

WHO IS THE LIAR IN JN 8:44?

The expression in the last part of Jn 8:44: ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος,¹ ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ is ambiguous and can refer to both the devil and to the father of the devil. It can also contain the implicit presence of Cain. The expression ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ ,της αχτιον οφ της δειλ. is in opposition to v. 45 ἐγὼ δὲ ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω, οὐ πιστεύετε μοι (the action of Jesus). The contrast between the devil and Jesus breaks the double antithesis present in this context: a) God – the devil; b) Jesus – the Jews.

According to J. Wellhausen², there is a clear allusion to the devil's son in the last part of the verse (ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ)³. He thought that there is a connection between the pronoun αὐτοῦ ἀνδ της εζπρεσσιον ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς This link gives a new understanding of the verse: “[...] wenn nun dieser der Sohn des Teufels ist, so wäre nicht der Teufel selber der Vater der Juden, sondern sein Sohn”⁴. In his searching for the original text and the intention of the author of the Fourth Gospel, he proposed reading

¹ I agree with É. Puech who during my conference (*Lectio coram* - 12.05.2000 in the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem) noticed that the comma in this place is already an interpretation of the editors of the Greek New Testament. He suggested the following reading: ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ. I find this proposal very interesting and challenging for the interpretation of Jn 8:44.

² The results of his research were published: a) in 1907 in his book *Erweiterungen und Änderungen*, pp. 19-24; b) in 1908 in his commentary *Das Evangelium Johannis*, pp. 42-45.

³ J. Wellhausen, *Erweiterungen und Änderungen*, p. 20: “Anfang und Schluß vertragen sich nicht mit einander. Vermutlich steckt nun das Unechte nicht im Schluß; denn eine so paradoxe Aussage ist nicht nachträglich eingetragen und die handschriftliche Überlieferung schwankt bei ihr durchaus nicht.”

⁴ See *ibidem*, *Das Evangelium Johannis*, p. 43.

the end of the verse as: “because also his father is a liar”⁵. This reading is supported by the old evidence (Syr^s and Old Latin). R. Bultmann thought that the opposition between Jesus and the devil (vv. 44-45) was the result of a mistranslation. Instead of ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος ηε συγγεστέδ ρεαδινγ πᾶς οὖν ὁ λαλῶν το ψεῦδος... In this reading the speaking of the lies is not the act of the devil but of his children (the Jews)⁶. M.-É. Boismard and A. Lamouille tried to resolve this problem by using instead of ὅταν λαλή της λεσσον ὅς ἂν λαλή attested to by the Old Latin versions and Augustine⁷.

In my opinion there is an implicit presence of Cain in the sentence ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ. The pronoun αὐτοῦ χαν βε χοννεχτέδ ωιτη τὸ ψεῦδος or ὁ ψεύστης. Commentators often connect αὐτοῦ ωιτη τὸ ψεῦδος and translate it as: “the father of the lie.” But the connection of pronoun αὐτοῦ with ὁ ψεύστης cannot be excluded. Such connection can be attested by *Codex Sinaiticus* the pronoun αὐτοῦ is connected with ψεύστης and must be translated as “the father of the liar” (his father):

Codex Sinaiticus

ומא דממלל דגנלשא מן דיגה ממלל
מתל דדגלא הו ואבוהי

Greek New Testament

ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ
ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ

In Syriac text the suffix in *ואבוהי* is in the masculine form while the noun “lie” (*גנלשא*) is the feminine. In this case the suffix is clearly related to the noun “liar” (*אגלש*). The connection of this pronoun with ὁ ψεύστης reveals the implicit presence of Cain. In this case the opposition between Cain (son of the devil) and Jesus (son of God) would be stressed. Jesus, like Abel in the haggada, is killed by his brothers who, like Cain, act under the control of the devil.

The verb *λαλεῖν* occurs in the Fourth Gospel 60 times⁸. In the majority of its occurrences (47 times) *λαλεῖν* describes the speech of Jesus. In the context of Jn 8:44 we note the frequent usage of this term.⁹ The *λαλεῖν* of Jn 8:44 is referred to the devil (Cain) who spe-

⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 19: “denn ein Lügner ist auch sein Vater.”

⁶ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p. 319.

⁷ M.-É. Boismard - A. Lamouille, *L'évangile de Jean*, pp. 232. 235.

⁸ Mt-26; Mk-21; Lk-31. See R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik*, p. 116.

⁹ In Jn 7-8 this word occurs 17 times: 7:13.17.18.26.46; 8:12.20.25.26.28.30.38.40.44.

aks lies (τὸ ψεῦδος λαλεῖν). It is contrasted in our passage with the speech of truth proclaimed by Jesus in 8:38.40 (τὴν ἀλήθειαν λαλεῖν – the same verb λαλεῖν) and 8:45.46 (τὴν ἀλήθειαν⁶ της'ερβ λέγειν).

