



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 18:33-40 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 18:33) Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Pilate went back into his headquarters and brought Jesus in for His trial, where it would be quieter to question Jesus and hear His answers. During Jesus' trial, Pilate would hear something of the gospel of Jesus Christ from Jesus himself. When Jesus testified before Pilate, He gave Pilate the opportunity to hear the truth and learn more about Him as King and Savior, if he chose. Since John accompanied Jesus to His trial before the religious leaders and comforted Jesus' mother at His crucifixion, most likely he accompanied Jesus to His trial before Pilate, where he could testify on behalf of Jesus if he were called, and where he heard Pilate's questions and Jesus' answers for later recording in his gospel as the Holy Spirit enabled him. The Holy Spirit would also have aided John's memory when it was time for him to write his gospel. Pilate's questions related to whether Jesus was the long-expected Messiah or King of the Jews. If Jesus had answered “Yes” directly, He could not have talked more about the truth with Pilate and His answer would have had political implications for Pilate

because the Jews expected the Messiah to free them from oppressive Roman rule. By saying “Yes” indirectly, Jesus could explain to Pilate the type of King that He was and is, a King who was no direct threat to Roman rule; and thus, relieve Pilate of the duty of punishing Him. However, God planned for Jesus to die on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and the religious leaders planned to pressure Pilate into crucifying Jesus no matter what Pilate thought about their case against Jesus.

(John 18:34) Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”

Jesus talked reasonably to Pilate, and convinced Pilate that He was not an irrational fanatic. Jesus showed respect for Pilate as a person and Roman governor. Jesus knew that Pilate was not plotting His death, but He also knew that with enough pressure from the high priest that Pilate would condemn Him to die on a cross. Jesus was not trying to talk himself out of crucifixion, but He was concerned that Pilate learn the truth (which might be of spiritual benefit to Pilate later). Jesus told Pilate enough truth for Pilate to make a just and courageous decision on Jesus’ behalf, which Pilate eventually did, but Pilate refused to spare Jesus’ life for fear of the Jewish leaders (who could start a riot in Jerusalem or destroy his political career with unjust accusations to the Emperor). By sparing Jesus’ life, they could report that Pilate was no friend of Caesar and they could have him removed as governor. Jesus’ question was designed to advance His dialogue with Pilate, for Jesus already knew what Pilate would answer Him and do. Jesus knew and had foretold His disciples that He must die on a cross for the sins of the world, to save all who would believe in Him as Lord and Savior.

(John 18:35) Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”

Pilate answered that because he was not a Jew, he did not expect a Messiah, nor would he acknowledge a Jewish king politically or spiritually. He would be concerned only if a Jewish king threatened Roman rule or the peace of Jerusalem (for which he was politically responsible). Yet, Pilate did want to know from Jesus’ testimony as part of the trial why the Jewish leaders

wanted Jesus crucified. He wanted to know if Jesus really deserved the death penalty. He wanted to know if there was really a criminal case against Jesus, and after his examination of Jesus, three times he would tell the religious leaders and the people that he found no case against Jesus.

(John 18:36) Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

Using a rational defense, Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not physical, material, or political. He did not seek to compete administratively or militarily with Pilate, any other king, or nation. His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom; therefore, His followers would not use physical force and fight for Him. His disciples were armed and could have fought those sent to arrest Jesus in the garden, but Jesus refused their offer when Peter cut off and Jesus healed the ear of Malchus (an illegal action that Pilate had probably learned of from his soldiers who went to arrest Jesus). They could testify that Jesus offered no resistance when they arrested Him, and He offered no resistance to Pilate or the religious leaders when they put Him on trial. Jesus’ kingdom was totally different from a “this world” kingdom and what a “this world” leader would do. Pilate did not see or hear from Jesus what he would have expected to hear and see from a person who wanted to be a ruler in this world.

