

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: The people who lived in Jerusalem were perplexed about Jesus. He was from the small, dirty, field town people, yet spoke the truth with confidence and did miraculous things that could not be duplicated or understood. In addition, their leaders were conniving against Him, even trying to kill Him. This caused many to wonder if He could be the Messiah; the leaders were afraid for their positions and traditions. The leaders could not speak against what He was saying or doing, but they also knew of His humble origins and family. He talked the talk and did the unbelievable, but they had a belief, not from Scripture, that the Messiah was supposed to come out of nowhere, not from a local village. Jesus addressed them on this: *yes, you know me and where I come from, but you do not know my true origins or who sent me; but I do.* This further infuriated the leaders who tried to arrest Him. But, they were not able to do so because Jesus' time had not yet come. But again; what more could a Messiah do that Jesus had not done? Jesus responded, *I will be here just a while longer, but then you will not be able to find me nor come to where I am.* They did not understand that their faith was absent and this was their one and only opportunity to really come to God. So, they rebuked Jesus because of pride, and said He was trying to flee the country and go to the heathen, so they were in a hurry to get Him arrested.

During the final days of the festival, Jesus addressed the crowds again; *if you are thirsty, come to me. If you believe in me, come and drink of me; then, rivers of living water will flow from me to you.* He promised the Holy Spirit to them as well as eternal life and faith, if they would believe. This satisfied many of the crowd who realized Jesus was for real, that He was the Messiah. Others remained skeptical, fixating on the fact that He came from Galilee; they thought the Messiah would have to come from a King, not realizing that God is the greatest King and Jesus is from the line of David. So, the crowd was divided and they argued. The leaders were upset that Jesus was not arrested, but no one could do that; they were too mesmerized with His works and words, some even believing. The leaders were obsessed with their pride, and rebutted by saying they did not send Him, they did not believe Him, and so He couldn't possibly be real. Nicodemus came up and defended Jesus, citing the law and backing Jesus; they just talked down to him also, saying, *no prophet comes from Galilee.*

Contexts and Background:

This passage continues Jesus' challenge to the people to have faith and motivation, to think and not bow to emotionalism or gossip or to superficial leaders who skew truths for their own traditions and ideas. At the same time, many people continued to lose their confidence in Jesus because He did not fulfill their distorted expectations. John used this incident to answer the main arguments against Jesus as the Messiah and to encourage his people. In the earliest days of the Church, most Christians were gathered in Galilee while the Jewish stronghold was in Judea. This tension, conflict, and the growing hostility toward Jesus and His followers started to increase here in the context of this passage.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Isn't this the man?* Our sinful nature hates and fears true Truth, loves what feels good and is easy, and has a hard time trusting what is not tangible or believing what is not clearly seen, both of which are fundamentals of faith.
- *The Christ.* Meaning the anointed One, the one who came to save the lost; in this context, it is the expected Messiah (John 4:27-45).
- *Where this man is from.* Jesus was well known; they knew of His family and human origins. The people could not wrap their minds around the fact that the Messiah would come as the Scriptures stated; they wanted Him to come as they felt He should. Jesus set them straight, yet, the crowd was divided based on their will and perceptions and not on God's will and perception. So, they resorted to gossip and arguments rather than seeking truth by reason and by faith (Matt. 2:5-6; Mark 1:5; 14:12).
- *No one will know where he is.* There was a popular belief in the first century that the Messiah would either come out of nowhere or be hidden and make a sudden appearance. This did not come from the

Scriptures, but people were fanatical on this speculation rather than what the Scripture stated. Many people today also cling to sensationalism and false doctrines and not biblical truth (Matt. 2:4-6; John 9:29).

