

The Fall of the Gods – *John 10:22-42*

Introduction – Over and over again, it is good to be reminded that there are many layers to John’s writings, and this next section is thick with them. We were last in the temple with a group of Jewish leaders divided over who Jesus is (v19). Two months have gone by between these two feasts (Tabernacles and Dedication). Now, among the crowds again, they press Jesus to tell them openly Who He is. They likely have a plan to trap Him as well.

Summary of the Text – During Hanukkah, John records a final public discourse with the Jews as Jesus walked in the temple (v23). They wanted Jesus to state plainly if He was the Messiah (v24). The Lord explains why this would be useless to do (vv25-26). They are not of His sheep, for His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (v27). Those same sheep are given eternal life, they will never perish, and because they are in the palm of His hand and the Father’s hand, none of them will be lost (vv28-29). Jesus and the Father are one (v30). Because He claimed Deity, the Jews take up stones in judgment to kill Him (vv31-33). Jesus defends His Deity and the Father’s purpose (vv34-38) for which they again sought to seize Him, but He escapes (v39). Jesus then leaves Jerusalem, desolate, and returns to where He was baptized by John beyond the Jordan (vv40-41) where many believed in Him (v42).

The Feast, the Temple, and Solomon’s Porch (vv22-24) – Since Chapter 5, John has been ordering the ministry of Jesus around feasts. The Passover Feast of Chapter 5 is followed by Jesus feeding the 5000 and proclaiming that He is the true bread from heaven. The Feast of Tabernacles (Ch. 7) ends with its water festival and Jesus proclaiming that out of the believer’s heart will flow rivers of living water, along with nights in the temple lit with giant candelabras and Jesus proclaiming that He is the light of the world.

The Feast of Dedication was an 8 day feast to celebrate the rededication of the temple which happened in 164BC and the Macabean revolt. After driving out the Greeks who had defiled the temple with their pig-sacrifices (an abomination of desolation), Judah Macabees and his guerilla fighters took back the temple. In the dedication, they lit the temple candles but realized they only had oil for one day. But miraculously the candles continued to burn for another seven days (hence the menorah lamps of Hanukkah).

Now, under Roman occupation, the Jewish authorities “*surround*” (v24, the same word is used in Rev 20:9 to describe a military siege) Jesus and demand, “*If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.*” This is a setup to turn Jesus over to the Romans as an insurrectionist. He is walking in the temple and particularly in “*Solomon’s porch*,” a portico with roof and supporting columns.

The Doctrines of Grace in the Words of Jesus (vv25-30) – Jesus said “*I told you and you do not believe.*” He had been making quite clear Who He was. He openly identified Himself as the Son of God (5:25-26) and Son of Man (5:27, 6:53, 62, 9:37), a clear messianic title. He had referred to Himself as the bread of life (6:35, 48) and “the light of the world” (8:12) and to have been sent from heaven (6:58, 8:42). These and other teachings, along with His works, were clear enough for His disciples to believe on Him as the Christ. The fact that these religious leaders, well acquainted with the prophecies, did not believe revealed something else.

Jesus replies that in His words and works, not only has He declared Who He is but what He is going to do. The problem for these Jews is twofold: they do not want to believe, but worse, they are not able to believe. Jesus does not say that they are not His sheep because they do not believe. Rather, He says that they do not believe because they are not His sheep! This is the mind-boggling doctrine of unconditional and particular election. This, along with John 6:37, 39 confirms Paul’s words of Eph 1:4. We do not become His sheep because we believe. We believe because we are His elected sheep.