(John 18:37) Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

The original Greek New Testament manuscripts do not include exclamation marks, periods, or question marks. Jesus’ response to Pilate makes the most sense if we do not place a question mark at the end of Pilate’s statement. Or, if we emphasize the word “are” as we read Pilate’s statement as a statement and not as a question, perhaps with some incredulity or amazement in his tone of voice as, “So you ARE a king!” Pilate understood from Jesus’ answer that Jesus claimed to be a king, but not like any king of

this world. Jesus claimed to be a king of a different realm, a spiritual realm. Jesus told Pilate that He “came into the world.” He came into the world from a spiritual realm or kingdom with a plan and a purpose that would influence this world, but not as a political or material king like the kings of this world. As king, Jesus came to tell people the truth, the truth that He knew from having been (and still being) a king in His spiritual kingdom. He came from heaven to earth to bring truth into the world. No human being can choose to come into the world as Jesus came, by personal choice, before they are born. Jesus came to tell the truth and He always told the truth. No one has ever convincingly refuted anything Jesus ever said as recorded in the Bible. He told the truth to the religious leaders and people, and He told the truth to Pilate. He told Pilate that if he, Pilate, belonged to the truth that he would listen to what Jesus said, believe His teachings, and obey Him. Jesus told Pilate: “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” If anyone belongs to the truth today, they will listen to Jesus and obey Jesus as King, the King whose kingdom is not of this world.

(John 18:38) Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him.

With Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” and his refusal to discuss the question of truth further with Jesus, Pilate confessed that he did not belong to the truth. Even if he came to believe the truth that Jesus was a real king from a spiritual dimension with a spiritual purpose, Pilate would not save Jesus from death by crucifixion. He went out and told the Jews the truth—he found no case against Jesus. He found no evidence that Jesus was a criminal. He found no evidence that Jesus wanted to overthrow the Roman Empire or establish a Messianic kingdom according to the expectations of the Jews. He found no evidence that Jesus was a physical, political, or material threat to anyone. This is the first time that Pilate will say, “I find no case against him.” He will declare His judgement on Jesus’ behalf two more times to the chief priests and the crowd.

(John 18:39) But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”

Trying to keep the peace and possibly save Jesus from death, Pilate made the chief priests and the crowds an offer. He did have Jewish convicted criminals in his prison. He did have some convicted criminals that faced crucifixion. The Romans crucified thieves and bandits, rebels, revolutionaries, and murderers. Pilate referred to a custom that perhaps he had begun a few years earlier to keep the peace at Passover time when there would be large crowds in Jerusalem. We do not know when the custom began. He offered to release the King of the Jews because he knew (and every priest also knew) that Jesus had never broken a Roman law and He was not a criminal deserving death. Pilate did not convict Jesus of a crime against the Roman state or against the emperor. He knew that their dispute with Jesus was only religious.

(John 18:40) They shouted in reply, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Even though Jesus was no criminal, the priests and people shouted that they wanted Pilate to release Barabbas, who was a convicted criminal. He was a bandit. Bandits use violence to rob people, and Barabbas had probably robbed his fellow Jews, Samaritans, and Roman citizens. In Luke 10, Jesus spoke about bandits when He taught a parable about a traveler who bandits had beaten and left for dead, and how a good Samaritan had helped the victim. The Samaritan was a good neighbor, a far better person than those who wanted to crucify Jesus. In John 10:1, when Jesus taught about himself as the good Shepherd and the sheepfold, Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.” Those who practiced their religious traditions, especially during Passover, but who wanted and worked to crucify Jesus were spiritual thieves and bandits who used the Roman legal system to commit murder. Later, in Matthew 27:38, we learn that they crucified Jesus among bandits: “Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.” We learn additional facts about Jesus’ crucifixion in each of the three synoptic gospels that John saw no need to repeat. Jesus died on the cross as a sacrificial substitute for us, so God could with justice and mercy forgive us for our sins when we repent of our sins and receive Jesus the King as Lord and Savior. Jesus freed

Barabbas from death on a cross by dying in his place as his substitute, but we do know if Barabbas ever repented of his sins and believed in Jesus. The name Barabbas means “son of the father” [Bar (son) & Abba (father)]. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Son of God the Father. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are adopted children of God. They have received the Holy Spirit who indwells them. Paul wrote about believers in Jesus as children of God in Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” And in Galatians 4:6, Paul wrote, “And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How did you learn that Jesus is the King of the Jews?
2. How did Jesus answer Pilate’s question, “What have you done?”
3. What did Jesus tell Pilate about His kingdom?
4. What reason did Jesus give Pilate for coming into the world?
5. Who listens to Jesus?

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