



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 1:24-34 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(John 1:24) Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

We learn in this verse that the priests and Levites who went to examine John the Baptist had been sent from the Pharisees, and they were probably Pharisees themselves. Because many were going to John from Jerusalem and Judea to be baptized by him, these priests and Levites went to examine John the Baptist, not to repent and be baptized by him. The Gospel of John does not repeat every event the other gospels report, but in Matthew 3:7-8, we learn what John the Baptist said to some of the Pharisees and Sadducees who did come to him for baptism: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance." John's baptism involved the personal commitment to repent, obey God, and do right. In Acts 23:8, we learn the primary differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three." Eventually, these two groups of religious leaders joined together as a brood of vipers to crucify Jesus Christ and oppose His apostles in the early Church. They certainly did not bear good fruit, and many of them died when Jerusalem fell to the Romans and the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

(John 1:25) They asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

The religious authorities always wanted to know why or by what authority others were doing what they were doing, especially if they were influencing large crowds without official authority from the leaders in Jerusalem. Even when Jesus obviously did the right thing, such as cleanse the Temple in Jerusalem, they asked Him to show them a sign and show them by what authority He had done so (John 2:18). Traditionally in Judaism, baptism was reserved for Gentile converts to Judaism who needed to be cleansed morally (the men who converted to Judaism were also circumcised).

Natural born Jews were not baptized: they offered sacrifices at the Temple for their sins (but Temple practices had also become corrupt). John baptized all who came to him to prepare them for the coming of the King of Israel, the Messiah. John’s call for people to be baptized included the command: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2). Whenever God the King is near, the kingdom of heaven is near, and the kingdom of heaven was coming with the Messiah Jesus.

(John 1:26) John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know.”

We learn the chronology of some events surrounding Jesus’ baptism and ministry from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. John baptized Jesus; then, the devil tempted Jesus forty days in the wilderness. After Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness, He returned to see John (see Matthew or Luke chapters 3 and 4). Jesus came back to see John on the very day that the priests and Levites were examining him, and John certainly was not going to present the Messiah to a brood of vipers for them to examine Him. John saw Jesus standing among them, but they did not know Jesus.

(John 1:27) “It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

After John confessed to those sent from Jerusalem that he was not the Messiah, nor Elijah or the prophet, John expressed his humility. He said that the one “coming after” him was greater than him (notice John did not

tell them directly “the Messiah”). To learn what John meant, they would need to know the Scriptures and have a repentant heart and a teachable spirit. Jesus once said to the Sadducees, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Compared to the One who was yet to publicly declare himself according to His timing, John the Baptist confessed that he was lower than a servant. One of the jobs a servant would perform for a king or rich person was taking off his sandals for him and washing his feet. Compared to the Messiah, John confessed that he was lower than one who would do the most menial tasks for others.

(John 1:28) These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John was baptizing believers in the Jordan River and was examined by his inquisitors in Bethany. One town named Bethany was about 2 miles east of Jerusalem, and the other Bethany was east of the Jordan River. The KJV calls the town Bethabara, which means “house or place of a ford,” where Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Interestingly, John was there baptizing people to prepare them to meet Jesus, who would lead those who believed in Him into the Kingdom of God. The interrogators of John were not repenting of their sins and requesting baptism, so John did not introduce them to Jesus; but later, priests, Levites, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians would try to entrap Jesus with their questions.

(John 1:29) The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him and *said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

In the first twenty-nine verses of the Gospel of John, John taught some of the most important facts about Jesus that he had learned from John the Baptist and from Jesus during His public and private ministry. In these verses, John revealed Jesus as “the Word was God,” “the True Light,” “the Father’s only Son,” “the Christ,” “God the only Son,” “the Lord,” “the Lamb of God,” and other truths. As a disciple of John the Baptist before he became a disciple of Jesus, John learned that Jesus is “the Lamb of God,” and throughout John’s Book of Revelation he called Jesus “the Lamb.” John the Baptist testified that as “the Lamb of God” Jesus would fulfill Scripture and die a sacrificial death for the sin of the world. The Holy Spirit

within John gave John this title or name for Jesus. Probably none of John the Baptist's disciples knew what John meant when the Holy Spirit inspired John's name for Jesus, but they could have discussed this privately. Those who became Jesus' disciples learned how Jesus would take away the sin of the world by His sacrificial death on the cross. The Lamb of God died, as a substitute for sinners, so God could be both merciful and just when forgiving sinners out of His heart of love.

