

Like Father, Like Son: The Role of Abraham in Tabernacles – John 8:31-59

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Abstract: Chapters 7 and 8 of the Fourth Gospel present a unified narrative focussed upon the issue of Jesus' identity. Abraham functions as a witness to Jesus' identity and relationship with Israel's God. For the Johannine Christians, living in their own time of conflict with emerging post-70 Judaism, the confrontation at Tabernacles offers clarity and hope in their struggle for identity. Abraham's testimony demonstrates that the traditions of Israel now find their fulfilment and perfection in Jesus.

THE APPROACH OF A NEW MILLENNIUM seems to intensify the age-old desire for certainty. Before we venture into an unexplored future we seek a firm rudder and sure compass in order to know where we are now and in which direction we are heading. The Johannine community knew a similar *angst* as it struggled with its own questions of identity. What is our relationship to Jewish traditions? Do we still shape our lives according to the Mosaic Torah? As a community of Jew and Gentile, are we all "children" of Abraham? Who is Jesus? What is his relationship to the God we have known in our history? These issues come to the fore in the conflict between Jesus and "the Jews" during the feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-10:21).

In the narrative of Tabernacles, Jesus' claims to be a source of living water (7:37) and light (8:12) relate very clearly to the main liturgical rituals of the Feast. Similarly the references to Moses (7:19-24) are pertinent given that the Feast celebrates events that occurred during the wilderness experience following the Exodus. What is not so readily explained is the frequent reference to Abraham during the final part of the dispute (8:33-58). Why does Abraham dominate the concluding arguments during this Feast? What is Abraham's connection with Tabernacles? Since the liturgical symbols have been given a Christological focus, in what way does the discussion about Abraham elucidate the identity of Jesus? What relevance can this discussion have for the

Johannine community facing their own identity questions? These are the issues addressed in this article.

I begin with an overall discussion of chapters 7 and 8, presenting a structure that shows the focus of this unified narrative upon the issue of Jesus' identity. I then examine the role of Abraham; concluding that Abraham functions as a witness to Jesus' identity and to his relationship with Israel's God. Finally, I examine the implications of Jesus' identity, *vis-à-vis* Israel's traditions, for Jesus and for the Johannine Christians.

1. THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF 7:1-8:59

An atmosphere of growing hostility pervades chapters 7 and 8. The threat of death both introduces and concludes this section: "He could not go about in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him" (7:1); and then in 8:59 "They took up stones to throw at him; he went out of the temple." The section is introduced in verses 1-13, which include background information about geography (v 1) and about the time of the year (v 2); about the request by the brothers to go to Judea (vv 3-5); reference to another time-frame governing Jesus' actions (vv 6-9); and Jesus' attending the feast (vv 10-13).

Following this introduction, the first discussion between Jesus and his audience occurs "about the middle of the feast" (v 14). In the initial discussion the origin of Jesus' teaching is questioned. Jesus, in his argument, appeals to Moses, the great teacher of Jewish law (v 19). Because the Feast of Tabernacles recalled YHWH's protection during the wilderness wanderings, Moses is a key figure. Through Moses' intercession the people were sustained by gifts of manna (Exod 16) and water (Exod 17:1-7).¹

The discussion then moves away from Jesus' teaching authority to the question of his identity (vv 25-36). Each time this question is raised the audience searches for an answer in terms of Jesus' origins. The participants in the story are limited in their perception of these origins and so fail to accept Jesus' claims of a divine origin in the One who sent him and to whom he is going (vv 28, 33). The discussion is interrupted by another reference to time: "the last day, the great day" (v 37).² On this day, and within a feast that has had daily water libations and prayers for rain, Jesus proclaims a new source of living water. In this

1. For a detailed analysis of later Mosaic traditions regarding the wilderness times see G. Bienaimé, *Moïse et le don de l'eau dans la tradition juive ancienne: Targum et Midrash*. AnBib 98. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984).

