys*” and “*bad guys*” alike) that the Messiah, the Christ to reign over David’s kingdom, would come from Bethlehem.
- iv. Here some of the modern liberal scholars (like John Dominic Crossan of the ‘Jesus Seminar’) like to jump in and “*solve*” this apparent problem by claiming (falsely) that:
 1. Jesus likely grew up in Nazareth; BUT
 2. The Bethlehem-birth accounts in **Matthew 1-2** and **Luke 1-2** were fabricated later on by disciples, just to force-fit the narrative that He was the Messiah!
- v. Let’s look at the story
 1. **Luke 1:26-28** says that Mary and Joseph were from Nazareth in Galilee, and that the angel Gabriel first announced the conception and birth of the Christ to come to Mary, while she was still in Nazareth, in Galilee.
 2. Then Joseph and Mary had to go down to Bethlehem, to register at the time of a census, since he was of the line of David. (**Luke 2:1-6**)
 3. Some time after that, after the magi came, Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt. After the evil king died, they returned to Nazareth in Galilee, where Jesus grew up. (Read **Matthew 2:19-23**).
 - a. I am not sure what the statement “he shall be called a Nazarene” is referring to.
- vi. **Question for Us, and for the Liberal Scholars:** Do the prophecies only point to Bethlehem, or do they point to Galilee as well?
 1. Read **Matthew 4:12-16**
 2. Also read **Isaiah 9:1**, from the LXX

- a. A great light will come to a dark land.
 - b. It will appear in the north: the land of Zebulun and Naphtali (two of the 12 tribes) along the seacoast.
 - c. It will appear in “Galilee of the Gentiles”
 - i. Galilee is mentioned in the book of **Joshua**, when the Promised Land, Canaan, is divided up among the 12 tribes.
 - d. It will extend to other nearby areas: the land across the Jordan River, parts of Judea.
 - e. Jesus is the great light.
 - i. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (**John 3:19–21**, NKJV)
 - ii. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” (**John 1:4–9**, NKJV)
3. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem as well as His growing up in Nazareth (in Galilee) *both* fulfilled significant Old Testament prophecies!

III. The Puzzling Rebuke that the Pharisees Give to Nicodemus

- a. Keep in mind that Nicodemus is a Pharisee and ruler, a teacher of the Scriptures to the Jews, who is supportive of Jesus. He is being insulted by other religious leaders.
 - i. **John 3:1-2** Nicodemus is described as “a man of the Pharisees... a ruler of the Jews”.

- ii. **John 3:10** Jesus refers to Nicodemus as "*the teacher of Israel*".
 - iii. **John 19:39** Nicodemus demonstrates his loyalty to Jesus at the end, brings spices to help prepare Jesus' body for burial.
- b. Now re-read **John 7:50-52**
- i. "Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee." (**John 7:50-52**, NKJV)
 - ii. This statement, as rendered in the NKJV and in most other translations, does not "make sense" to me.
 - 1. Everyone familiar with the Old Testament knew that *at least one prophet* clearly came from Galilee: the prophet Jonah.
 - a. The Book of Jonah begins: "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying...." (**Jonah 1:1**, NKJV)
 - b. We know where Jonah was from. It says regarding King Jeroboam II of Israel: "He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher." (**2 Kings 14:25**, NKJV)
 - c. And where was Gath Hepher?
 - i. In **Joshua 19:10-13**, it discusses the boundaries of the territory of Zebulun. Gath Hepher is one of the border towns of Zebulun.
 - ii. Zebulun is adjacent to the territory of Naphtali.
 - iii. Galilee is mentioned in **Joshua 20 & 21** as associated with this northern area.
 - iv. Gath Hepher happens to be only a few miles from a small village of no account: *Nazareth*!
 - 1. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* article on Gath Hepher says that the ancient village of Gath Hepher is

only about 2 miles (or about 3 km) from Nazareth!

2. Why would God plant Jesus so close to where Jonah was, in Galilee? Is He using geography to point us back to the story of Jonah, to tell us important things about another great Jewish Prophet who would come from Galilee?
 - a. Jesus makes a parallel between Himself and Jonah in **Matthew 12:39-42**
 - i. Both Jonah and Jesus were great preachers who would bring thousands of Gentiles to repentance.
 - ii. As Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the great fish or whale, Jesus would be three days and nights “in the heart of the earth.”
 - b. There are other parallels, which we can see by reading the story of Jonah carefully. For example:
 - i. Both men were Jewish prophets from Galilee.
 - ii. Both were reluctant to go on a great mission by God. Compare Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in **Matthew 26:36-46**, and **Jonah 1:1-3**, who tries to avoid going on his mission.
 - iii. Both “descended to Hades” for three days, before coming out alive. Compare what Peter says about Jesus in **Acts 2:22-31** with Jonah’s prayer in **Jonah 2:2-3**, where he cries out “out of the belly of Hades” (**Jonah 2:3**, LXX, OSB)
 - iv. (There are more parallels...but for another time and lesson!)
3. Clearly, there is *at least one other* prophet from Galilee!
 - a. Many modern commentaries and teachers have a “*field day*” with the Jews’ (apparent) claim that *no prophet had come out of Galilee*. They criticize the Jews of Jesus’ day of not knowing the Scriptures, or else claim that they are deliberately falsifying their own history out of spite.
 - b. However, let’s try to create an analogous situation here in Boston, today. Would an historian say to another

history teacher living in Boston, “No president *has ever* come out of *Massachusetts*”?

