

Who Are You?

We will discover in this study that the Jewish religious leaders had rejected the idea that Jesus was a good moral teacher and that He was God. One might think that they thought He was nuts, but Matthew 12:24 has already revealed that they thought He was a follower of the Devil (Matt. 12:24). In fact the early church father Origen quotes Celsus (in A.D. 248) who claimed that some Jews taught that Jesus performed Egyptian magic (Origen. Contra Celsum, Book 1, Chapter 28). Such a late date can hardly be trusted as being accurate since the Jew would not have been an eyewitness. Further, this is quite an admission from the enemies of Jesus and the Christians that 1) Jesus existed and 2) performed miracles. The Jews just created another explanation since they could not explain away the miracles that He performed. Jesus said that people would be either for Him or against Him. There is no middle ground (Luke 11:23). The same occurs even today. People are either for Jesus or against Him. Some agree with the critics and others believe the ancient records.

Decision About Jesus. C. S. Lewis once wrote a statement that applies to them. He said, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on a level with the man who says he is a poached

egg or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you

can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not

intend to.”¹ The religious leaders had come to the conclusion that Jesus was trouble. When one is blind, one cannot see the truth.

I Go Away. Our study is John 8:21-30. In the opening verse Jesus tells the religious leaders that He was going away and that they would try to find Him but they would not be successful.



Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.”
John 8:21 (NASB)

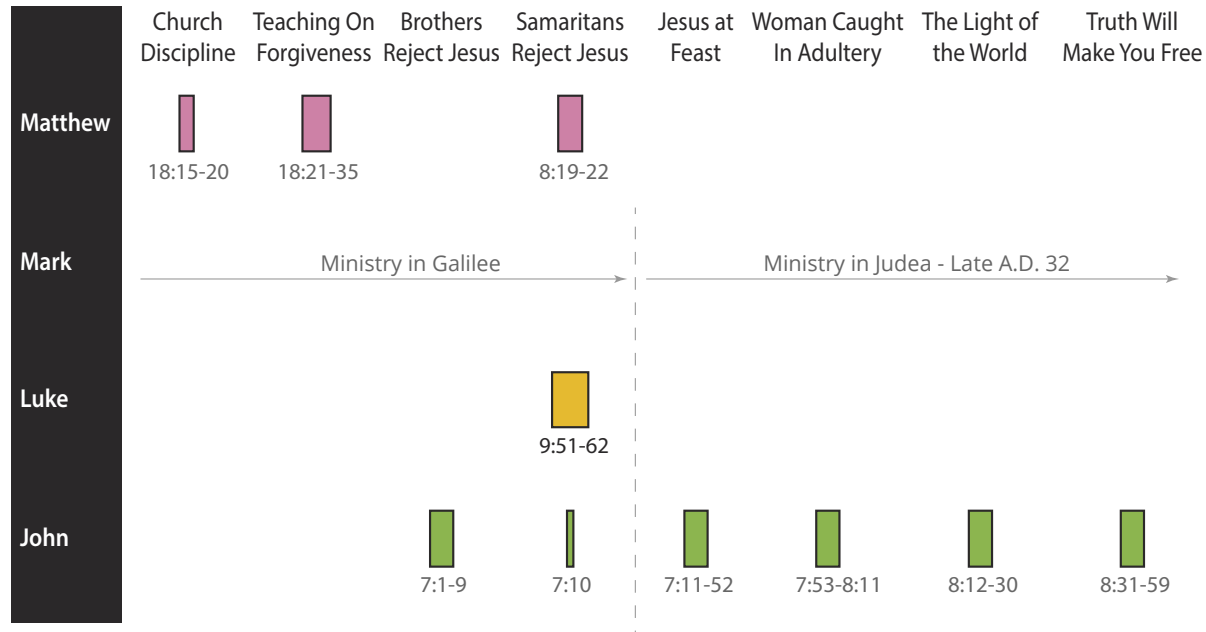
This is the first time that Jesus had said He was

going away and we can be sure that the religious leaders did not understand. Later in John 13:33 Jesus will tell the disciples that where He is going they cannot come (John 13:36-

1. C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) 52-53.

Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Galilee - Late A.D. 32



37). Here He is speaking to the religious leaders. When Jesus does tell the disciples, we will discover that they are puzzled just as the religious leaders were. But then Jesus explains where He is going and why He will leave. Jesus tells them when they are in the Upper Room on the night in which He was betrayed. A few verses later in John 14:1-6 Jesus explains that He is going to heaven and will prepare a place for them. In John 14:28 He will tell the disciples that after He leaves He will return. Then in John 16:7 He will tell them that He must go away in order for the Holy Spirit to come. Each time Jesus refers to His death, resurrection and return back to heaven. But the religious leaders missed the message.

Hard Hearts Do Not Listen. I do not believe that the religious leaders tried to understand what Jesus was talking about at all. They had already rejected Jesus. That is the message of the next verse.

