

# John 8:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

## Analysis

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**We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man**—This response reveals staggering historical amnesia or deliberate evasion. The claim 'never in bondage' (οὐδενὶ δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε/oudenì dedouleukamen pōpote) is demonstrably false. Israel's defining national narrative begins with Egyptian slavery (Exodus 1-15). The judges period featured repeated subjugation to Canaanites, Midianites, Philistines. The Babylonian exile lasted 70 years. As Jesus spoke, Roman legions occupied Judea, Roman governors ruled from Caesarea, and Roman taxes funded pagan temples.

Yet they claim 'never in bondage to any man'—perhaps rationalizing that spiritual freedom through covenant with God transcended political subjugation. Or perhaps their pride couldn't admit historical reality. The Greek perfect tense (δεδουλεύκαμεν/dedouleukamen) emphasizes completed state: 'we have not been in bondage and remain free'—a claim bordering on delusion given Roman occupation.

**How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?**—Their question reveals they've misunderstood Jesus's meaning entirely. He spoke of spiritual liberation from sin (implied in v.32's 'truth shall make you free'); they heard political liberation from Rome. This confusion between spiritual and temporal kingdoms plagued Jesus's entire ministry—crowds wanted bread and political deliverance; Jesus offered Himself as bread of life and deliverance from sin. The tragic irony: claiming freedom while enslaved to sin, the worst bondage of all.

## Historical Context

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This exchange occurred in the temple treasury (v.20) during Passover season, when Israel's liberation from Egypt was central to liturgy and consciousness. The Passover Haggadah declared 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt,' yet here they claim 'never in bondage'—perhaps distinguishing between ancestors' slavery and their own perceived freedom through covenant.

First-century Judaism was intensely nationalist. The Maccabean revolt (167-160 BC) had achieved temporary independence, celebrating Hanukkah as freedom from Seleucid oppression. Messianic expectations centered on political liberation—the Psalms of Solomon (written 1st century BC) envision Messiah crushing Gentile rulers and establishing David's throne. The Zealot movement advocated armed rebellion against Rome. When Jesus spoke of freedom, His hearers naturally thought politics, not sin.

The claim to be 'Abraham's seed' (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ/sperma Abraam) invoked covenant privilege. God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (Genesis 15:18), be numerous as stars (Genesis 15:5), and through them all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). First-century Jews understood this as guaranteeing them special status—sons of the free woman (Sarah), not slaves like Ishmaelites. Paul would later appropriate this imagery (Galatians 4:21-31), arguing that true Abraham's children are those of faith, not mere physical descent.

The tragedy of their response is its self-deception. They stood in a temple built by Herod, an Idumean client-king serving Roman interests. They paid tribute to Caesar. Roman soldiers patrolled Jerusalem's streets. Yet pride blinded them to present reality and desperate spiritual need. Within 40 years, Rome would destroy that temple, enslave thousands, and scatter the nation—proving that both political and spiritual freedom had eluded them.

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does pride blind us to our true spiritual condition, making us claim freedom while enslaved to sin?
2. Why do people consistently reduce Jesus's spiritual message to political or temporal terms?
3. What is the relationship between physical/political freedom and spiritual liberty, and which does Jesus prioritize?

## Interlinear Text

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ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ Σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐσμεν καὶ οὐδενὶ  
**They answered** **him** **seed** **Abraham's** **We be** **and** **to any man**  
G611 G846 G4690 G11 G2070 G2532 G3762

δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε· πῶς σὺ λέγεις ὅτι Ἐλεύθεροι  
**in bondage** **never** **how** **thou** **sayest** G3754 **free**  
G1398 G4455 G4459 G4771 G3004 G1658

γενήσεσθε  
**Ye shall be made**  
G1096

## Additional Cross-References

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**Matthew 3:9** (References Abraham): And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

**John 8:39** (References Abraham): They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

**John 8:37** (References Abraham): I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

**Genesis 15:13** (Parallel theme): And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

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