

Before Abraham Was (John 8:51-59)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background for this Lesson

- a. In this section of the gospel of John, Jesus has been having a heated argument with a group of Jews.
- b. The argument touched on:
 - i. Spiritual slavery vs. freedom (whether the Jews that Jesus addressed were in spiritual slavery as Jesus stated, or were in fact free).
 - ii. Lineage (whether the Jews here were sons of Satan as Jesus said, or children of Abraham).
- c. The Jews had said in defense of themselves, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’” (**John 8:33**, NKJV)
- d. The prior lesson ended with Jesus’ enemies accusing Him of being a Samaritan who has a demon! (**John 8:48-49**)

II. Those Who Keep My Word Shall Never See Death (Read John 8:51-53)

- a. Summary of the storyline in the text:
 - i. Jesus says that if anyone keeps His work, he shall never see death.
 - ii. The Jews take this statement of Jesus literally (assuming that He is referring to normal death) and they protest:
 1. Abraham and the prophets *all died*.
 2. But you are saying that those who follow your teaching will never die?!
 3. Do you think you are even *greater than* our father, Abraham?
 4. You must be demon possessed!
- b. If we are to be good, active readers of the Bible, we need to ask tough questions about the text we are reading. Then we need to dig deeper into the Scriptures to find the answers to the questions we have just asked. We can also look to others to see what other early witnesses had to say about the passages we are reading, which may shed some more light. This is the hard (but rewarding!) work of good Bible study and good Bible teaching.

- c. **An obvious question** (to me): What does Jesus mean, “if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death”? (**John 8:51**)
- i. In earlier statements, Jesus had promised eternal life.
 1. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (**John 3:14-16**, NKJV)
 2. “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (**John 6:40**, NKJV)
 - ii. Later in the **gospel of John** we find Jesus saying to Martha, outside the tomb of her brother Lazarus,
 1. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (**John 11:25-26**, NKJV)
 2. In this passage in **John 11**, it is clear that Jesus is using the term “die” in *two difference senses*.
 - a. First, Jesus says of the one who believes in Him, “though he may die, he shall live”.
 - b. Then Jesus says, “Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”
 - c. This is like a riddle; clearly two different kinds of death must be in view.
 - iii. Jesus has power over death.
 1. Read **Revelation 1:12-18**
 - a. Jesus has conquered death. He lives, was dead, and is alive forevermore.
 - b. He has the keys of Hades and Death.
 - i. Recall that “Hades” is the place where spirits of the dead go, awaiting final judgment. See **Psalm 16:10 (15:10 in the LXX)**, **Acts 2:27** and **Luke 16:23**.

2. “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” (**Revelation 2:10–11**, NKJV)
 - a. Here, Jesus clearly speaks of two deaths. Those who remain faithful to the Lord to the point of dying (the first death) shall not be hurt by the second death.
3. Read **Revelation 20:11-15**
 - a. On the final Day of Judgment, all people from all ages will be judged at the same time.
 - b. All will be judged according to their works (according to what they have done). Death, Hades and anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life are all cast into the lake of fire – this is the second death.
 - c. This is similar to what Jesus taught in the story of the Last Day, where He says He will separate the righteous from the wicked as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (**Matthew 25:31-46**). There, the wicked are cast into the punishment of everlasting fire.
 - d. This also reminds me of what Jesus said in **Matthew 10**, when he sent out His twelve apostles to preach throughout Israel, “as sheep in the midst of wolves”:
 - i. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
 - ii. Note that the word translated “hell” here is *gehenna*, the lake of fire.
 - iv. Based on all of the above, it seems to me that Jesus was speaking of the second death in **John 8** (with the Jews misunderstanding Him). Someone who follows Jesus and is faithful to the end will not experience the second death; they will not be cast into the lake of fire on the Last Day.

