



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 3:22-30 Commentary New International 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 3:22) After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.

After Jesus explained the essentials of the good news to Nicodemus, that one must be born again through believing the truth about Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus must be lifted up by dying a sacrificial death on the cross and by rising from the dead, Jesus left Jerusalem to see those in the country and small towns of Judea. Jesus showed concern for all people, not just city dwellers. He also needed some quiet times away from the

crowds to teach His disciples. In John 4:2, John explained that “it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized.” We also learn this detail from John’s Gospel: after Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, for an unspecified time Jesus and John the Baptist continued in ministry together, but probably in separate nearby locations, for immediately after John the Baptist pointed some of his disciples to Jesus, Jesus began to call His disciples from among them (see John 1:29-42). John the Baptist and Jesus’ disciples baptized so people would repent of their sins, receive forgiveness, and prepare to receive the Jesus the Messiah.

(John 3:23) Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized.

We do not know the exact locations of these two places, but they were probably located near the Jordan River, where people had become accustomed to going to see John the Baptist (see also John 3:26). John the Baptist’s public ministry of preparation and teaching continued until he was arrested. John had seen Jesus and had pointed people to follow Jesus, and he would continue to do so until God made clear that his work of preparation was done.

(John 3:24) (This was before John was put in prison.)

John’s Gospel makes clear that John the Baptist continued in ministry until he was thrown into prison; thus, his

public ministry was over. Jesus and John the Baptist worked together in Judea, probably not far from one another. Then, we learn in Mark 1:14, that after John the Baptist was arrested Jesus went to Galilee and began ministry there. With John's arrest, Jesus knew that their work in Judea had been completed.

(John 3:25) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.

Concerns about rites of purification and John's baptism of repentance continued because many Jews did not believe they needed baptism. They believed baptism was reserved only for those converting to Judaism. They also had their rites of purification, which they believed met all their needs along with their temple sacrifices (remember Jesus used their jars for purification when He changed water into wine: see John 2:6). Many Jews did not want to be treated as Gentiles who needed baptism to become Jews.

(John 3:26) They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

John the Baptist's disciples knew how to answer questions about purification, but their discussion with this unnamed Jew (they were all Jews) raised some other troubling questions for them. They did not mention Jesus by name,

but called Him, “the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified” (which reminds us that John the Baptist’s ministry was always one of preparing people to meet Jesus; therefore, he pointed his disciples to Jesus and bore witness that Jesus is the Lamb of God, see John 1:23, 35-37). John’s disciples were concerned that increasing numbers of people were going to see Jesus instead of John. Perhaps they assumed that John and Jesus would continue working together until the Messiah, Jesus, had fulfilled their political understanding of what the Messiah would do (the same understanding of most Jews at that time). John’s disciples would naturally be concerned that John’s ministry seemed to be on the decline, so what might this mean for them and their expectations if John’s ministry just faded away.

(John 3:27) To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.”

In answer, John the Baptist told his disciples a universal truth: everything and every person that they had received during their ministry together they had received from heaven. Using the word “heaven” was a devout and respectful way of saying “God.” God was involved in the life of every person who came to John and his disciples with sincere repentance asking to be baptized as preparation to receive the Messiah when He came. Likewise, everything and every person Jesus and His disciples received in their ministry, they received from Jesus’ Father in heaven. Later, in John 6:37, Jesus

declared: “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.” In his humility, John the Baptist gave God the glory for all he had accomplished as the Holy Spirit had worked within him. John also gave God the glory for all that God was accomplishing through Jesus; for John had seen the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Jesus (see John 1:33). John was not jealous of Jesus’ success, though his disciples might have been jealous for John. It is a universal truth that as created in the image of God, as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we show our love for God by using the gifts God has given us with all our strength in the power of the Holy Spirit while leaving the results with God. As followers of Jesus Christ, we can be happier and more at peace if we do not compare the results of our work with the results of others and then think we are better or lesser than others.