2. There are divergent views whether "the last day" meant the seventh day, or the additional eighth day of solemn assembly. For a discussion of this issue see Raymond Brown, *The Gospel of John* (Anchor Bible 29-29a. New York: Doubleday, 1966 and 1970) 1:327; L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (rev. ed.) NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 373, n. 79; also Z. Hodges, "Rivers of Living Water – John 7:37-39," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979) 247.

proclamation Jesus is identified with one of the major liturgical symbols of the feast, namely, living water (v 38).³

At the centre of the section (vv 40-52), is a *schisma* (v 43) based on a twofold questioning of Jesus' identity. For some he is "the prophet" (v 40), for others "the Christ" (v 41). However, some, who attribute his origins to Galilee, reject both these titles claiming he is neither the Christ (vv 41, 42), nor a prophet (v 52). In refusing to accept Jesus' origins with the Father, they remain ignorant of his true identity. The section continues in 8:12 with a second affirmation of Jesus' identity. In the context of a Feast where large menorah illuminate the Temple courtyards, such that the Mishnah records, "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light" (m. Sukk. 5:3), Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world" (8:12).⁴ These two self-revelatory statements of Jesus, as living water (7:38) and light (8:12), bracket and bring into sharp relief the refusal of the participants to accept his claims. The discussion of Jesus' identity continues (vv 13-30) and again the issue of identity is raised in terms of his origins and destiny.

The final section (vv 31-38), which is the focus of this study, brings the person of Abraham into the discussion, and leads to Jesus' definitive non-predicated statement of identity – *ego eimi*. Jewish tradition, recorded in the Book of Jubilees, remembers Abraham as the first to celebrate Tabernacles:⁵ "And he [Abraham] built booths for himself and for his servants on that festival. And he first observed the feast of booths on earth" (Jub 16:30). The discussions during Tabernacles begin with the figure of Moses and conclude with the figure of Abraham, enabling the two great Jewish forefathers associated with the Feast to bear witness to Jesus' claims.

The Temple and the rituals of Tabernacles provide a cultic context for questions about the identity of Jesus. The participants in the story ask the right question, namely, "Who are you?" (8:25). However, because they think he has come from Galilee (7:27, 41, 52), they fail to grasp Jesus' true identity and his origins in the Father. The readers of the Gospel have already been given the answer to this question, "Who are you?" First, in the Prologue, Jesus is the presence of the divine *logos*

3. For a brief overview of Tabernacles and its rituals see G. MacRae, "The meaning and evolution of the Feast of Tabernacles," *CBQ* 22 (1960) 251-76; also G. A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989) 70-82. A more detailed analysis of the Feast may be found in M. Dacy, *Sukkot: Origins to 500 C.E.* (Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis; Dept. of Semitic Studies, University of Sydney, 1992) 1-206.

4. As Tabernacles was celebrated at the full moon during the autumnal equinox, the "world" was lit by the sun during the day and by the radiance of the moon by night. H. Ulfgard, *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (Lund: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1989) 115.

5. The Book of Jubilees is a non-canonical text from late Second Temple Judaism dated ca. 150 B.C.E. It is written in the form of a revelation to Moses on Sinai announcing Israel's future failures and ultimate salvation. Many of Israel's later religious festivals are given a very early foundation in the primeval history and ancestral narratives.

now tabernacling among us (1:14), and in the first encounter with “the Jews” Jesus is the new Temple of God’s presence (2:21).⁶ As the Feast of Tabernacles unfolds, the knowing reader observes the mounting hostility of “the Jews” who reject a new Tabernacling presence of God in their midst.

Schematically, the structure can be shown thus:

Introduction: 7:1-13

“He could not go about in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him.”

The Feast of Tabernacles.

- MOSES 7:14-24

- the issue of origins

- WHO IS JESUS? 7:25-36

- his origins & destiny

- Jesus’ first reply – LIVING WATER 7:37-39

- JESUS’ IDENTITY – SCHISMA 7:40-52

- reason – his origins in Galilee.

- Jesus’ second reply – LIGHT OF THE WORLD 8:12⁷

- WHO IS JESUS? 8:13-30

- his origins and destiny

- ABRAHAM 8:31-58

- the issue of origins

Conclusion 8:59.

“They took up stones to throw at him; he went out of the temple.”

