



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 3:11-21 Commentary King James Version

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 3:11) Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

The “we” probably looked ahead and referred to Jesus and His disciples, who followed Jesus and who would testify about what Jesus taught after His death and resurrection. The “we” might also have referred to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and their testimony. “You people” might have referred to the Pharisees and other religious leaders in Jerusalem. Jesus, and later His disciples, were rejected by many of the religious leaders, who were

responsible for His arrest and crucifixion by the Romans. Jesus and His disciples could testify about Jesus changing water into wine and other actions that demonstrated His divine wisdom and power with absolute certainty. Jesus could testify with absolute certainty about what He had seen and heard from God the Father in heaven before He was born in human flesh. “Testify” and “testimony” are legal terms for saying something under oath that a person has witnessed personally with their eyes (or with any of their senses) instead of having heard about something second hand or through rumors or from other’s opinions. In other words, what they spoke with absolute certainty was of the quality that it could hold up as true evidence in a court of law.

(John 3:12) If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

Jesus was an eyewitness to heavenly things. He was and is the Word that was with God the Father from the beginning, so He could testify about everything that His Father and He had done from the beginning (or even before they began time and creation). But Jesus knew that Nicodemus and many others would not believe what He said about heaven, because they would not believe what He told people about the world in which they lived. Later, John indicates in his gospel that Nicodemus came to believe in Jesus.

(John 3:13) And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

No one has ever obeyed the law perfectly or has contemplated religious ideas perfectly and become qualified to go into heaven. No one has succeeded in going to heaven and bringing down true and trustworthy knowledge about heaven. The only One who has brought the true knowledge of heaven to us is Jesus, the Son of Man. Jesus used the title “Son of Man” for himself, a title He took from the Old Testament. Consider Daniel 7:13, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him” (KJV). Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man that Daniel saw. Some contemporary translations make this comparison less clear when they translate “Son of man” as “human being.” Jesus came into the world fully God and fully human. The title also expressed His humility, because at other times He indicated that He was the Son of God. He would not directly claim before unbelievers that He was the Son of God, but He would strongly imply the claim as the time neared for Him to be crucified with a charge of blasphemy against Him. In Matthew 16:16-17, Jesus fully accepted Simon Peter’s declaration: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus descended from heaven when He was born, and after His resurrection He ascended back into heaven (which proved that God the Father accepted His words and works as authentically

divine, trustworthy, and without sin). Unlike any other human being, as the Son of God Jesus both descended from heaven to earth and then ascended from earth to heaven (see Luke 1:30-35 & Luke 24:50-53).

(John 3:14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

One time, when the Israelites sinned against God in the wilderness, God sent poisonous serpents among them and many were bitten and died. God also provided a way for them to be forgiven for their sins and be healed from their bites so they would not die. According to the command of God, Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a pole and all who looked at the serpent lived (see Numbers 21:8-9). It may not have made sense to some of the Israelites, so some did not look up and they died. In a similar way, Jesus foretold His being lifted up upon a cross and dying and rising again so all who would look to Him in faith would be forgiven, saved from their sins, and inherit eternal life. Even today, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ does not make sense to some people, so they will not look to Him in order to be born again, filled with the Holy Spirit, and live forever with Him. However, whether some will believe or not, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life that God the Father has provided for people to look up to and trust in to be saved.

(John 3:15) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John's Gospel does not tell us whether Nicodemus understood all that Jesus told him that night, but he would remember the example of the serpent on the pole when he saw Jesus crucified. God the Father may have brought this to his remembrance, even as He revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (see Matthew 16:16-17). The fact that Nicodemus honored Jesus in His death indicates that he had come to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and he had received eternal life (eternal life includes a holy, loving, spiritual quality of life that can begin now in relationship with God in Jesus Christ as well as a blessed and happy life with God that will never end).

(John 3:16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

That night, Jesus told Nicodemus enough for him to believe in Him, to be born again, and to have eternal life. Jesus came to teach the truth, die, and rise again, but He did not explain everything He would do as Lord and Savior to Nicodemus that night. Because God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) loved the world, Jesus came to die in our place. He came as the sacrifice for our sins. When the time was right, God the Father fulfilled the Old Testament laws and prophecies through Jesus. He gave

His only begotten Son so everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish (suffer God's just judgment and continue existing apart from or separated from God forever) but receive eternal life (live in holy love with God forever). God will fulfill all His promises in Jesus Christ. If we want to enjoy eternal life, we must believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, and receive the Holy Spirit.

