



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 8:39-47 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 8:39) They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus *said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham.

Many of the Jews, especially the leaders who wanted to kill Jesus, thought they were blessed and favored above all others in the world because they were the physical descendants (children) of Abraham. The Jews were the physical descendants of Abraham, but that did not make them better than anyone else in the world. So, Jesus warned them that though they were physically related to Abraham, they were not spiritually Abraham's children; for if they were, they would have welcomed Him as a messenger sent from God, even as Abraham welcomed the messengers of the LORD when they came to see him (see Genesis 18). Abraham displayed faith in God and obeyed the LORD; those who claimed Abraham is their father did neither. Those who rejected Jesus certainly were not the spiritual descendants of Abraham, for they did not believe and act like Abraham. God chose Abraham to eventually be the ancestor (or father) of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was both a physical and spiritual descendant of Abraham because He did what Abraham did when He

obeyed God and faithfully spoke the words of God as a true spiritual descendant (or child) of Abraham.

(John 8:40) “But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.

Jesus emphasized again that He knew they were trying to kill Him, which did not prick their conscience and lead them to repentance, for they eventually crucified Jesus. They would continue to try to kill Jesus until they succeeded when Jesus’ hour came. Jesus emphasized that He told them the truth that He had heard directly from God, His Father. The true Old Testament prophets spoke the truths they heard from the LORD, and they suffered the consequences of telling the truth. The true prophets of God were often beaten and killed by those who had turned away from the LORD (certainly, those who killed the prophets were not Abraham’s spiritual descendants). Jesus, the Son of God, came and spoke the truth from the LORD, and as He foretold in His parables, they would kill Him as they had killed the prophets who came before Him (see Mark 12:1-12). As in the past, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day would have also killed God’s prophets; they killed the Son of God, and they persecuted and killed some of Jesus’ followers—Abraham would never have done such a thing (see Matthew 23:29-39).

(John 8:41) “You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”

Many of the Jews took great pride in themselves as the true children of God, and they called God their Father. In Isaiah 64:8, with deep sorrow and humility, when Isaiah interceded in prayer for those the LORD punished for their iniquities with the destruction of Jerusalem and their temple, he prayed, “Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Most Jews considered it a privilege instead of a responsibility that God was their Father; therefore, the prophet Isaiah called them to repent for having turned from God the Father. The Jewish leaders told Jesus that they were both God’s children

and Abraham's children, but Jesus said they did not think or act like God the Father or Abraham. Saying that their fathers had killed the prophets, Jesus made clear to them that what they were doing and what they intended when they sought to kill Him was what their true father did. In 1 Kings 19:10 and 14, Elijah twice lamented when he prayed: "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." Throughout their history, the true spiritual descendants of Abraham and God would never have rejected the prophets sent by God. They would have welcomed Elijah. They would have rejoiced to see Jesus' day rather than want to kill Jesus, God's Messiah. The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day claimed to have God as their father; however, they did not act as though God were their father.

(John 8:42) Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

As He talked with them, Jesus declared that God could not be their father because they did not love His Son. If God were their father, they would have known God and would have seen God's resemblance in what Jesus did and how He taught the lost sheep of Israel with compassion—they would have loved Jesus and all He said and did. They would have seen the kindness, love, and mercy of God in Jesus. They would have recognized Jesus' actions as signs from God that authenticated Jesus as sent from God when Jesus met the real needs of people. Instead, they kept asking Jesus for a sign. In Matthew 16:4, Jesus declared, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. Then he left them and went away." If God were their spiritual father, they would have recognized that Jesus taught the truth, the truth of the Scriptures, and also the truth about what He knew was in their hearts when He revealed to them their true spiritual condition. They would have heeded Jesus' warning words and have repented of their sins. Jesus insisted that He was not simply teaching His own ideas. He was teaching and doing what God the Father had sent Him to do, and He was calling people to humble

themselves and repent. Like the true prophets of God, He told them how God saw them.

(John 8:43) “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.

Jesus’ word is true, but the unbelieving Jews could not understand His teaching because they would not accept what Jesus told them about himself. If they had accepted Jesus as sent from God because of Jesus’ signs, then they could have accepted His words and understood what He taught. Because God was not their father, they would not do this. Jesus was like the true prophets of the Old Testament, but Jesus was and is more than a prophet. Truly, Jesus was and is God’s promised Messiah and God’s only Son. God the Father sent Jesus into the world, and Jesus spoke the truth of God and acted according to the truth of God. In this verse, Jesus stated a universal truth: because of their spiritual nature, some cannot accept Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus’ words as the true word of God; neither can they understand what Jesus taught about the true God, sin, repentance, righteousness, love, mercy, forgiveness, and eternal life.