6. In speaking of Jesus as both Temple and Tabernacle there is no dichotomy as the two are intrinsically related as the flesh (1:14) is related to the body (2:21). The Tabernacle and Temple serve the same symbolic function even though they recall different historical eras. Both were central in Israel’s cultic awareness of God’s presence. In the Gospel the images of the Tabernacle (*skêne*) and Temple (*naos*) are applied to Jesus in his humanity. Given the holistic, Semitic notion of the human person, the Hellenistic distinctions of “flesh” and “body” do not apply. There is therefore fluidity in the Johannine use of the metaphors Tabernacle and Temple as images of God’s presence in the historical person Jesus. In the flesh/body of Jesus the divine *logos* becomes part of the human story. Temple is also the more appropriate historical image once the Prologue concludes and the narrative proper begins.

7. The story of the woman taken in adultery (7:35-8:11) is not part of the narrative of Tabernacles. It can be described as a non-Johannine interpolation that is part of the gospel tradition even though there is uncertainty as to which gospel it belongs. For further comments on this pericope and its place in the fourth gospel see Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1:332-38; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John*, (3 vols. London: Burns & Oates, 1968-1982) 1:181-82; 2:168-71. A recent analysis of this episode with bibliographic references to current discussion can be found in F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*. Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Michael Glazier Liturgical Press, 1998) 258-65.

2. ABRAHAM'S ROLE WITHIN THE FEAST

During the final discussions both "the Jews" and Jesus appeal to Abraham.

<i>The Words of "The Jews"</i>	<i>The Words of Jesus</i>
we are descendants of Abraham 33	I know you are descendants of Abraham 37
Abraham is our Father 39	if you were children of Abraham 39
	you would do what Abraham did 39
	this is not what Abraham did 40
Abraham died 52	
Abraham who died 53	Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my
	day 56
you have seen Abraham 57	Before Abraham was, I am. 58

The initial verses (33-40) raise the issue of the origins of "the Jews" who claim Abraham as their father, *sperma Abram esmen* (v 33). In v 37 Jesus supports this assertion. In a physical sense, they are Abraham's seed. But in v 39 the language changes from seed (*sperma*) to children (*tekna*): "If you were children of Abraham the works of Abraham you would do." Although physically descended from Abraham, "the Jews" are not true children for they do not *do* what Abraham did. There is a principle working here that has already been established in the Gospel, that is, sons do what their fathers do. In chapter 5 Jesus had claimed to be a true son of the Father, "for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise" (5:19). Doing as the father does is the true measure of sonship. In rejecting Jesus who speaks the truth, and in seeking to kill him (v 40), "the Jews" show that their father is the Devil who is "a murderer" and "has nothing to do with the truth" (v 44). The deeds of "the Jews" testify to their true lineage for they *do* what their father does, they murder and destroy truth.

The concluding verses of chapter 8 contain some of the harshest words in the Christian scriptures about "the Jews" and it is essential that the term be understood in its narrative context. The conflict in the Johannine narrative is best understood as a struggle between adolescent siblings trying to establish their own self-identity in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, the term the *Ioudaioi* in the Johannine gospel must be read as a narrative device rather than as a description of members of Second Temple Judaism. According to Bultmann the *Ioudaioi* portrays the Jews "from the standpoint of Christian faith as the representatives of unbelief" and "the unbelieving world in general."⁸ They are, in John Ashton's words, an "archetypal symbol of the sinful-

8. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 86.

ness of all humanity".⁹ "The Jews" in the gospel narrative are a caricature of the unbelieving world that rejects Jesus,¹⁰ and in their rejection they show they are not true *sperma Abram*.

What is it that Abraham *did*, that "the Jews" are not doing, so they cannot be true children of Abraham? In v 56 we are told, "Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day." The action of rejoicing in the day of Jesus is what "the Jews" fail to do. Frequently Abraham is described as a man of faithful obedience; that is the key memory in the Jewish tradition (Gen 12:4; 22:1-14; 26:5), and also in the early Christian writings (Rom 4:3, 13, 16; Gal 3:6; Heb 11: 8, 17; Jam 2:23). However, in this feast, it is Abraham's joy rather than his faith or obedience that is commended by Jesus. The book of Jubilees and the celebration of Tabernacles provide an appropriate context for this unusual emphasis.

Tabernacles is the most joyful of Israel's three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles), when Israel is told to rejoice before the Lord for seven days (Lev 23:40). As already mentioned, Abraham is named in the book of Jubilees (ca. 100 BCE) as the first to celebrate the feast of booths (Jub 16:21). Abraham's joy in this feast is striking. The text of Jubilees repeatedly mentions joy.