Jesus speaks truth
(verb λαλεῖν)

8:38

ἄ ἐγὼ ἐώρακα παρὰ
τῷ πατ ρὶ λαλῶ

8:40

ἄνθρωπον ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν
ὑμῖν λελάληκά

Devil (Cain) speaks lie
(verb λαλεῖν)

8:44

ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος,
ἐκ τῶν ιδίῳν λαλεῖ

Jesus speaks truth
(verb λαλεῖν)

8:45

ἐγὼ δὲ ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν
λέγῶ

8:46

εἰ ἀλήθειαν λέγω διὰ τι
ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεu,ετε, μοι;

The term ψεῦδος occurs only once in the Fourth Gospel and twice in 1 Jn.¹⁰

The Gospel of John

8:44

ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν

1 Letter of John

2:21.

πάν ψεῦδος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ουνκ e;stin
ιδίῳν λαλεῖ

2:27

ἀλλ' ὡς τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς
περὶ πάντων καὶ ἀληθές ἐστιν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν
ψεῦδος

In 1 Jn 2:21 the lie is contrasted with truth (no lie comes from truth). In this context the liar (ὁ ψεύστης) is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn 2:22). 1 Jn 2:27 describes the anointing (τὸ χρίσμα) received by believers which is true and is not a lie (ἀληθές ἐστιν

¹⁰ It does not appear in the synoptic Gospels. See R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik*, p. 156. See H. Conzelmann, ψεῦδος, *TDNT*, vol. IX, pp. 594-603; H. Giesen, ψεῦδος, *EWNT*, vol. III, pp. 1191-1193.

καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος). In Jn 8:44 ψεῦδος is connected with the act of speaking. It can be referred to the lie of the serpent expressed in Gen 3:4-5 or the lie of Cain in Gen 4:9.

Gen 3:4-5 (the serpent)

You will not die for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Gen 4:9 (Cain)

Then the LORD said to Cain, „Where is your brother Abel?” He said, „I do not know; am I my brother’s ke eper?”

A more precise description of the lies of the serpent and of Cain is provided in the Targums.

The lie of the serpent

Targum Onkelos (Gen 3:4-5)¹¹

You will certainly not die. For it is revealed before the Lord that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like angels knowing between good and evil.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Gen 3:4-5)¹²

You shall not die. But every craftsman hates his fellow craftsman. For it is manifest before the Lord that on the day on which you eat of it you shall be like great angels, who are wise to know good from evil.

The lie of Cain

Targum Onkelos (Gen 4:9)¹⁴

And the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Gen 4:8-9)¹⁵

Cain spoke up and said to Abel, “I see that the world was created with mercy, but it is not governed according to the fruit of good deeds, and there is partiality in judgment... There is no judgment, there is no judge, there is no other world, there is no gift of good reward for the righteous, and no punishment for the wicked... The Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know. Am I, perhaps, my brother’s keeper?”

¹¹ M. Aberbach - B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos*, pp. 34-35.

Targum Neofiti (Gen 3:4-5)¹³

You certainly shall not die, because it is manifest and known before the Lord that on what day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like angels before the Lord knowing to distinguish between good and evil.

Targum Neofiti (Gen 4:8-9)¹⁶

Cain answered and said to Abel: I see that the world was not created by love and is not led according to the fruits of good works and that there is acceptance of person in judgment... Cain answered and said to Abel: There is no judgment and there is no judge and there is no other world; there is no giving of good reward to the just and there is no retribution from the wicked... And the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother? And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

The lies of Cain in Targums Pseudo-Jonathan and Neofiti are expressed not only during the meeting with God (MT) but also in his dialogue with Abel before the act of killing. The lies of Cain, "there is no judgment and there is no judge and there is no other world; there is no giving of good reward to the just and there is no retribution from the wicked [...]" can be placed on the same line as the lie of the serpent, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The lie of the devil is assimilated and interpreted by the words and acts of Cain. In both lies there is the will to replace the position of God and the desire to be higher than God. In Targumic traditions we note that before Cain spoke a lie to God, he had lied to himself and to his brother. This lie led him to the murderous act in which he placed himself in the position of God deciding about the life and death of his brother. A similar situation is observed in Jn 8:44 in a dialogue between brothers (Jesus and the Jews) about their true father. Jesus is speaking the truth which he has heard from his father (v. 40 τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα ἣν ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ). The

¹² M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, pp. 25-26.

¹³ A. Díez Macho, *Neophyti 1*, p. 502.

¹⁴ M. Aberbach, B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁵ M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁶ A. Díez Macho, *Neophyti 1*, pp. 506-507.