(John 8:44) “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

In speaking to these diabolical religious leaders, Jesus told them about their true spiritual father. Their spiritual father was the devil. Throughout history, beginning at least with the killing of Abel by Cain, the spiritual father of some people has been and is the devil. We know today that some people openly claim to follow the devil and the devil’s desires; such people cannot understand Jesus or Christians; instead, they persecute Christians in various ways and do other evil deeds. As a liar, the devil murdered Adam and Eve and the whole human race when the devil lied to Eve. Though Adam and Eve did not die physically immediately after they believed the devil’s lie and sinned, they began to experience spiritual and physical death immediately and finally died physically in this fallen world. Until Jesus

Christ comes again, everyone will eventually die physically. There is no truth in the devil, and he will twist any truth into a lie to achieve his purposes. What is within the devil comes forth from the devil, and the same is true for those whose spiritual father is the devil. They bring forth the evil spiritual values of their father, who was a liar and murderer from the beginning.

(John 8:45) “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.

In thought, word, and deed, Jesus always told the truth and acted according to the truth. Jesus always told the truth to those who were or would become the children of God, to those who would hear and believe and receive Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus also always told the truth to those who would never believe in Him, to those who would persecute and try to kill His followers, as they eventually killed Jesus when His hour came in accordance with the Scriptures. But this does not mean that Jesus always told unbelievers and those whose father was the devil truths they did not need to hear and would only ridicule. Christians do not tell all the truths they know; for Jesus warned His followers in Matthew 7:6, “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.” In calling unbelievers to repentance and faith, Jesus taught what people needed to learn without desecrating the Word of God or putting God to the test to save Him from trouble—His followers can do as Jesus did.

(John 8:46) “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?

As their discussion continued, Jesus asked them a question that few would dare to ask anyone. We all know, if we are in our right minds, that we have not always thought and acted perfectly or morally right—we have sinned. If we are not aware of the fact that we are not perfect, some of those who know us well can tell us that we have not always been right and morally perfect. The religious leaders who wanted to kill Jesus knew in their inner being this truth about themselves, a truth they tried to ignore as they hardened their conscience—they knew they had sinned against God. As they

pursued their father's desires, they did not recognize that increasingly they were not in a right mind. Because their father was the devil, they did not consider killing Jesus and persecuting His followers committing a sin. They no longer knew right from wrong, even though they knew intellectually the Scriptures and the Law of God (which they applied to others to abuse and control them). They no longer recognized when they were doing evil. They were just doing what their spiritual father did. Jesus asked them if there was any law of God that He had broken, knowing that He had never broken a law of God. Jesus always acted in love for God and neighbor. Jesus demonstrated the perfect love of God in everything He said and did. Even at Jesus' trial, all the evidence that the authorities could bring forward was from false witnesses who told lies about Him—witnesses inspired by their true father, the devil. Jesus knew the answer to and the consequences of His question. He wanted them to look at Him and within themselves. The Law of Love and His life and teachings were the measure they should use to measure themselves and the way they spoke and acted toward Jesus and others. Did they speak and act in perfect love as Jesus did? His life and words were the epitome and standard of love, truth, and righteousness. If they would see the truth in and about Jesus, they might see themselves as God saw them and repent of their sins and turn to God and to Jesus for salvation—but they would not.

(John 8:47) “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Jesus concluded His question with the right answer. They, these religious leaders who wanted to kill Him, were not from God. Yes, they were very religious, but their daily life was inspired by the devil, not the true God. Though they were of the highest rank as religious leaders in Jerusalem, they would not listen to Jesus' words because they were not from God. They never did the works of God in relation to others, they never loved God or their neighbor; they always used God's law and others to achieve their self-centered, godless, purposes. They tried to kill or silence those who interfered with their personal goals. On the other hand, there were some religious leaders, such as Nicodemus, and others in the crowd who also heard Jesus teach. They were from God and they understood and believed

in Jesus. God was their true Father; therefore, when they heard the words of Jesus, they heard them as the words of God. The same is true today. Christians teach and share the words of God, the words of Jesus; those from God will hear them as the words of God. After hearing the words of God, if they are not Christians, they will repent of their sin and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. If they are Christians, they will read the Bible and the words of Jesus as the words of God; then, they will pray and make the effort to obey Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. Unhappily, in every group of people there will be some who will not hear the words of God because they are not from God—such knowledge requires discernment, and too many people are committed to following a spiritual father who is not God. They refuse to believe God the Father or Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. They prefer other ideas and thereby fulfill the desires of the devil.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What do the true children of Abraham do?
2. How did Jesus describe himself as a man?
3. Who did the religious leaders say was their father?
4. Why did Jesus say they were not their father? Who did Jesus say was their father, and how did Jesus describe their father?
5. Who hears and who does not hear the words of God?

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