(John 3:28) You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’

John the Baptist did not teach them a new truth but reminded his disciples of what he had taught them. They had heard him say that he was not the Messiah. He reminded them that he had been sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare the way for His coming. John did not aspire to work as an equal with Jesus, for John had said in John 1:27, “the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” John the Baptist rejoiced that he had been able to serve God in the power of

the Holy Spirit, for he knew from experience what the angel told his father in Luke 1:15, “for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

(John 3:29) The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

From their knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, John the Baptist and his disciples knew that the LORD considered His relationship with Israel as close and personal as a bridegroom and bride, as close as a husband and wife. Spiritually, the LORD and Israel became one. In Jeremiah 2:2, the LORD told the prophet, “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.” Then, in Jeremiah 2:32, the LORD declared His judgment against the Jews, “Can a girl forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.” In the days of Jesus, the Jews (certainly the religious leaders) did not act as the bride of the LORD God.

In the New Testament, the Church is called the bride of Christ. All who believe in and receive Jesus as the Son of

God and their Lord and Savior become part of the bride of Christ, the true Church. After the church in Corinth began falling away from the Lord Jesus into sin, the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” In Revelation 22:17, we learn how the Holy Spirit working through the Church (the Bride of Christ) calls people to faith in Jesus: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.” John the Baptist said that he was happy to be the friend of Jesus, the bridegroom. John was happy to hear everything that Jesus taught. He was happy when he learned what Jesus was doing. He wanted his disciples to be happy when they listened to Jesus or heard about His work. Just as a person brightens when they hear the voice of the one they love, John brightened every time he heard the voice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. John’s joy was fulfilled in hearing and seeing Jesus, in learning about all Jesus was doing, and knowing that increasing numbers of people were being given to Jesus by His Father. John rejoiced knowing he fulfilled God’s purpose for him whenever he pointed people to Jesus.

(John 3:30) He must become greater; I must become less.”

The religious leaders in Jerusalem got this truth backwards. For them, they felt they must increase in authority, power, and wealth while God, Jesus, and the Scriptures must decrease in authority and influence. Many around the world today feel this same way. Like Moses, John the Baptist was a model of humility. For example, after the Israelites rebelled against the LORD in the wilderness, the LORD told Moses in Deuteronomy 9:14, “Let me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they.” Instead of agreeing to this fabulous offer, in deep humility Moses fasted and prayed forty days to save them from destruction, telling the Israelites in Deuteronomy 9:26, “I prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Lord GOD, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’” In the presence of his disciples, John the Baptist expressed concern for the glory of Jesus just as Moses expressed concern for the glory of God. In Deuteronomy 9:28-29, Moses said he prayed and reasoned with the LORD, because “otherwise the land from which you have brought us might say, ‘Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness.’ For they are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.”

John the Baptist wanted all his disciples to go to Jesus, as their Rabbi (Teacher), Messiah, Son of God, and Lamb of God, for he knew that he fulfilled God's purpose when he pointed people to Jesus. Like all those who came to him, John told his disciples that they must go to the One he pointed out to them. John pointed all those who came to him for baptism to Jesus; therefore, Jesus' numbers of followers increased while his decreased. At some point, John knew he would totally "decrease" on the earth, and he wanted his disciples to go to Jesus rather than be scattered in disillusionment.

It is the height of arrogance for anyone to use God, Jesus, and their teaching of the Bible to make themselves increase in reputation or authority or power or wealth or in other ways at the expense of teaching the truth revealed in the Bible. As Paul pointed out to the Corinthian Christians, some will come before the Church and the world to make themselves look great and smart by decreasing the glory and honor that only God, Jesus, and the Bible truthfully and rightfully deserve.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In the early stages of Jesus' ministry, why might it have been important for Him to have His disciples baptizing in Judea somewhere near John the Baptist and his ministry in Judea?

2. Why do you think John the Baptist's disciples expressed concern that increasing numbers, indeed "all," they said, were going to Jesus?
3. What does "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven" mean to you?
4. Why was John's joy fulfilled?
5. How did John the Baptist express his humility to his disciples, and what effect might that have had on them?

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