In fact, all five of the Doctrines of Grace (often referred to as the five-points of Calvinism) are found in these verses. Regardless of the words one hears or the works one sees, no one is able to believe unless God has chosen them for His own (v26) and grants them faith (Eph 2:8-9). This is related to the doctrine of our Total Inability. The saving, atoning work of Christ is definite and efficacious for all His sheep, the doctrine of Definite Atonement (v27-28a). This is accomplished through His perfect and efficacious call or Irresistible Grace (v27). And all His sheep will be preserved to the end because they are held in the hand of the Son and the Father, the doctrine of the Preservation of the Saints (vv28b-29). (*And tuck this away: we will see this perfectly illustrated in the raising of Lazarus from the dead in the next chapter.*)

“I and the Father are one” – Jesus and His Father are one in purpose, in will, in power. They are equal in glory and power. They are distinct Persons of the Godhead, and as the Athanasian Creed says regarding the Son, “*...equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity.*” And so, Jesus is claiming far more than messiahship, as though He would simply be another Judah Macabees. And the response of the Jewish authorities makes that abundantly clear.

The Blasphemy of Wicked Gods (vv30-39) – John records two times that the authorities, these judges, took up stones to kill Jesus. The first was when He said, *“before Abraham was, I AM”* (John 8:58). They clearly knew He was referring to Exodus 3:14 and the name declared to Moses. This was a claim of divinity, worthy of stoning for blasphemy if proven false. Now, a second time. Jesus says *“I and the Father are one,”* and that would sound an awful lot like the Shema, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”* (Deut 6:4).

They say they should stone Him for making Himself to be God and Jesus gives this cryptic answer. Let me paraphrase: *“Doesn’t your own law that you are so fastidiously following say that you authorities are gods? If so, how much more should I, having been set apart and sent into the world by My Father to do His works right before your eyes, be called the Son of God?”*

This is hard to understand so let me take us step by step. This is a quotation from Psalm 82. In 82:1 “Elohim” stands in the congregation of the “El”; He judges among the “Elohim.” And in vv2-4, He condemns them for wicked and unjust judging. They are fools walking about in darkness and the very foundations of earth and society are shaken (v5). He then says, *“I said, ‘you are gods’...but you shall die like men”* (vv6-7). You might ask at this point, “when did God say these judges are gods?” But its true. The Hebrew word, “Elohim,” is translated “judges” in our Bibles in Exodus 21:6; 22:8,9. You see, they are “gods” in the sense that they judge a man’s life, they can sentence him to death, they can take his possessions over a crime needing restitution, they can enslave and set free, they can bring forth a divorce and dissolve a marriage. In this sense, these judges are gods.

The Deep Irony – Returning to our text, these gods (the Jewish authorities) are judging Christ, charging Him with blasphemy. They are doing this in the temple, in the porch of the wisest judge, Solomon, the son of David. They are saying this of the Son of David, the Good Shepherd who was promised to come and shepherd His sheep and take them away from the devouring wolves. These gods are judging and they want to put Jesus to death. But they are those wicked gods of Psalm 82. What is going to happen to them? Listen again to Psalm 82:7-8 – *“But you shall die like men; and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations.”* This is the last time John will record any public ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem until the Passion Week. In addition, John’s gospel is the only gospel that does not have the Olivet Discourse (of Matt 24 or its equivalent in Mark 13, Luke 21) with Christ’s prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in one generation. These judges, and their priesthood, and their temple, and their sacrifices, and their city, all of it *“shall die like men.”* But Jesus, after His resurrection would claim, *“all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me”* (Matt 28:18) just as His Father promised (Psalm 2:7-8).

Returning to the Jordan (vv40-42) – In verse 22, John also mentions that *“it was winter,”* the end of a season, and this is the end of Jesus’ discourses with the religious leaders in this gospel. *“They sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand”* (v39) and departed to where His public ministry had begun, beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first. His disciples would spend months with Him there and I would wager they would go over all these discourses and the deep meanings of what these things pointed to, Who Jesus was and what He was going to do. We all need time to reflect deeply on what it means that Jesus is the Word of God, that He is God, that He is the Lamb of God, that He is the Son of God, the Son of Man, that He is the bread of life, the light of the world, living water, that He is the greater Solomon, the Son of David, the Good Shepherd, that He has the authority to lay down His life and to take it up again, that He calls His Sheep and they hear His voice and He gives them eternal life, and that no one can snatch them out of His Father’s hand. How much time do you think you need to ponder this?

....and there is one more, the seventh, sign to come...