He built an altar there to the Lord who delivered him and who made him rejoice in the land of his sojourn. And he celebrated a feast of rejoicing in this month (16:20).

He observed this feast seven days, rejoicing with all his heart ... (16:25).

And he blessed and rejoiced and called the name of this festival "the festival of the Lord", a joy acceptable to God Most High (16:27).

The cause of Abraham's joy and blessing lies in the future that he is permitted to see,¹¹ "for he knew and perceived that from him there would be a righteous planting for eternal generations and a holy seed from him" (Jub 16:26). Abraham's perception enables Jesus to say, "Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56).

In failing to rejoice in Jesus as Abraham did, "the Jews" reveal that they are not true children of Abraham. In this confrontation where "the Jews" call upon Abraham to add legitimacy to their argument (v 33),

9. J. Ashton, "The identity and function of the Ioudaioi in the Fourth Gospel", *Nov. Test.* 27 (1985) 68.

10. The term also reflects the painful conflict between the post-70 Synagogue and the early Christian community, however local that conflict may have been. For a further description of the characterisation of "the Jews" see R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 125-31.

11. "Early Jewish tradition held that Abraham had been privileged with a disclosure of the secrets of the ages to come, especially the messianic age (see *Targum Onkelos* on Gen 17:16-17; *GenR* 44:22, 28; 4 *Ezra* 3:14; *Test Levi* 18:14; 2 *Baruch* 4:4; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 31:1-3; *Tanh Bereshit* 6:20; *b. Sanhedrin* 108b)." See F. J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 112.

Jesus shows that their claim is not true. The post-70 Christian readers of this dispute may at this point be thinking that the narrative is going to reveal that **they** are the true children of Abraham because they have responded positively to Jesus. But there is more!

3. ABRAHAM AS A WITNESS TO JESUS' ORIGINS

It is not just a question of the identity of the son/daughter; also at stake is the question of the identity of the father. "The Jews" insist that their father is Abraham (v 33, 39) and even God (v 41), a claim Jesus challenges by pointing to what they *do* to him (v 40), and showing that therefore they cannot have their origins in either Abraham or God. By contrast, Jesus does the will of his Father. He speaks what he has seen and heard with his Father (v 38, 40). Jesus is a true son and his Father is none other than the one "the Jews" claim as their God (v 54). There is a contrast established between "our/your father Abraham" (vv 53, 56) and "my Father"/"God" (vv 49, 54). The sonship Jesus claims goes far beyond the sonship of belonging to the "seed" of Abraham; his is a divine sonship.

"The Jews'" question, "*Are you greater than our father Abraham?*" (v 53), recalls an almost identical question asked earlier in the Gospel by the Samaritan woman, "*Are you greater than our father Jacob...?*" (4:12). The site of Sychar in chapter 4, was linked in the Scriptures to Jacob and, for the Samaritans, was a sacred place close to the remains of their Temple. For "the Jews", their holy place was the Temple Mount chosen by David, a site which also has associations with Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac.¹² At two sacred places, both associated with Israel's patriarchs, Jesus' identity is challenged: "*Are you greater than our father Jacob/ Abraham?*" Jesus concludes both discussions with the affirmation, "I am" (4:26; 8:58). The use of the divine appellation *ego eimi* asserts Jesus' claims to transcend Israel's sacred traditions. The manifestation of the incarnate *logos* who dwells with God from all time (1:1) brings to the human story one who far surpasses the founding fathers of Israel, and does away with their legacy of cultic sites and actions.

Many scholars trace the Johannine unpredicated use of "I am" to the self-revelatory formula of Deutero-Isaiah (41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:18; 46:4; 51:12; 52:6).¹³ The phrase *ego eimi* is regularly used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew phrase *ani hu*.¹⁴ In Isaiah, the first occurrences of

12. The place of Isaac's sacrifice is the land of Moriah (Gen 22:2), and according to the Chronicler, Solomon builds the temple on Mount Moriah (2 Chr 3:1).

13. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 94-96; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 2:79-89; Brown, *Gospel*, 1: 533- 38.