(John 3:17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

God's purpose in sending Jesus, His Son, was to save the world through faith in Jesus, the Messiah and Savior that God promised to send when He inspired the prophets of Old Testament times. Just as those bitten by the serpents in the wilderness could only be saved by looking at the serpent on the pole that God told Moses to create, so God provided Jesus as the way to be saved from sin and death. Jesus came to save and not condemn, but His solemn warnings to unbelievers and those who sought to murder Him may sound like condemnations, especially to unbelievers.

(John 3:18) He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

In this verse, Jesus once again claimed to be "the only Son of God." Jesus came and taught, and Jesus sent out

disciples to teach about Him and the meaning of His coming, so people could believe and not be condemned. If a criminal refuses to accept a pardon from his government and dies as a condemned criminal, the fault is not the government's fault, but the fault of the one who refused to be pardoned. God offers us a pardon for all our sins, if we will accept the conditions of His pardon and His conditions are not complicated or strenuous, so anyone can choose to accept or reject God's pardon. Some who heard the truth about Jesus (from His very own lips or from His disciples) refused to believe, and Jesus said they were "condemned already" (even prior to the coming Day of Judgment), because they refused to believe in Jesus, "in the name of the only Son of God." God the Father sent Jesus His Son so the world might be saved through Him. Perhaps this solemn truth influenced Nicodemus when he came to believe in Jesus. Even today, the followers of Jesus Christ seek to teach the truth about Him that many might believe, be saved, and not be condemned: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Romans 10:14).

(John 3:19) And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Some people have committed themselves to doing evil (we too often read or hear about them), to rejecting God and God's ways, to denying the existence of God. Jesus said that these people love the darkness because their deeds are evil (at one time most people wanted to hide their evil deeds by doing them in the dark). Today, in some contemporary cultures, some people do their evil deeds in the light and even post them through various media for many to see, but they are living in the spiritual darkness they prefer because their deeds are evil. Jesus is the light of the world, the truth of God for people to truly live by if they want true blessedness and happiness. The judgment is that some people reject Jesus and the light He gives because they prefer their godless thinking and their wicked ways of living.

(John 3:20) For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

Those who do evil are not neutral toward the light (or truth) or neutral toward Jesus. They do not simply ignore God and Jesus and the teachings of Jesus; rather, they hate the light of God, do not come to the light of God, and they hate the light and those who represent the truth of God. They often express their hatred by fighting against the light (the truth) of God and those who want to share the light (the truth) of God with others that they might be encouraged or come to believe in God the Father and His only Son. Those who did evil crucified Jesus, who did

expose some of their deeds (He cleansed the temple for example and defeated their arguments in discussion). Those who do evil today will persecute Christians wherever they have the opportunity.

(John 3:21) But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

One way to describe true Christians or true followers of Jesus Christ is with these words: “those who do what is true.” The followers of Jesus Christ go to Him for daily guidance and understanding of the Bible so they can do what is true in all situations throughout life. They want to live consistently with the teachings of the Word of God made flesh, Jesus, and the Word of God written, the Bible. Those walking in the light will see clearly when they and others do deeds that God has influenced and empowered them to do. Remember, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night; Jesus wanted Nicodemus to do what is right and true and come into the light, to come to Him in the light and not just at night. Nicodemus did so when he helped with the burial of Jesus in the light, and perhaps at other times before Jesus’ death and burial (see John 7:50-51).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What types of things could or would Jesus have seen that He could testify to having seen (give evidence to having seen) that He knew the religious leaders and probably many people would not receive?

2. Explain what Jesus meant when He said the Son of Man had descended from heaven?
3. Why do you think Jesus compared the serpent that Moses lifted up to the Son of Man being lifted up?
4. How can a person have eternal life? What does having eternal life mean to you?
5. Why do you think some people think Jesus Christ came to condemn the world rather than save the world?

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