



# International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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## **John 12:20-26 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 12:20) Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.**

The previous verse ended with the Pharisees concluding and prophesying about Jesus, "Look, the world has gone after him!" Now, in addition to Jesus' Jewish followers on Palm Sunday, other nationalities (Gentiles) who went to worship during Passover began to get excited about Jesus. What the Pharisees recognized about Jesus' popularity among more people than just the Jews began to take place even before Jesus was glorified.

The Court of the Gentiles in the Temple was reserved for those who were not Jews to worship God. Gentiles who had turned from (or were turning from) paganism to learn more about the Law of God or worship the true God would do so in the Court of the Gentiles, where some rabbis (if they chose) could also teach them. Jesus cleansed the Court of the Gentiles of corrupt business practices related to the sale of sacrifices and money changing by driving out the money changers and the overpriced sacrificial animals. If the Court of the Gentiles remained cleansed, Gentiles could truly worship God and learn more about God as the Father intended. Jesus

probably cleansed the temple at the beginning of His ministry and then again before the end of His ministry because the priests had returned to their corrupt religious and business practices. The chief priests and the Pharisees knew that letting Jesus live involved financial considerations. Sincere and faithful Jews and Gentiles knew that the true purpose of the Court of the Gentiles had become corrupted and those wanting to sacrifice at the temple were being cheated by their religious leaders. No wonder many Jews and Gentiles rejoiced when they learned about Jesus as the Messiah and His coming to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Most Gentiles in the known world spoke Greek because Greek was the universal language of the time, which promoted trade among people of from different nations. Usually, only Jews knew the Hebrew or Aramaic languages. The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, so the Good News of Jesus could be learned by the greatest number of people around the known world. Indeed, now translated into many languages, the Bible can now be read by millions in their own language and the whole world continues to go after Jesus.

**(John 12:21) They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”**

John specifically mentioned that some Greeks who went to the festival wanted to see Jesus. John does not tell us what day of the week these Greeks went to see Philip. They may have sought out Philip because Philip is a Greek name. Alexander the Great’s father was named Philip. Philip was a Galilean from Bethsaida (along with Andrew and Simon Peter), so he may have seemed more approachable as they saw Jesus surrounded by mostly Jewish seekers. They respectfully asked to see Jesus, perhaps to learn more about His teachings rather than to only be able to tell others when they returned home that they had seen Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

**(John 12:22) Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.**

Andrew was the first disciple Jesus called and he was the brother of Peter. Andrew was the first disciple to proclaim Jesus was the Messiah. Andrew is

also a Greek name. These Greeks may have thought that Philip and Andrew would be more open than some of the other disciples to speaking with Greeks and Gentiles. Philip and Andrew may have been more fluent in Greek than the other disciples. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, so he had seen Gentiles coming to John, repenting, and being baptized by him. Philip and Andrew knew that Jesus spoke openly to Jews and Gentiles (even Samaritans), so they went to Jesus believing Jesus would want to speak to these Greeks who sought to see Him.

**(John 12:23) Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**

John does not tell us whether Philip and Andrew went alone to talk to Jesus or if they took the Greeks with them to make their request known to Jesus. We do not know if Jesus saw them. We do not know if Jesus spoke the words about His coming glorification to these Greeks and to Philip and Andrew. Believers and unbelievers usually have some questions that the Bible does not answer. John only shared the most important points of what was probably a longer discussion. In reading these verses, we know some of what Jesus meant because we know “the rest of the story.” Jesus’ public ministry was coming to an end, and He had prepared His disciples to take over His ministry after He was glorified. After He was glorified, it would be their responsibility to see Jews and Gentiles and tell them about Jesus. They would need to tell others about Him in ways that would lead Jews and Gentiles “to see” Him (not with physical but with spiritual eyes), believe Him, and receive Him as their Lord and Savior. The word “hour” meant “time” in this verse. It was time for “the Son of Man” (the accepted title for the long-expected Messiah) to be glorified or honored rather than remain a poor itinerant carpenter turned preacher. God glorified Jesus when He was crucified, raised from the dead, and returned to the Father in heaven.