- *You know me.* The people were focusing on Jesus' earthly location; Jesus focused them on His eternal location and Divine mission.
- *He who sent me is true.* Jesus set the record straight and boldly proclaimed He was the Messiah, and if they did not believe and trust in Him, they could not know God or inherit eternal life.
- *Seize him.* They could not out-argue Him or prove He was not the Messiah because Jesus proved He was; so, they wanted to get rid of Him with conniving, plots, and false accusations because of their own pride and prejudice. Yet, they would not succeed until God's plan came to its fruition.
- *Put their faith in him.* While most of the people, just as they do today, misunderstood Jesus and inserted their own views and ideas, they persisted in the claim that they were people who understood the Scriptures. Some thought He was not powerful enough; others thought He should do no miracles. No one could be pleased.
- *Will he do more miraculous signs than this man?* There was a sharp debate on whether the Messiah would be a militant leader and kick out the Romans or be a miracle worker. Thus, many people believed that the Messiah would do no miracles and thus, to them, Jesus could not be the Messiah. Jesus demonstrated that He had done miracles beyond expectation and the people in this camp were very much satisfied. But, those who expected a revolution, as in a war, were disappointed.
- *Pharisees.* They comprised a sect in Judaism whose job centered on interpreting the law (they were not fair-you-see). Josephus, a first century historian, recorded that there were more than 6,000 Pharisees then. They are famous for creating the Jewish commentary, the *Talmud*, which includes the *Mishnah*, and the *Gemara* (200 BC- 500 AD+), a thorough Jewish history and study of the Law, Prophets, and Writings. Also, according to Josephus, who was from a Jewish background, many of the Pharisees were good and godly, but they overemphasized outward appearances. They were disliked by more pious groups because they repeated bad practices formed from bad ideas—those without merit, thought, or Scriptural guidance. They made their own traditions and manipulated others to obey them, thus missing what God had actually intended. Later on, we will see that Jesus did not play their game of pretentiousness (looking good with their decorative garments and long public prayers, then going out to lie, and cheat widows and orphans), and they hated Him for it. An honest man is always fervently hated by hypocrites. In John's time, before 70 AD, these Pharisees radically opposed the Christians; Paul was one of their chief prosecutors until his conversion (Matt. 3:7; 23; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:17; Acts 7-9)!
- *Arrest him.* Pleading to the Temple guards, they had no real authority to arrest people then, as the Romans were in power, but they did heavily influence the people and could petition the Romans, which they must have done on several occasions without success until the time was right.
- *Will not find me.* Meaning His spiritual and geographic location as well His origin and destination, contrasts of unbelief and belief. *If you do not believe, trust, and have a thirst for God, you will not see Me or receive my grace and salvation.* The Holy Spirit creates the ability for us to see and receive, but we are so often blinded by pride. This also indicates that Jesus will be taken away to heaven, so they will not be able to physically see Him, nor see Him in eternity either because of a lack of faith (Matt. 6:33; 7:7; John 14:3).
- *Among the Greeks.* They thought Jesus was going to go to the Gentiles, whom they despised. In their view, that would invalidate Jesus as the Messiah.
- *Stood and said in a loud voice.* Jewish teachers usually sat in ceremonial chairs. Because Jesus stood up and spoke boldly, He would have amazed the crowd, reinforcing His message.