Jews are not able to hear the word of Jesus (v. 43 οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμὸν) because they do not believe him (v. 45 οὐ πιστεύετε μοι) and they act according to the words of their father (v. 38 ἃ ἠκούσατε παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ποιείτε). Like Cain they seek to kill Jesus (v. 37. 40 ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι) and at the end of the dialogue they take up stones in order to kill him (v. 59 ἦραν οὖν λίθους ἵνα βάλωσιν ἐπ' αὐτόν).

I. De la Potterie recognizes 3 aspects of the lie (yeu/doj) in Johannine literature:

a) the refusal of the truth brought by Jesus;

b) the attitude of the Jews who refuse to believe in Jesus and the opposition between the sons of the devil and the son of God (dualistic and eschatological aspect);

c) the satanic character because the devil is the liar *par excellence*.¹⁷

The form ἰδίῳν may be masculine or neuter and may be translated “own family”, “his own”. The expression ἐκ τῶν ἰδίῳν λαλεῖ underlines the speech out of one’s own family; out of his own. A parallel text can be found in Jn 12:49 where Jesus states: ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐξ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐκ ἐλάλησα, a parallel which suggests an opposition between devil (Cain) and Jesus. The expressions ἐκ τῶν ἰδίῳν ἀνδ ἐξ ἐμαυτοῦ used in an oppositional context may be regarded as equivalent.¹⁸

The term ψεύστης occurs only 10 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Johannine literature (twice in the Fourth Gospel and 5 times in the 1 Jn).¹⁹

¹⁷I. De la Potterie, *La Vérité dans saint Jean*, p. 908.

¹⁸ Compare also Mt 12:34 ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ περισσεύματος τῆς καρδίας τὸ στόμα λαλεῖ (out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks).

¹⁹ See R. MORGENTHALER, *Statistik*, p. 156; H. BALZ, yeu,sthj, *EWNT*, vol. III, pp. 1194-1195.

The Gospel of John

a. 8:44 – devil
(Cain)
ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν
καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ

b. 8:55
– the Jews,
κἄν εἴπω ὅτι οὐκ
οἶδα αὐτόν, ἔσομαι
ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης

1 Jn

a. 1:10 – God
ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκῃ
μεν, ψεύστην ποιούμεν αὐτόν

b. 2:4 – the person who
says that he knows God
but does not obey his
commandments
ὁ λέγων ὅτι Ἔγνωκα αὐτόν
καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ
τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν
τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν

c. 2:22 – the person who
denies that Jesus is the
Christ (antichrist)
τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ψεύστης εἰ μὴ ὁ
ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ
ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός;

d. 4:20 – the person who
says that he loves God
but hates his brother.
ἐὰν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι ἀγαπῶ τὸν
θεὸν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ
μισῶ, ψεύστης ἐστίν.

e. 5:10 – God
ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην
πεποίηκεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐ πᾶς
πίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν
ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ
τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

Other writings

a. Rom 3:4 – the man
μὴ γένοιτο· γινέσθω δὲ
ὁ θεὸς ἀληθής, πᾶς δὲ
ἄνθρωπος ψεύστης

b. 1 Tim 1:10
– the people.
πόρνοις ἀρσενοκοίταις
ἀνδραποδισταῖς ψεύσταις
ἐπιόρκοις, καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον
τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ
ἀντίκειται

c. Titus 1:12
– the Cretians.
εἶπέν τις ἐξ αὐτῶν ἴδιος
αὐτῶν προφήτης, Κρήτες
ἀεὶ ψεύσται, κακὰ θηρία,
γαστέρες ἀργαί.

The term ψεύστης (liar) describes a person whose attitude is against God. In 1 J 1:10; 5:10 this term is related to God in the case when people ignore his teaching and do not believe in His witness. In neither of its occurrences in the NT is ψεύστης identified with the devil. I think that the end of the verse ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ is better understood when one recognizes in it a relationship between the child and his father (Cain-devil).²⁰

In this perspective a certain symmetry (father – child) between the beginning and the end of the verse can be detected:

ὁμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστε, (Cain – devil).

ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ (Cain – devil).

In my opinion in v. 44 and its context, Cain and the devil stand in relation to the Jews. They form a kind of paradigm “devil-Cain-Jews”. The liar can be identified with Cain who acts according to the will of his father - the devil.

²⁰ Some commentators at the end of verse 44 stress the relation between the one who speaks lies and his father who is liar: M.-É. Boismard, A. Lamouille, *L'évangile de Jean*, p. 244: “Celui qui dit le mensonge parle de son propre fonds, parce que même son père est menteur.”; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p. 319: “his father, the devil, is also a liar.”