

John 8 probably records events of the Sabbath concluding the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three Feasts required in the Old Testament (Leviticus 23:33-43; Deuteronomy 16:13-15). By Jesus's day a number of human traditions had been added including the pouring out of water in the Temple as an offering and the lighting of three candlesticks or lampstands in the Temple courtyard, towering over 22 meters. Their light, which could be seen throughout Jerusalem, and the light from the sanctuary flooded the Court of the Women.

Light was an important part of the Feast. It was a reminder of the pillar of fire by which God led the people through the wilderness, when they came out of Egypt. It pointed prophetically to the coming of the Messiah, a great light (*cf.* Luke 2:30-32; Isaiah 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3). In this context Jesus again called out to the people and said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

### **I. *The significance of Jesus' claim to be the light of the world (8:12)***

1. *It was an obvious claim to be the Messiah.* Old Testament passages describe the Messiah as being a light to the Gentiles, i.e., to the nations. The Feast of Tabernacles was associated with the future reign of the Messiah (Zechariah 14:16) and people connected the celebration of light with the Messiah.
2. *It was a direct claim to be the source of spiritual salvation.*
  - a. Jesus claimed this directly (v 12). Darkness especially represents separation from God (*cf.* Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and being in the light is being in the presence of God. Darkness, light and life have much more than physical significance, they have spiritual significance.
  - b. It was pictured in the pillar of fire that gave light and led the people through the wilderness, a picture which was remembered during the Feast of Tabernacles. The people followed the pillar of cloud and of fire just as Jesus told people to follow Him. Those who followed the pillar of cloud and of fire eventually came to the promised land. Those who follow Jesus experience spiritual salvation, never to walk in darkness.
  - c. There is also a reminder here of the opening words of John in this Gospel, "In Him was life and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4).
3. *It was a proclamation of salvation for the world.* This went beyond Jewish nationalism. Jesus would become a sacrifice for the sins of anyone, Jew or Gentile alike. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Jew or Gentile alike could have access to God the Father. He is the light of the world.

The significance of Jesus' claim was not lost on the Jews and they responded, challenging His claim.

### **II. *The challenge of the Pharisees to Jesus making this claim (8:13-19)***

1. *The Pharisees questioned the truthfulness of His claim (8:13-18).*

Though "valid" (NIV) in verse 13 is a possible translation, the more common meaning is "true". The Pharisees appear here to be questioning the truthfulness of Jesus's claim. To them he was making empty claims, false claims which he could not support. But Jesus counters with three reasons they should consider His claim as truthful.

  - a. Jesus had perfect knowledge of Himself (v 14), knowing like no one else from where He came and where He was going. He had come from heaven, sent by the Father, and was returning to the Father when His work of redemption was done. The Pharisees had no such knowledge.
  - b. The unique union which Jesus had with the Father guaranteed the truth of His understanding (vv 15-16). Jesus does not act alone in His judging. His judgment is based upon what He hears from the Father, never acting outside of the will of the Father. (Interpreters and translators differ on verse 15. It may be better to consider the emphasis given in the original, i.e., "I myself do not judge." Verse 16 then explains that when Jesus does judge, He does not do so alone, but in union with the Father. The charge then to the Pharisees that they judge "according to the flesh" (literal) means that it did not depend upon God but arose from their own sinful nature.)
  - c. Building on the first arguments Jesus explains that the Father joins Him in witnessing to His person thus assuring that His claim is true (vv 17-18). By O.T. law two witnesses confirmed the truth of an accusation against a person. Jesus had two witnesses, Himself and His Father. No other mere man could testify to Jesus as Jesus could. The Father had been testifying to Jesus through the signs which He had given Jesus to do.
2. *The Pharisees questioned the testimony to His claim (8:19).*
  - a. Though interpreters are divided, the Pharisees probably understood that Jesus was referring to God but rejected that possibility. The question was roughly, "Where is this "Father" of yours and His testimony whose support you are claiming?"
  - b. Jesus rebuked them that they knew neither Him nor God the Father. As the perfect revelation of God, knowing Jesus would mean knowing the Father (*cf.* John 1:18).

The great lights that stood in the Temple would be extinguished after the Feast, but the light of Jesus goes on forever and extends to any who would follow him. Those who follow Jesus will never walk in darkness but enjoy forever the light of life. To follow Jesus is to believe on Him, just as the Israelites trusted the pillar of cloud and of fire and followed it. It is an invitation to all, any may come and follow Jesus to have life.

Those who have come to Jesus should remember that we must also walk in the light (1 John 1:7). We then have the assurance, that we share in common the very life of God and that we have been cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus. Unlike the world we truly know Jesus and we know God.