14. P. Harner, *The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Usage and Thought*. (Facet Books. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 6.

the phrase *ani hu* occur in trial scenes where, over and against the gods of the world, YHWH asserts his singular sovereignty. "I am YHWH, the first and the last; I am (*ani hu*)" (Isa 41:4).¹⁵ In these trial scenes YHWH summons his servant Israel to bear witness, to **know**, **believe** and understand. "You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may **know** and **believe** me and understand that I am (*ani hu*)" (Isa 43:10).¹⁶

In the context of a juridical dispute the Pharisees reverse roles and demand that Jesus produce witnesses (8:13). Jesus' first witness is none other than Israel's *ego eimi*. "I am (*ego eimi*), the one witnessing to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me" (v 18). The phrase *ego eimi* is repeated two more times in words that recall YHWH's words to Israel. "You will die in your sins unless you **believe** that I Am" (v 24, see Isa 43:10). "When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will **know** that I Am" (v 28, see Isa 43:10).¹⁷

The rituals of Tabernacles may also explain the strong concentration of the phrase *ego eimi* within this particular chapter, where it occurs five times (8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58). A variant of the Hebrew *ani hu* was used in the Festival of Tabernacles as an oblique way of referring to YHWH and thus avoiding saying the sacred name. During a procession with willow branches the supplicant would pray "*ani w^hhu* (literally I and He) come to our aid".¹⁸ Having celebrated the feast and hearing the daily recitation of *ani hu*, Jesus' use of the phrase "I Am" as a term of self-designation would be both striking and offensive to his opponents.

The context of the final *ego eimi* in v 54 and the association with Abraham show considerable verbal links with the targumic version of Isaiah (43:10-12).¹⁹

15. Harner, *I Am*, 9.

16. D. Ball, "I Am" in *John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications* JSNTS 124. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 215-224.

17. The possibility for the expression having its background in Deutero-Isaiah is further strengthened by the uniquely Johannine word *hypsō* (*lift up*) which has the double sense of being lifted up in the crucifixion, and in exaltation (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). The Servant of Deutero-Isaiah, whom YHWH calls to witness will also be lifted up (Isa 52:13).

18. Harner, *I Am*, 18- 21; F. Manns, *Jewish Prayer in the time of Jesus* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 22. Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1994) 214; Dacy, *Sukkot*, 116; H. Ulfgard, *Feast and Future*, 111, n. 466.

19. Dating of targumic material is particularly difficult, since a text will frequently combine material from the Second Temple era with later rabbinic material. In the Isaiah passage given here, the reference to Abraham's future knowledge is also documented in the book of Jubilees (ca. 150 B.C.E) which offers support that this passage may pre-date the Johannine literature. C. Evans develops four criteria for the dating of targumic material. See C. A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Gospel*. JSNTSup 89. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 114.

MT Isa 43:10-12

Targum Isa 43: 10-12²⁰

<p>10. You are my witnesses, says the Lord and my servant whom I have chosen that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He.</p> <p>11. I, I am the Lord and beside me there is no saviour.</p> <p>12. I declared and saved and proclaimed</p> <p>when there was no strange god among us.</p>	<p>You are witnesses before me, says the Lord and my servant the Messiah with whom I am well pleased, that you might know and believe before me and understand that I am He. I am he that was from the beginning, even the ages of the ages are mine and there is no God beside me. I, I am the Lord, and beside me there is no saviour. I declared to Abraham your father what was about to come, I saved you from Egypt, just as I swore to him between the pieces, I proclaimed to you the teaching of my Law from Sinai, when you were present and there was no stranger among you.</p>
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Abraham has been inserted into the text of the Targum in connection with the deliverance from Egypt. Abraham is added to Isaiah in other places expressing a similar theme of Abraham as saviour. In some cases he replaces the original reference to Cyrus, who was considered a saviour figure (41:2; 48:15-16).²¹ The reference above to 43:10-12 is particularly striking, as the Gospel picks up the theme of “knowing” and “believing” (8:24, 28). The Gospel (v 56) and Targum (v 12) follow the Jewish tradition, found already in Jubilees (16:26), that future events were revealed to Abraham.