- v. Novatian (d. 257 AD), an early Christian who was a presbyter in the church in Rome uses Jesus' statement in **John 8** as supporting evidence for the divinity of Christ. Novatian wrote:
1. "If Christ is only man, how does He say, 'If any man shall keep my word, he shall not see death forever?' (**John 8:51**) Not to see death *forever!* What is this but immortality? But immortality is the associate of divinity, because both the divinity is immortal, and immortality is the fruit of divinity. For every man is mortal; and immortality cannot be from that which is mortal. Therefore, from Christ, *as a mortal man*, immortality cannot arise.
 2. "'But,' says He, 'whoever keeps my word, shall not see death forever;' therefore the word of Christ affords immortality, and by immortality affords divinity. But although it is not possible to maintain that one who is himself mortal can make another immortal, yet this word of Christ not only sets forth, but affords immortality: certainly He is not man only who gives immortality, which if He were only man He could not give; but by giving divinity by immortality, He proves Himself to be God by offering divinity, which if He were not God He could not give."
 - a. (Source: Novatian, *A Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 5, p. 624)
 - b. I would take Novatian's reference to the Lord "giving divinity" to us in the same sense used in **2 Peter 1:4**, where Peter says we have become "partakers in the divine nature".
- vi. **Question:** Why should it matter to us today that there will be a second death and that Jesus was divine?
1. First, understanding what Jesus taught about his divinity in the **gospel of John** can help equip us to persuade those who believe Jesus was the Christ, but who do not also believe He was not also God (divine).
 - a. That would include people from Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslim backgrounds. For example, Muslims accept that Jesus was a great prophet, reject His divinity and do not acknowledge that He is the Son of God.

2. Second, grasping what Jesus taught about the second death should motivate us to do whatever it takes to be prepared for the Day of Judgment and to help others be prepared as well.
 - a. This calls to mind a conversation I had this past week with an old friend, someone I have known for over 40 years.
 - i. He considers himself to be a Christian, with main focus on helping out other people in need (which is a wonderful thing).
 - ii. We were discussing what matters in the “last quarter” of our lives; and sharing our plans and objectives.
 - iii. I appealed to him as a Christian, that if what Jesus said was true, the most important thing we can be doing in the short time remaining is to prepare for the Day of Judgment, and to help as many others as possible to be prepared for that: to spread the message of the kingdom far and wide.
 - iv. He said he goes to church, but really does not think much about what happens after death!
 - v. While living a good moral life and helping others in this life are good things, it misses the point of what Jesus is saying: those who follow Him will *never see death*. Jesus came to offer us eternal life.
 - b. The Christian life is to be focused on the ultimate goal: eternal life with the Lord. *It is not about this life*. For Christians, this world is the spiritual Wilderness, in a time of testing. Paul concluded,
 - i. “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your

sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (1 **Corinthians 15:13–19**, NKJV)

- ii. “And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’” (1 **Corinthians 15:30–32**, NKJV)
 - 1. Our faith hangs on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the third day. Either it happened, or it didn’t.
 - 2. *If it did not happen*, our faith is useless.
 - 3. If the only hope for us Christians is limited to what can gain *in this life* (a nice life, good friends, being nice people and then dying/ceasing to exist), then Christians (whose life and teaching often will result in suffering and persecution), are of all people the most pitiable.
 - 4. Paul did not face wild beasts in Ephesus for “a nice Christian life”. Paul actually argues that *if there is no resurrection*, we might as well just live for the pleasure of the flesh.
 - a. But, since Christians do believe there will be a resurrection and Day of Judgment, we adopt a very different view on life’s primary objective!

III. Jesus: Greater than Abraham, and Before Abraham (Read **John 8:54-59**)

- a. Summary of what happens in this story:
 - i. Jesus said that the Father honors Him
 - 1. He had earlier said that *He honors* His Father (**John 8:49**).
 - ii. Jesus says, “I know God, who is My Father; but *you don’t*”.

