

THE DNA (OR LEGITIMACY) TEST — JOHN 8.37-47

Who is really your father?

Key statements —

- “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did.” (v. 39)
- “We are not illegitimate children. The only Father we have is God himself.” (v. 41)
- “If God were your Father, you would love me.” (v. 42)

The tone of this dialogue between Jesus and his listeners continues to escalate, becoming increasingly adversarial. In reality, it is a clash between two opposing spirits, two repelling natures, two mutually exclusive words: the truth of Jesus and the lie of the devil.

(1) Illegitimacy established - 8.37-38

“You are Abraham’s descendants, but not his offspring.”

- The Gospel of John is centered on two components: the Word and belief. Jesus is the God-Word (*John 1.1*) who has come into the world in human form (*John 1.14*); those who receive Him, who believe in him as the One and Only Son of God, receive eternal life; those who don’t will die in their sins (*John 1.12; 3.16, 36; 8.24*).
- When Jesus speaks, he speaks as the Word; he speaks what the Father has instructed him to speak—he speaks truth. Those who refused his words, rejected him.
 - ➡ In rejecting him, they embraced “The Lie” (*1 John 2.22-23*) that he was not the God-Word.
 - ➡ In accepting The Lie, they were submitting to the father of lies.
- Outwardly, the Jews qualified as Abraham’s descendants; inwardly, they disqualified themselves as true children of Abraham “because you have no room for my word” (v. 37). (*see also Romans 2.28-29*)
- Proverbs 20.11 —

*“Even a child is known by his actions,
by whether his conduct is pure and right.”*

The actions of the Jews —

“You are ready to kill me.” (v. 37)

“You do what you have heard from your father.” (v. 38)

- Thus they, by their own actions, prove that they are not Abraham’s true children, for Abraham anticipated the day (8.56) of the One who was the true Seed of Abraham (*Galatians 3.16*).

(2) Illegitimacy exposed - 8.39-42

“Your actions prove who truly is your father.”

- “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the things Abraham did.” (v. 39)

What did Abraham do?

He received by faith the word of God that came to him, the promise of God, given to Abraham *before* the outward sign of circumcision—

So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised . . . he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it might be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring — not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham.

—Romans 4.11b-12,16

These Jews, then, could not be true offspring of Abraham because, unlike Abraham who believed (Romans 4.17-18,20-21), they did *not* believe. Even more telling, because of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus and his truth —

“You are determined to kill me.” (v. 40)

Thus, their own illegitimacy is uncovered and exposed.

- “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.” (v. 41)

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am now here. I have not come on my own; but He sent me. (v. 42)

Their protest, “we are not illegitimate children,” came as a veiled reference to the circumstances of Jesus’ birth when his mother was “found to be with child” before she and her fiancé, Joseph, “came together” (Matthew 1.18).

In response, Jesus spoke with his own veiled reference to his conception by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1.18; Luke 1.35) when he said “for I came from the Father and am now here.”

- 1 John 2.23; 5.1—

*“No one who denies the Son has the Father;
whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*

*“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,
and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.”*

(3) Illegitimacy embodied - 8.43-45

“You are like the truly illegitimate one, the devil.”

- “Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.” (v. 43)

To his audience, the “words of the Word” were elusive. Because they did not believe him, they could not understand what he was saying to them. Often Jesus was misunderstood when he was speaking from a spiritual perspective, while his audience was thinking and perceiving on a human, natural level. This, however, goes deeper as Jesus will say in verse 47 —

“The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

- ▶ Matthew 13.13: “Though seeing, they do not see, though hearing, they do not understand.”

- They could not hear the “words of the Word.” Why? Having rejected the truth, they had believed the lie from the “father of lies.” (v. 44)

“You belong to your father, the devil.”

➡ “you want to carry out your father’s desire.”

“He was a murderer from the beginning.”

➡ “not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him”

“When he lies, he speaks his native language.”

➡ “for he is a liar, and the father of lies” (v. 44)

- ▶ The most powerful lie is that God is not Truth. This was the lie that the devil, embodied in the serpent, put forth to Eve—who, after consideration, rejected Truth and accepted the lie.
- ▶ These Jews have rejected the God-Word; they have refused to believe that Jesus is the God-Sent-One. They reject him as the Son of God—the representation and truth of God the Father. (*In John’s Gospel, “truth” is the revelation of God — the reality of His character, heart, and will.*)
- ▶ There are only two choices: the Truth or the Lie. Only two fatherhoods: the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ or the father of lies. Jesus’ purpose was to reveal his Father; from the beginning, the devil has revealed a consuming hatred for the truth and for all that reveals the truth and ways of God.

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

2 Corinthians 4.4

- ▶ 2 Thessalonians 2.9-11 —

“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed . . . in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.

For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion, so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.”

- “Yet because I tell you the truth you do not believe me! (v. 45)

(4) Illegitimacy explained - 8.46-47

“You do not belong to God so you cannot hear what He says.”

- “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?” (v.46)

If Jesus had not been telling the truth, if he had been lying to them, their inmost natures would have been drawn to him. As it was, because he was speaking the truth, the nature of the “father of lies” and the “murderer from the beginning” was revealed in their rejection of his words and their desire to kill him—a desire that they will soon act on.

- “He who belongs to God hears what God says.

The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” (v. 47)

Remember that these Jews have, at least, begun to put their faith in Jesus. And yet as he continues to speak and probe their hearts, they counter his words and refuse to accept with any humility what he is saying to them.

► James 1.21 —

“. . . humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

► Hebrews 4.2 —

“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith.”

► Romans 11.20-21 —

“But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”

► 1 John 3.8,10 —

“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”

By their words and actions, it is clear that the DNA of the Father is not that of these Jews. Jesus has exposed their illegitimacy. Their subsequent words and actions will continue to reinforce his judgment of them.

Three lessons to take to heart —

1. The Word of God is the Word of God is the Word of God . . .

It is not the word of man. Peter reminded his readers that the word of prophecy did not originate with a human being but with the Holy Spirit and that the word of prophecy has been made “more certain” through the coming of the Son of God (*2 Peter 1.16-21*).

The Word of God is not subject to man’s revision or alteration (*Revelation 22.18-19*) or arbitrary interpretation (*2 Peter 1.20*). We must hear and accept the Word of God as authoritative and final: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (*Matthew 24.35*).

2. ALL of God’s Word is important and necessary.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3. 16-17

We all have our favorite parts of the Bible, but we need *all* Scripture if we are to become men and women of God. We need the revelation of God’s character and ways found in **both** the Old and New Testaments. We need the examples of faith and failure in the Old Testament as encouragement **and** warning for us today (*Romans 15.4; 1 Corinthians 10.11-12*).

3. To love the Word is to love the Word-Christ.

All Scripture points to Jesus, the Word, and all Scripture ultimately is fulfilled in him. So to love Scripture, to make time for it in a large way, to study it and memorize it, is to really be loving Jesus. “Let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you” (*Colossians 3.16*). There is a direct correlation between our “consumption” of the Word of God and our love for Christ the Word.

*“I delight in Your decrees;
I will not neglect Your word.”*

Psalms 119.16