



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 8:21-30 Commentary New Revised Standard 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 8:21) Again he said to them, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come."

Jesus taught at various times and places in Jerusalem between the time of the Festival of Booths and the time of the Festival of Dedication (see John 10:22). John reported on some of these opportunities without always giving specifics. The Jews did not completely understand Jesus and neither did His disciples until after He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Jesus had no intention of telling the religious leaders all the details about His

coming crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. After Jesus rose from the dead, they did search for Him and His body—not because they believed in Him—they wanted to find evidence that would discredit the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. They did not find any evidence that would discredit His resurrection, but those who still refused to believe in Him died in their sin.

Because they refused to believe in Jesus when given the opportunity, they would die in their sins—unforgiven by God. They could only go where Jesus was going if they followed Him, and they refused to follow Jesus. They could not go where Jesus was going without believing in and following Him there.

(John 8:22) Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?”

When Jesus taught these truths about himself earlier, the authorities asked themselves if Jesus intended “to go to the Dispersion” (see John 7:35). Now, they asked if Jesus was going to commit suicide. The Jews believed that a person who committed suicide would go to the deepest part of hell. Their thoughts about Jesus revealed their total rejection of Jesus and His teaching. Though they did not think so, these unbelieving leaders could also go to hell; perhaps even to the deepest part of hell (if there is such a place) for plotting the murder of Jesus. On their current path, they could not go to heaven where Jesus was going, because they did not believe in or receive Jesus as their

Lord and Savior but totally rejected Him, the Messiah and Son of God.

(John 8:23) He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.

The Jews were humans, from below. From two earthly parents, they were born humans and would always be humans. Jesus came from above, from heaven, from His heavenly Father. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin Mary (see Matthew 1:16, Luke 1:31-38). Jesus is the Father’s only begotten Son, full of grace and truth (John 3:16 & 1:14). By birth, Jesus is fully human and fully divine. The first part of Jesus’ reply related to their and His location and their and His Jewish parents. The second part of His reply related to the moral and spiritual condition of those who refused to believe in Him. They were immoral. They were sinners. They were not forgiven and were not cleansed from their sin. They were committed to living by “this” world’s selfish, self-centered standards. Jesus had no part in this world’s immoral behavior. He followed God’s standards, which we find revealed in the Scriptures, and especially revealed by Jesus life, death, and resurrection as recorded in the Scriptures. Our challenge as followers of Jesus Christ is to live by God’s standards as revealed in the Bible with the guidance, help, and power of the Holy Spirit.

(John 8:24) I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.”

Jesus told them they would die in their sins because He knew they would never repent of their sins, believe in Him as Messiah and Son of God, and accept Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus knew they would never repent of their sins and turn to Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. When Jesus prayed from the cross, “Father forgive them,” He prayed for those who did not know who He was and so they mocked and crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Jesus prayed they would repent of their sins and believe in Him and receive the gift of eternal life. Only by believing in Jesus and who Jesus revealed himself to be can we receive forgiveness, cleansing from sin, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, eternal life, and go to be with Him in heaven. In this verse Jesus clearly sets out what someone must believe and do to be saved.

The Greek New Testament records what Jesus said of himself and what people must believe about Him, and Jesus said of himself, “I AM.” He used the divine name for himself here and in other places in the Gospel of John. The Greek “I AM” in Jesus’ words are variously translated in English: “I am He,” “I am the One” or “I am Who I am.” The King James Version and the New American Standard Bible rightfully indicate that “He” has been added in the English translation (see NRSV footnote on this verse, which notes “I AM” is original Greek). In Exodus 3:14, we

read, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM” has sent me to you.’” The Father sent Jesus, “I AM,” into the world, and Jesus is greater than Moses. Learn and remember John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NASB).

**(John 8:25) They said to him, “Who are you?”
Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all?”**

After just telling them who He is, they asked Him, “Who are you?” Jesus had just told them who He was, He is, “I AM,” which was beyond their comprehension. Translated “I am He” or “I am the One” at the very least should have meant to them that He was the Messiah, the One they expected. Jesus saw no benefit to explaining any more about His use of the divine name “I am, Who I am,” or “I AM,” to them. After all the signs Jesus had given that He was from God, and after all He had previously told them, Jesus knew that His speaking to them made no difference in leading them to believe Him—so He asked them why He should speak to them at all.