- iii. Jesus again calls his opponents “*liars*”.
 - iv. Jesus says, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day... and was glad.”
 - 1. His opponents reply that Jesus is *less than 50 years old*. Therefore, it is *impossible* for Abraham to have seen Him!
 - a. In **Luke 3:23** it says that Jesus was about 30 years old at the beginning of His ministry.
 - b. Note that Abraham had died about 2000 years before Jesus was born.
 - v. Jesus responds, “before Abraham was, *I am*”.
 - vi. The opponents of Jesus take up stones to stone Him, but he escapes.
- b. **Questions:** Why did Jesus say that Abraham “rejoiced to see My day” (**John 8:56**)? What did Jesus mean by that? Did Abraham actually see Jesus?
- i. Here are a couple of possibilities to consider, insights from early church writings.
 - 1. Perhaps Jesus just meant that Abraham was looking forward to Jesus coming (sometime in the future), since it was promised to him that all nations would be blessed through his seed, one who would come through Isaac. (**Genesis 17:15-21, 22:18**)
 - 2. Here is a second possibility. Perhaps Jesus meant that Abraham saw Him figuratively. For example, John Chrysostom (347-407 AD, teacher and bishop in Constantinople) believed that Abraham saw the day of Christ being crucified, in advance, revealed in figurative form. Chrysostom said:
 - a. “‘My day,’ seems to me to mean the day of the Crucifixion, which Abraham foreshowed typically by the offering of the ram and of Isaac.”
 - i. (Source: *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily No. 55)
 - b. Irenaeus (130-200 AD, bishop of the church in Lyon, in modern-day France) saw this in a similar way. He wrote:
 - i. “For Abraham, according to his faith, followed the command of the Word of God, and with a ready mind delivered up, as a sacrifice to God, his only-begotten and beloved son, in order that

God also might be pleased to offer up for all his seed His own beloved and only-begotten Son, as a sacrifice for our redemption.

- ii. “Since, therefore, Abraham was a prophet, and saw in the Spirit the day of the Lord’s coming, and the dispensation of His suffering, through whom both he himself and all who, following the example of his faith, trust in God, should be saved, he rejoiced exceedingly. The Lord, therefore, was not unknown to Abraham, whose day he desired to see.”
 - 1. (Source: Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 467)
- c. If the understanding of Irenaeus and John Chrysostom is correct, Jesus’ statement in **John 8** that Abraham “rejoiced to see My day” was a reference to the story in **Genesis 22**, the famous story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac on the mountain.
- d. Parallels between Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac with the crucifixion of Christ include:
 - i. The Father is willing to sacrifice His “beloved son”. (**Genesis 22:2**)
 - ii. Journey by donkey, then by foot to the place of sacrifice. (**Genesis 22:3-5**)
 - iii. The son carries the wood uphill, to the place of the sacrifice. (**Genesis 22:6**)
 - iv. The son is “bound hand and foot” and laid upon the wood, at the place of the sacrifice. (**Genesis 22:9**)
 - v. This son given over to death was, in a sense, raised from the dead (figuratively, as stated in **Hebrews 11:17-19**).
 - vi. God did provide the sheep or male ram as a substitute, for the sacrifice. (**Genesis 22:13, John 1:29**)
 - vii. As a result of this sacrificial act, the proclamation was made: “in your seed *all the nations of the*

earth shall be blessed.” (**Genesis 22:18, Galatians 3:8**)

3. A third perspective is presented by Tertullian (160-230 AD, Christian writer from the church in Carthage, North Africa). He believed that in **John 8:56**, Jesus meant that Abraham literally saw the Son of God.
 - a. How and where did Tertullian see that?
 - b. In a work *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian was trying to correct an error (which still appears today) that the Father *was* the Son (the two were one and the same *person*). Of course, Jesus said that He was sent by the Father, that He did the Father’s will (**John 6:38**), and that the Father is greater than He is (**John 14:28**).
 - c. Tertullian explains the orthodox understanding of the nature of the Father and Son as being one God, yet distinct persons, in *Against Praxeas*.
 - d. Tertullian explains that there are places in the Old Testament where God uses the term “Us” (plural), as in:
 - i. **Genesis 1:26** “Let Us make man in Our image.”
 - ii. **Genesis 3:22** “Behold, man has become as one of Us.”
 - e. Tertullian also makes the point that God is invisible; it is impossible to see God (referring to the Father).
 - i. **Exodus 33:13-20** When Moses asked to see God, the Lord told him, “No man can see my face and live.”
 - ii. He also cites similar statements in the New Testament that it is impossible for us to see God (**John 1:18, 1 Timothy 6:16-17**)
 - f. Tertullian then points out that several people in the Old Testament “saw God”, therefore this must have been referring to the Son of God, who is eternal, who existed before all things and through who all things were made (therefore is divine, yet He CAN take visible form and be seen, unlike the Father).
 - g. Tertullian asks his readers the rhetorical question:

- i. “Moreover, how comes it to pass, that the Almighty Invisible God, ‘whom no man has seen nor can see; He who dwells in light unapproachable;’ ‘He who dwells not in temples made with hands;’ ‘from before whose sight the earth trembles, and the mountains melt like wax;’ who holds the whole world in His hand ‘like a nest;’ ‘whose throne is heaven, and earth His footstool;’ in whom is every place, but Himself is in no place; who is the utmost bound of the universe;—
- ii. “how does it happen, I say, that He (who, though) the Most High, should yet have walked in paradise towards the cool of the evening, in quest of Adam; and should have shut up the ark after Noah had entered it;
- iii. “and at Abraham’s tent should have refreshed Himself under an oak;
- iv. “and have called to Moses out of the burning bush; and have appeared as ‘the fourth’ in the furnace of the Babylonian monarch (although He is there called the Son of man),—unless all these events had happened as an image, as a mirror, as an enigma (of the future incarnation)?
- v. “Surely even these things could not have been believed even of the Son of God, unless they had been given us in the Scriptures...”
 1. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 612)
- h. Then speaking of Jesus’ comment in **John 8**, Tertullian writes,
 - i. “*(Jesus said)* ‘If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father who honors me, of whom you say, that He is your God: yet you have not known Him, but I know Him; and if I should say, I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you; but I know Him, and keep His saying.’ But when He goes on to say, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad,’ He

certainly proves that it was not the Father that appeared to Abraham, but the Son.

1. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, pp. 617–618)
 - i. Conclusion from Tertullian: When Abraham met “the Lord” (“God” in the LXX) at the tree at Mamre in **Genesis 18**, along with two others (those two are identified as angels in **Genesis 19:1**), he actually met the Son of God.
 - i. They talked, enjoyed the cool shade under the tree together, ate the noontime meal together, etc.
 - ii. The person who appeared in **Genesis 18:1** is referred to as “the Lord” (“God” in the LXX).
 - iii. Abraham refers to Him as “the Judge of all the earth”. (**Genesis 18:25**)
 - iv. Several other early Christian writers drew the same conclusion: this could not be the Father; must have been the Son of God who met Abraham!
- c. **Question:** Why does Jesus say, “Before Abraham was, I am”? (**John 8:58**)
 - i. He could have said, “Before Abraham was, I was.” (past tense)
 - ii. Note that in many Bible translations, the translators put the two words, “I am” all in capital letters, as: “I AM”.
 1. Note that in the ancient Bible manuscripts, they generally did not use capital and lower-case letters the same way that we do in modern English. So this capitalization has been added by the translators.
 - iii. In many Bibles, there is a footnote that says something along the lines of: “The term ‘*I am*’ (in Greek = ego eimi / ἐγὼ εἰμί) in **John 8:58** refers to the divine name of God given in **Exodus 3:14**.”
 1. If that statement, popular in commentaries and Bible footnotes, is true (in other words, if “ego eimi” is the divine name of God), it would imply that Jesus is applying the divine name of God to Himself. In essence, He would be stating that He is God.