**(John 12:24) Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

To further explain what He meant, Jesus compared His glorification to a grain of wheat falling to the earth (after being sown by a farmer), dying, being covered by the soil, and then rising up and producing enough grain to be harvested. The Father had sent Jesus into the world. Jesus would die. Jesus would be buried in a tomb. Jesus would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. By the risen Jesus working in and through His disciples many more people would follow Him, be discipled (taught) by His disciples, and become disciples as well. John does not tell us how much Jesus further explained His words to His listeners at that time. Readers of the Gospel of John for the first time learn what Jesus meant as they read the subsequent chapters, just as His disciples learned more of what He meant after He was glorified. Just as the fruit of the grain is like the grain from which it came, Jesus' first disciples would become apostles and become like Him in their teaching the truth, in working miracles as signs, in their suffering and martyrdom, in their loving others as Jesus did, and in other ways. Even today, Jesus' disciples increasingly become more like Jesus as they learn the truth of the Bible and learn more about Jesus as the Holy Spirit works within them. As the Bible teaches, Jesus gives believers in Him a variety of gifts and talents, and He expects them to use their God-given gifts as He intends in order to help others believe in Him and remain loyal to Him.

**(John 12:25) Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**

Remember: The Father sent His Son into “this world” to save “the world.” In John 3:17, Jesus taught, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” To save “the world” and themselves, believers in Jesus must be willing to lose their life or turn away from a sinful way of life in “this world.” They need to turn away from the sinful ways of “this world,” away from the love of money, and away from the temporary pleasures God's law forbids. If they love a “this world way of life,” they will lose their life in “the world” and in “the world to come.” Those who come to hate a “this world” way of life and want to turn from it, and those who hate living in the very midst of “this world” of dedicated unbelievers, can turn to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world and themselves—that they and the world

might be saved by Him. Only Jesus can free someone from slavery to sin, the devil, and death. Speaking about their faith in Jesus, those who lived in the Samaritan town that Jesus visited told the woman Jesus met at the well, “we know that this is truly the Savior of the world” (see John 4:1-43). To keep our lives for eternal life, we must love our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ enough to live and do as He showed and taught.

**(John 12:26) Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”**

If the Greeks were present and hearing Jesus’ words, they would have learned with Philip and Andrew that believers must do more than just “see Jesus” or want to “see Jesus,” as someone might want “to see” Simon the Magician (see Acts 8:9-24). Some go to Church every week just “to see” their friends, or to present their desires and wants before the Lord Jesus in prayer. Jesus’ words show what Jesus requires of true believers in Him, and true believers in Jesus want to do what He asks. In this verse, Jesus Christ stated three responsibilities that He expected His disciples to fulfill.

First, a true believer in Jesus will love Jesus and want to serve Jesus because they love Jesus, even if serving Jesus will cost them their lives, their friends, and the sinful pleasures of this world. A true believer will want to read the Bible (if they have one or can borrow one) and pray to learn how they can love and serve Jesus more effectively. They will ask the Holy Spirit to lead them and empower them to do what Jesus wants them to do specifically. They will want to serve Jesus in Jesus’ way of serving. Second, a true believer will want to follow Jesus. Jesus obeyed His Father and lived totally devoted to His Father and to doing His Father’s will. The Father and the Son loved each other, and they loved the children of God that Jesus came to serve. Believers in Jesus want to represent Jesus and Jesus’ way by their words and example because they love God and others as Jesus loves them and others. They want to know the will of Jesus and obey the Law of love as revealed in the Bible so they can follow Jesus in every way. Third, they want to be with Jesus. They follow Jesus believing that if they follow Him, then they will be with Him wherever He goes forever.

When believers in Jesus serve and follow Jesus as described in the Bible, they can look forward to being honored by God. Think of the many honors “this world” offers to those who achieve some measure of success in different endeavors “this world” finds acceptable or worth honoring. Some seek “this world’s” puny honors to the exclusion of faith in and obedience to the God of the Bible: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Because they love “this world” and “this worldly” honors, they have lost all that is important in the world and the world beyond. They do not want to be with Jesus in the world or in the world to come. They know His way of life is inconsistent with their way of life. Yet, there can be no greater honor than the honor that God, our Creator, our Sustainer, and our Redeemer can give. Jesus has promised every believer, no matter what their past life in “this world,” that if they serve Him, then the Creator God of the universe will honor them. Those who love, follow, and serve Jesus will inherit eternal life and receive everlasting honor from His Father and our Father. Imagine! Having been a sinner, receiving honor from God as a servant of Jesus!

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Who came to the Passover Festival and asked to see Jesus? Who did they ask? Who went to ask Jesus?
2. What did Jesus say when He learned of their request? What do you think He meant?
3. What did Jesus say happens to a grain of wheat when it dies? What do you think He meant?
4. What must a servant of Jesus do? What did Jesus say was the result?
5. What did Jesus promise those who served Him? What does this mean to you?

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