- *If anyone is thirsty.* These were the last two days of the Feast of the Tabernacles, where they held the "closing assembly" with elaborate water rituals, pouring water into jars, various processions and speeches, and giving out souvenir jars of clay filled with water from the ceremonies that emphasized Zachariah 14 and Ezekiel 47 that told of rivers of living water flowing from the Temple, nourishing and bringing life. There were elaborate cisterns built that were also used to store rain water. Jesus used this as an illustration of what is truly important—that He was fulfilling this prophecy, that He was the new Temple, the True Source of life and living, giving us the Holy Spirit flowing from Him to the believer (Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36: 24-27; 47; Zach. 14; Joel 2:28; John 19:34; Rev. 22:1).
- *Scripture has said.* This is a summary of several O.T. passages testifying to the coming of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 12:3; 44:3; 58:11; Ezek. 36:25-27; John 16:7; Acts 2; Eph. 5:8).
- *Rivers.* Meaning God's abundance and provision.
- *Living water.* Meaning God's "Divine Activity," symbolized as fresh water flowing over what is stagnant, indicating that God refreshes us and also about the work of the Holy Spirit upon people and the refreshment of eternal life. The Holy Spirit imparts to us the new, transforming, cleansing, and spiritual life. This new life impacts us totally, constantly and continually to usher us into eternity. But, it is still up to us to accept that impact and let it come in contact with our application of life to God, ourselves, our environment, and others. Ironically and providentially, this feast was illustrating this as Jesus, the One, was there testifying; wow (Isa. 12:3; Jer. 2:13; Ezek. 47:1-9; Zech. 14:8; John 4:1-26; 7:37-39; 8:24; 11:50-51; 19:19)!
- *The Prophet.* Referring to Moses, whom many in that day expected to return. He represented God's Law and how God delivers and cares for His people. This was the high point of Jesus' popularity; He who fulfilled this prophecy was not a mere Prophet. Later, we will see that His challenges and call to discipleship would cause most to turn away (Deut. 18:15-18; 33:4-5; Matt. 16:14; John 1:20-21; 6:1-15; 7:40-41; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).
- *He is the Christ.* Here was the debate on where the Messiah must come from; Scripture said from David and Bethlehem where Jesus was born and where David's descendents were, while Galilee, where Jesus lived, was considered beneath them. So, people in Jerusalem looked down on Galilee just like people of a big city today look down at a small town, a form of condescension for the people they called "people of the land." *How can they be better than us? We are the capital; we are sophisticated. They are dirty and work in fields* (Micah 5:2).
- *Deceived you also/misleader.* Anyone who did not hold their view was considered ignorant (John 3:1-2; 7:12).
- *Any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?* Educated Jews and Romans considered sophistication and high speeches pervasive and of high value. This was also a prime form of entertainment, and Jesus proved His mastery of speech; the *Temple Guards* who had heard it all, were very impressed with Him, and perhaps the hardest group to impress. But, a hard heart will never welcome Truth.
- *Knows nothing of the law.* They were referring again to their rules—not Scripture—proving that these Pharisees were not honoring the law, only themselves.
- *Curse on them.* This is calling someone closed-minded or stupid, another irony, for psychologists call this *projection*, or placing your faults upon another. They claimed the people were not leading godly lives when they, the leaders, were the ones in apostasy.
- *From Galilee too.* Again, referring to regional prejudging and prejudices, because the Pharisees hated anyone who did not fully practice their "traditions." But, for people who worked for a living, these were too much of a burden—even impossible; thus their regulations were widely disregarded outside of Jerusalem. This was a condescending remark; they could not attack Nicodemus' logic, so they did what is called an "ad hominem" attack—attacking someone personally without merit or truth. This is, of course, a fallacy and wrong and a sure sign the person who used this method is in the wrong.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Here is a call to trust and rely on God's provision and timing. As Christians, we should not only reverence God's Holiness, but also submit to His control and timetable through attitude and deed. As Jesus demonstrated a trust and reliance upon God and His provision and timing, so are we to follow suit. In contrast, people who are self-centered, prideful, control freaks, or do not know God will hate this with a passion. They want things their way, they want control; and, because God is the Ultimate Sovereign and is really in control, they will fight against God and hate those who represent Him. Such a mindset hates God and will act in the opposite character and fruit of the Spirit, seeking to contradict and fight any good thing the Scripture or God's people have to say. This is the wisdom of the world; do what feels good, be number one, all religions are the same—all of these lead to brokenness and bitterness. God calls us to trust Him and align our lives with Him so we honor His schedule and can better receive His help.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Are you ready to live or ready to die? What does this say about your walk with Christ? What do you need to do?
2. How and why were some people then and some today disappointed in Jesus? How do our expectations line up to His in our lives and church?
3. What are some of the reasons the people were perplexed about Jesus? What about people today and people to whom you have witnessed?
4. Have you ever wondered what more Jesus could have done to have people come to Him? What about you? How much can you do?
5. How and why do people rebuke Jesus by pride? What helps satisfy you that Jesus is for real?
6. What has Jesus given you that is far more important than what you have been through or what you can face?
7. Why does our sinful nature hate and fear true Truth?
8. Why do we, as humans, love what feels good and is easy and have a hard time trusting what is not tangible or believing in what is not clearly seen—which is the actual essence of faith?
9. Why did the people continue to lose their confidence in Jesus? How and why do people today reject Jesus? Why do people assume He did not fulfill their distorted expectations?
10. What more can you and your church do to challenge people to have faith and reason, to think and not bow to emotionalism, gossip, or to superficial leaders who skew the truth for their own traditions and ideas?
11. How do you see some people today go to the Scriptures to somehow prove that their feelings, their will, views, ideas, and perceptions are true, clinging to sensationalism and false doctrines instead of seeking how they can line themselves up to God's will and biblical Truth?
12. What better things can you and your church do to help people to wonder more about Jesus and know Him more? How can they come to know Him for the first time and how can those who are Christians know Him more?