- i. Is that credible? Of course not! Think of US Presidents John Kennedy, John Adams and John Quincy Adams, for starters. Obviously, no one knowledgeable would *make a fool of himself* by making such a blatantly false statement!
 - ii. So how credible is it that one group of Pharisees antagonistic to Jesus would make a statement to another Pharisee *and teacher* like Nicodemus, who was supportive of Jesus?
- 4. Since it seems incredible that a Jew who knew the Old Testament would make such a blatant mis-statement, is it possible that we are misunderstanding this interaction? Is there another credible way to translate this verse that would make more sense? Let’s consider at an alternate translation of **John 7:52**, at least as a possibility.
 - a. Although most modern translations render this verse similar to the NKJV, not all do.
 - b. In the New American Bible, a translation by Catholic scholars, the same passage reads:
 - i. “Do not tell us you are a Galilean too, they taunted him. ‘Look it up. You will not find the Prophet coming from Galilee.’” (**John 7:52**, NAB)
 - c. The big question here: should it be translated “a prophet” (referring to *any* prophet) or “the Prophet” (referring to the one Moses wrote about in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, the one great Prophet who would come in the future to succeed Moses)?
 - d. The reason why translators don’t all render it the same way: in Greek (unlike English) there are about 20 ways to say “the” but *THERE IS NO WAY* to say “a”. The technical grammar explanation: Biblical Greek language has a definite article (“the”) but no indefinite article (“a”).
 - i. Banana example:
 - 1. I can say (in Greek) “banana” or “the banana”. However, *there is no way* to say

“a banana.” (That may seem bizarre to English speakers, I am not kidding here!)

2. So, if there is only one banana in the bowl on a table.” And then I was to point to the bowl and say (in Greek) “I want to eat banana,” everyone would know that I was referring to that specific banana (*“the banana”* in English).
 3. However, if there is a bowl containing a bunch of 8 bananas, and I were to point to the bowl and say (in Greek), “I want to eat banana,” you would understand based on context that I was referring to *“a banana”* (not any specific one).
 4. Bottom line: in Greek, since there is no indefinite article, if the definite article “the” is absent, you can only tell from context whether you mean “a” or “the” thing you are talking about.
- ii. Now back to the “prophet” reference in **John 7:52**, where there is no article. Should it be rendered *“a prophet”* or *“the Prophet”*? (And no, we don’t have a capital letter vs. lower case distinction to help us in ancient Greek manuscripts.). We can only answer by looking at the context.
1. Consider **John 1:21**, where John the Baptist is asked, “Are you the Prophet”? (Referring to the one Moses wrote about in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**).
 2. Now re-read **John 7:40**, to appreciate the context of what the Jews are arguing about: “Truly, this is the Prophet”. Clearly, the issue is whether Jesus is the specific Prophet whom Moses wrote about.
 3. *“The Prophet”* vs. *“a prophet”*: how you translate it makes a world of difference in this case!

- e. Also, it is significant to note that one of the earliest almost-complete ancient manuscripts of the **Gospel of John**, known by the reference *P-66*, includes the definite article (*the*) it in Greek of **John 7:52**. It reads: "the prophet does not arise from Galilee".
 - i. Parchment 66 (sometimes noted P-66 or P⁶⁶) is one of the oldest almost-complete manuscripts of John's gospel. It has been dated to around the year 200 AD (some authorities date it even earlier, while some date it later). This resides in the Bodmer collection of the Bodmer Library in Geneva, Switzerland.
 - ii. For those able to read Greek, a transcription of the papyrus text is available online, created by the International Greek New Testament Project.
- c. Bottom line: For multiple reasons, I believe that the Pharisees were telling Nicodemus that "the Prophet" would not come from Galilee. For them to say "a prophet does not come from Galilee" has them saying something that they and Nicodemus all knew would be untrue (since Jonah came from Galilee). Also, "the Prophet" fits in perfectly with the context of the discussion in **John 7:40**.

IV. Conclusions and Take-Aways

- a. The officers were right: truly "No man ever spoke like this Man"! He tells the truth, he is the one who created all things, who has returned in the midst of His creation, recognized by a few truth-seekers.
- b. Jesus had to be from *both* Bethlehem and Galilee, to fulfill all the prophecies made centuries beforehand. He would be the great king like David, and the great preacher of repentance like Jonah: who would rise from the dead after three days and nights in the tomb.
- c. Let us see Jesus for all He is: the light that would come into the world, starting in Galilee and spreading out from there.