(John 8:26) I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”

In Matthew 23:13-19, Jesus spoke about the “woes” or “sorrows” that would come upon the scribes and Pharisees

because of their hypocritical behavior. Jesus did not come to condemn people, but as John the Baptist had done, Jesus condemned sinful behavior and pointed out the sins of the self-righteous, which hopefully would move them to repent, turn back to God, believe in Him, and live right. Because of John the Baptist's and Jesus' preaching about sin and repentance, many did repent, believe, and were baptized. Some Pharisees did eventually repent and believe, as did Nicodemus. Sometimes Jesus told people exactly what they needed to stop doing so they could turn to God and believe in Him. Jesus is the Truth and His Father is True (also the Truth). Jesus told the truth about the true God. The total being of God is true and the truth. The Father and Jesus are unlike human beings who have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:21-26). Jesus declared what He heard from His Father, and both the Father and the Son agreed about the sins of people and what people needed to do to receive their forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.

(John 8:27) They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father.

At that time, Jesus did not fully explain truths they would only twist and misuse to attack Him further and more viciously. Jesus spoke indirectly to them; yet, if their hearts had been open to God and to living according to the truth, they would have understood Jesus and believed. When His hour came, we see something of the cruelty they would have inflicted on Jesus sooner if He had given them

the opportunity. Because we know the rest of Jesus' life and teachings, we know that Jesus was speaking about His heavenly Father. Jesus interpreted parables and explained His teachings to His disciples who believed in Him, followed Him, and who would teach His parables and explanations to those they led to faith in Him. After Jesus went away, back to His Father, where the scribes and Pharisees could not find Him, His disciples explained and preached directly what Jesus said truthfully and directly about himself and His good news mission in the world. Some truths are only received and fully understood by believers in Jesus and not before they believe in Him. Some truths are understood only during the process of followers following Jesus in a variety of situations.

(John 8:28) So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me."

Jesus spoke to them using the messianic title "Son of Man," which would partially answer their question, "Who are you?" He openly declared that He was the Messiah they expected, but not as they expected. He again used the divine title, "I AM," about himself, "I am He." Jesus spoke no more and no less to unbelieving hypocrites than His Father told Him to teach them. Jesus was not just sharing some ideas of His own; He was sharing truths from His Father suited to the situation. They would only realize the truth about who Jesus is after they had "lifted up the Son

of Man,” the Messiah. Some would believe in Jesus as the Messiah and God’s Son only after they had lifted Him up on a cross to kill Him. During Jesus’ crucifixion and death, Jesus and the Father gave many signs that He was “the Son of God”—even the Roman centurion believed Jesus is God’s Son by the way Jesus died (see Matthew 27:50-54). Some would not believe in Jesus until after He had been lifted up to heaven, from where He sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. On that day, as Peter preached, they were cut to the heart for their sin of crucifying the Messiah and they cried out for knowledge on how to be saved (see especially Acts 2:36-41).

(John 8:29) And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.”

The Jews thought of their temple as the dwelling place of God, where they could go to worship and be with God. Within forty years, the temple was destroyed. Jesus said the Father was with Him wherever He went, and the Father never left Him. Jesus’ presence with believers replaced the temple as the place to meet God (the Father and the Son). Jesus is the Son of God, the Word of God, who believers can always be with because He is always with them wherever they live. Jesus also claimed to be perfect for He said He always did what was pleasing to God the Father. The truths Jesus taught, the people He healed, the signs and works He did, the people He called as His disciples, what He said about God the Father and

himself were always pleasing to God. No human being can say that they have always done what was pleasing to God. As the only begotten Son of God, Jesus honestly and truthfully said that He always pleased God.

(John 8:30) As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

The Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus, and lived within Jesus, and the Father was always with Jesus. Jesus was never alone or apart from the Father or the Holy Spirit; therefore, working together they influenced people. Some people's minds and hearts were opened to receive Jesus' words as the Word of God up to the level of their understanding at that time and they believed in Him. John said, "many believed in Him." Obviously, many were not offended by Jesus' words and knew His signs substantiated what He taught about being sent by God. We do not know how many continued to believe in Him after Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified, but those the Father gave to Him remained true to Him. Remember, in John 6:38-40, Jesus promised, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day." Even today, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwell with and within every believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers can be with God wherever they are—to love, glorify, worship, adore, and serve God the Father and God the Son in the loving power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Where was Jesus going, to whom was He going, and when was He going?
2. Why would some of Jesus' listeners look for Him, not find Him, and die in their sin?
3. What does Jesus declare to the world?
4. In what way did Jesus use the divine name for himself?
5. How did Jesus tell His listeners that He was the Messiah, and when did He say some of them would realize who He was?

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