Targum – *I declared to Abraham your father what was about to come*
Jubilees – *He knew and perceived that from him there would be a righteous planting for eternal generations*

Gospel – *Abraham rejoiced to see my day.*

Both Targum and gospel speak of the pre-existence of the “I Am”.

Targum – *“I am he that was from the beginning”*(Is. Tg. v 10).

Gospel – *“Before Abraham was I am”* (8:58).

20. B. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*. Edited by Martin McNamara. Vol. 11. The Aramaic Bible. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1987).

21. Harner, *I Am*, 39-41.

The similarities between the Gospel and Targum suggest that both draw upon a common source of traditional material concerning Abraham available to a first century author.

4. THE DIVINE FILIATION OF JESUS – ITS IMPLICATIONS

On the Temple mount, the place that recalled the obedience of Abraham and his sacrifice, and during a feast which remembered Abraham's perception and joy, Jesus confronts the seed of Abraham with their disobedience and true paternity disclosed in their seeking to kill the "only son" of the Father. The Father of Jesus is the one "the Jews" claim as their God (8:41, 54) and whom, every morning during the feast of Tabernacles they profess to worship. According to the Mishnah every morning before sunrise the Priests would assemble at the East gate of the Temple facing Mount Olives.²² At the moment of sunrise they would turn to the West to face the Temple and say:

Our fathers who were in this place turned with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east (Ez 8:16). But as to us, our eyes are to the Lord. (m. Sukk. 5:4)

The challenge to believe that Jesus is "I am" speaks precisely to this ritual profession of faith carried out each morning during the feast. Will the Israel of Jesus' day repeat the sins of their fathers or accept a new manifestation of God's tabernacling presence? Will they move beyond their identification with "our father Abraham" (vv 33, 39) to perceive in Jesus the one Abraham "rejoiced to see" (v 56), and their true Father (v 41) whom Jesus' reveals (1:18; 8:58)?

The reaction of "the Jews" to Jesus' final "I am" testifies that they have understood his words even though they reject them as blasphemy. Jesus' response is to leave the Temple. The departure of the one who is "the light of the world" is ominous. Once before the glory cloud of God's presence departed the Temple and it heralded the forthcoming destruction of the Temple (Ez 10:18-19; 11: 22-23). The departure of one who has, during this Feast, consistently affirmed, his relationship with the Father (7:16, 28, 29; 8:18, 19, 29, 38, 42, 54, 55) and so revealed himself as the tabernacling presence of Israel's "I AM" (8:12, 58) acts as a judgement on Israel's cult. As their fathers once "turned their backs to the Temple" (Ez 8:16), now "the Jews" turn from the true Temple of God (2:21) and drive him from his Father's House (2:16). Neither the witness

22. Pharisaic Judaism respected both the written law (Torah) and the oral traditions of the Rabbis. Early in the third century C.E. the oral teachings of the great Rabbis were compiled into the text known as the Mishnah. Even though the Temple had been destroyed in 70 C.E., a large part of the Mishnah is concerned with Temple rituals and maintenance, possibly drawing on pre-70 traditions.

of Moses (7:14-24), nor Abraham (8:31-58) has changed their original intention to kill Jesus (7:1).

CONCLUSION

For the Johannine Christians, living in their own time of conflict with emerging post-70 Judaism, the confrontation at Tabernacles offers clarity and hope in their struggle for identity. Abraham, the great father of Israel, testifies to the coming of Jesus (8:56), thus demonstrating that the traditions of Israel now find their fulfilment and perfection in Jesus. When the Temple Mount has become rubble, and the Synagogue is no longer accessible, a Christian community finds it has lost nothing. Their Jewish Festivals can still be celebrated; celebrated now in their fulfilment and no longer as promise. In and through their faith in Jesus, they still have the Tabernacling presences of God and they still have a filial identity. While “the Jews” claim Abraham as their father (v 39, 53), the Father of Jesus is revealed as none other than Israel’s God (8:54). Christians, who participate in Jesus’ sonship, no longer need turn to Abraham as their father for in Jesus a new and greater filiation is possible, the gift to become children of God (1:12).²³

23. The theme of divine filiation is not explicit in this scene but has emerged for the Christian reader in earlier parts of the text (1:12) and will be developed in the ongoing narrative (see esp. 19:26-27).