2. While I have heard many people claim that “ego eimi”, (translated “I am” is the divine name in Greek from **Exodus 3:14**, after checking out the claim I have discovered that is not the case! Let us examine what the Scriptures actually say, as well as how this statement was understood by Christians in the beginning.
3. When the Lord asks Moses to take on his great mission, Moses asks God a question: “Indeed, when I go to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I tell them?” (**Exodus 13:3**, LXX, OSB)
4. Here is the passage from the Septuagint (LXX) in which God answers Moses’ question: “Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν, λέγων, ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὄν· καὶ εἶπεν, οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, ὁ ὄν ἀπέσταλκέ με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.” (**Exodus 3:14**, Brenton LXX Gk)
 - a. The passage above from the LXX can be translated: “And God spoke to Moses, saying, ‘I am the Existing One’. And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: The Existing One sent me to you.’”
 - i. In the Septuagint, (the Greek Old Testament that Jesus and the apostles generally quote from, and the Old Testament used in the early church), the statement that God makes is ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὄν, which is translated, “I am the Existing One”.
 - ii. The divine name of God in the LXX, the Greek Old Testament, is *NOT* “I am” (ἐγὼ εἰμι).
 - iii. The divine name in Greek is “the Existing One” (ὁ ὄν)
 - iv. The phrase (ὁ ὄν) in the LXX rendered “The Existing One” could also be translated “The One Who is Being”, or as Brenton translated it quite literally, “THE BEING”.
 - b. Many Jews throughout history have made a point of *not pronouncing* the divine name of God from **Exodus 3:14**, out of reverence. However, God *didn’t* say “Don’t pronounce my name.” He told Moses exactly *what to say*.

- i. Also, the Jehovah's Witnesses put a great emphasis on this. They insist that God's name is Jehovah (taken from a transliteration of the Hebrew in **Exodus 3:14** and elsewhere).
 - ii. However, I believe that God does not actually have a proper name. Is "the Existing One" or "I am" a proper name? God is simply telling Moses that when the people ask, "Who sent you?", tell them it is "The Existing One (or from the Hebrew, 'Jehovah/ YHWH/ I am who I am') Who sent you. It strikes me that this answer is a slam on all the other "gods", of Egypt or anywhere else on the earth. They do not exist; The One Who *does* exist, the One Who is, is the God Who spoke to Moses.
 - iii. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD), a philosopher who converted to the Christian faith, addressed the question of whether God has a name. Justin wrote:
 1. "For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God; and if any one dare to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness." (Source: Justin Martyr, First Apology, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 183)
 2. What is Justin saying? I think he is saying that there really is no name or label that can capture the One who created the entire universe from nothing.
5. Bottom line: when Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am", he was *not* referring to "the divine name" from **Exodus 3:14**. You can see this by comparing the Greek of **John 8:58** with the Greek in the LXX of **Exodus 3:14**. (You can verify this for yourself with an interlinear New Testament and an interlinear Septuagint.)
 6. Also, I checked the Ante-Nicene Fathers (most of the Christian writings from the first 320 years of the church) and none indicated that they thought Jesus was applying the divine name from **Exodus 3:14** to Himself, in **John 8**.

7. I realize that many teachers and preachers today attempt to connect this “*I am*” statement by Jesus in **John 8:58** to what God said to Moses in **Exodus 3:14**, in an effort to prove the divinity of Christ.
 - a. While Christians believe Jesus was divine, we do not want to take Scriptures out of context. In fact, there are *many other ways* to show clearly the divinity of Christ from the New Testament and from the Old Testament. (For examples of how this was done effectively in the past, see Tertullian’s *Against Praxeas*; and Eusebius’ *Proof of the Gospel*.)
- iv. Early Christian writers saw great significance to Jesus’ remarkable statement that “before Abraham was, I am”. Although they did not see Jesus pointing back to **Exodus 3:14** here, they saw it as evidence for His divinity *on other grounds*.
 1. Origen used **John 8:58** as part of his defense of the Christian belief in one God (as opposed to many pagan gods) in a work called *Against Celsus*:
 - a. “We worship one God, the Father and the Son, therefore, as we have explained; and our argument against the worship of other gods still continues valid. And we do not ‘reverence beyond measure one who has but lately appeared,’ as though He did not exist before; for we believe Him when He says, ‘Before Abraham was, I am.’”
 - i. (Source: Origen, *Against Celsus*, in In Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 643)
 - ii. The point Origen makes: The Son of God was from ancient times, not a recent appearance.
 2. John Chrysostom discussed this unusual statement by Jesus as pointing to the *timelessness* of the Word of God. His existence in all eternity is a characteristic of divinity, which He shares with the Father:
 - a. “But why did He not say, ‘Before Abraham was, I was,’ instead of ‘I am’? As the Father uses this expression, ‘I am,’ so also does Christ; for it signifies continuous Being, irrespective of all time. On which account the expression seemed to them to be blasphemous.”
 - i. (Source: John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily No. 55)