(John 1:30) “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”

Jesus was and is before John in every way because Jesus is God. Jesus was the Word who was with God the Father in the beginning before Jesus was born and came into the world in human flesh (see John 1:1-14). John the Baptist was conceived in Elizabeth and born before Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus ranked ahead of John, because Jesus is God and the King of kings, the long-promised Messiah. Though Jesus was born after John, and though His public ministry began after John, John came to point people to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy. John came to prepare a way for the Lord, for the one who ranked ahead of him by His office as King.

(John 1:31) “I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.”

When John said he did not know Jesus was the Messiah, John made clear that Jesus and he had not planned John's baptizing as the forerunner to Jesus' coming. They had not plotted together to make Jesus the Messiah, as the kings and leaders of this world plan or scheme. John did not know Jesus was the Messiah and the Lamb of God until the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to him, though he no doubt knew the story of Mary's visit to his mother Elizabeth before he was born. John preached a message of repentance and baptized with water to prepare people for Jesus' coming and for Jesus' revelation of himself as Messiah, Savior, and Lord. During John's ministry of baptizing in the wilderness, Jesus came to be baptized and the Holy Spirit revealed to John a special aspect of Jesus' ministry as the Lamb of God.

(John 1:32) John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

All four Gospels insist that John was an important forerunner of the Messiah. John was indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of conception (see Luke 1:13-17). The Holy Spirit taught John and empowered his ministry; therefore, multitudes of people went to hear him preach, turned from their sins, and were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John recognized the Holy Spirit when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism, because he had always known the Holy Spirit as a divine Person living within him. Furthermore, John had been taught how to visibly recognize the prophesied Messiah: a dove would descend upon Him. John emphasized the fact that the Holy Spirit would remain on Jesus and empower Jesus' ministry. Though Jesus is the unique Son of God the Father, He is also the Son of Man indwelt by the Holy Spirit for ministry. Throughout Jesus' ministry, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit worked together to reveal the truth about God and save us from our sins.

(John 1:33) “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’

John the Baptist repeats the fact that he did not know Jesus in advance of the Holy Spirit revealing Jesus to him as the Messiah. Though John knew some truths about his prophesied birth to his mother, Elizabeth, and about Jesus' prophesied birth to his mother's relative, Mary, he had never met Jesus personally prior to Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit within John the Baptist told him how he would recognize the Messiah. God made John a promise, and then God did what He promised. The subsequent ministry of Jesus, including Jesus' death and His resurrection, confirmed what John preached about Jesus. John's preaching about Jesus inspired some of Jesus' disciples to follow Him as the Messiah, and John's ministry began to decrease as Jesus' ministry began to increase, finally leading to John's arrest and beheading by King Herod. After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus baptized believers with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and that also confirmed what John saw and said about Jesus.

(John 1:34) “I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

To testify to something in a court of law as a witness, you must either be an eyewitness or an earwitness to the event or situation. John the Baptist heard the word of the Lord. John the Baptist knew the work of the Holy Spirit inside him by experience. John the Baptist saw Jesus, and John saw God fulfill what He had promised him about how he would recognize the Messiah, the Son of God. As in any court of law with witnesses giving testimony, a verdict usually follows. And the next day, Jesus came and began calling His disciples, some of them were formerly John’s disciples, to teach them privately before He began His public ministry following John’s arrest by King Herod. Those who receive Jesus Christ believe in Jesus Christ because of many eyewitness testimonies in the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit in their own lives confirming the Word of God. The Bible and the Holy Spirit teach and testify that Jesus is the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord, the Lamb, and the Savior of the world.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. If someone asked you what Lamb of God meant, what might you say?
2. What did John say the Lamb of God would do?
3. How did John the Baptist know that Jesus was the Lamb of God?
4. In addition to Jesus being the Lamb of God, who else did John say Jesus is?
5. What are some of the ways Jesus, who is the Son of God and the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world?

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