- ii. This is why the Jews tried to kill Jesus: they saw His statement as blasphemous. His claim of pre-existing Abraham was pointing to His divinity.
 - b. As the Word of God, the Son of God is continuous, with no beginning in time. This points to His divinity, not by name but by being eternal and transcending all time.
 - i. He was “in the beginning...with God” (**John 1:1-2**).
 - ii. “He is before all things.” (**Colossians 1:17**)
 - c. When John Chrysostom says, “as the Father uses the expression ‘I am’...”, here I assume he is referring to passages where the Father use present tense rather than past tense to refer to action He has done in the past. (He says, ‘I am’ instead of ‘I was’). Examples of this that come to mind:
 - i. **Exodus 3:6**, where God tells Moses, “I am the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”
 - 1. He does *not* say, “I was the God of...”, despite the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all *had been dead for over 1,000 years* at the time that the Lord spoke to Moses.
 - ii. **Isaiah 48:12**, where the Father says, “I am the first, and I am forever.”
 - 1. He does *not* say, “I was the first...”
- 3. Novatian, a presbyter in the church in Rome (d. 257 AD) uses this statement by Jesus to defend the divinity of Christ. He wrote:
 - a. “If Christ was only man, how did He say, ‘Before Abraham was, I am?’ For no man can be before Him from whom he himself is; nor can it be that any one should have been prior to him of whom he himself has taken his origin. And yet Christ, although He is born of Abraham, says that He is *before* Abraham. Either, therefore, He *says what is not true, and deceives*, if He was not before Abraham, seeing that He was of Abraham; *or He does not deceive, if He is also God, and*

was before Abraham. And if this were not so, it follows that, being of Abraham, He *could not be before* Abraham.

- i. (Source: Novatian, *A Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 624–625)
- ii. Novatian’s logic: Jesus was descended from Abraham. Therefore, either he is telling the truth (in which case, if He is also before Abraham, He must be divine) or He is lying!

IV. Conclusions

- a. Jesus promises that those who follow Him will never see death: referring to the second death, in the lake of fire.
 - i. Jesus has the power over death and offers us eternal life.
 - ii. When Jesus returns, the dead (all who died a “first death”) will be raised and face judgment. At that time, those who believed in Jesus and obeyed him will inherit eternal life; the rest will face “the second death”.
 - iii. This is the goal of our faith: eternal life. Nothing matters more. As Jesus said, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (**Mark 8:36**, NKJV)
- b. Jesus said that Abraham saw His day and rejoiced.
 - i. Perhaps Abraham was looking forward to the Christ *figuratively*: the one promised to come from Abraham’s seed Who would be a blessing to all nations; OR
 - ii. Abraham may have also seen “the day of Christ”, (referring to His crucifixion) *in type or allegorical form*, foreshadowed in the sacrifice of Isaac in **Genesis 22**; OR
 - iii. Abraham may have seen the Son of God *literally* in the account of the meeting at the tree of Mamre in **Genesis 18**.
- c. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, *I am*”; a mysterious statement, one that speaks of the timelessness and divinity of the Son of God. He is before all things and shares the divine nature with the Father. His enemies understood the significance of this bold claim and tried to kill Him as a result.
 - i. Let us always be prepared to explain and accurately defend Jesus’ divinity from the Scriptures, especially from the **gospel of John**.