So the Jews were saying, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" John 8:22 (NASB)

Earlier in John 7:11, 13, 25 and 32 we were told that they wanted to kill Jesus. Therefore we can be confident that they were not trying to be objective and learn about Jesus. The fact is the religious leaders were like a couple in an argument. You know what happens when two people argue. Neither partner is really willing to listen. They are just proud individuals trying desperately to win the argument. They are not sympathetic toward each other. Consequently, they do not listen to each other. Sometimes one person does not listen and really think about what was said. That describes the religious leaders. But Jesus was not arguing with them. He was honestly trying to explain; but the religious leaders jumped to the conclusion that Jesus had planned to commit suicide. The Jews believed that suicide sent one to the darkest part of hell.

... that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolution of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies; while the souls of those whose hands have acted madly

against themselves, are received by the darkest place in Hades . . .²

It is obvious by their question that they think Jesus is planning to commit suicide since they were not planning to commit suicide. The religious leaders either forgot Jesus' earlier statements that He had revealed He was God (John 5:17-18, 26, 39-43), Who had come down from heaven (John 6:38, 41-42), and Who will raise up those who believe in Him at the end of the world (John 6:33, 39, 44, 50) or else they just intentionally ignored them. If they had remembered and connected the dots, they could have concluded that since He had come down out of heaven He was simply saying that he was going back to heaven. But they didn't.

I Am God.

Now Jesus tells them what they should have understood.

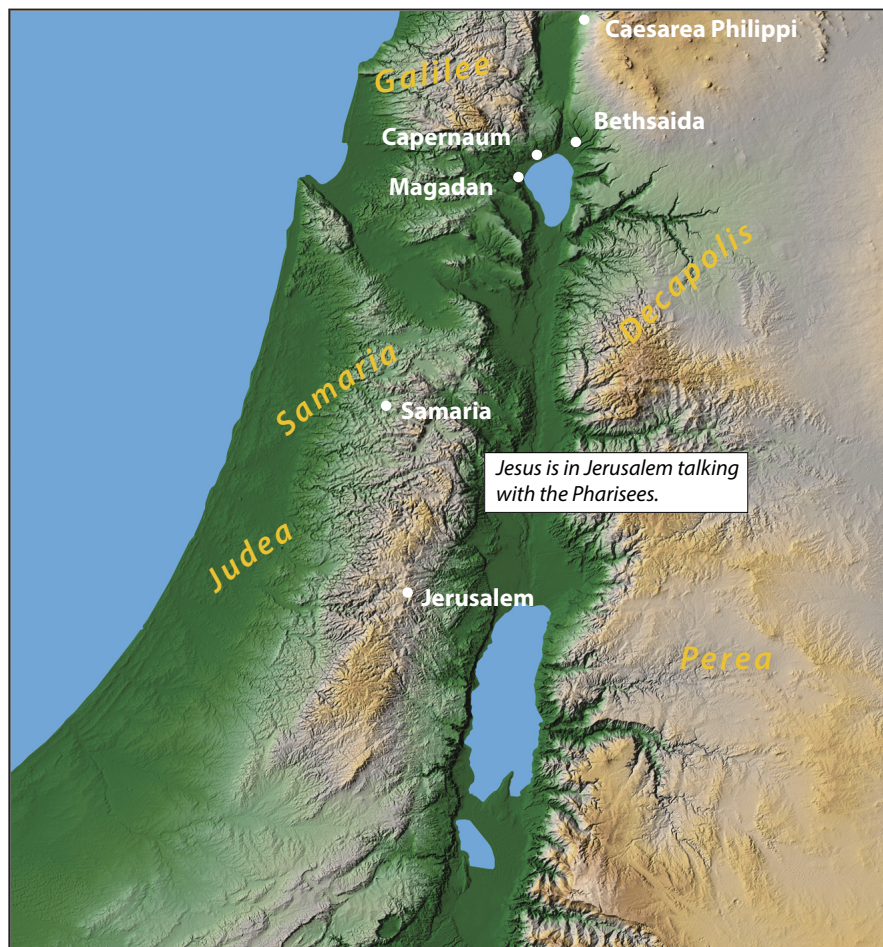
And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." John 8:23-24 (NASB)

He tells them that they are from "the below." Our English Bibles do not properly translate the Greek. Our Bibles simply say, "Below" but Jesus added "the" resulting in "the below." He was not referring to hell but simply "this world" as the next part of the statement. Then Jesus says that He is from "the above" or heaven. They are of this evil world but He isn't. Some people teach that Jesus never claimed to be God. They

need to read the Bible. They need to read this passage of scripture plus a host of other passages. They are like the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They either are not listening, that is reading, or they just reject what He said. Such spiritual blindness is truly disastrous since they fail to understand that they are headed for an eternal destiny of suffering. Why?

I want you to notice four important spiritual truths. First, Jesus tells us that we are

sinners. We commit sin. Everyone born into this world is evil and does evil. Many people might think we do good, but we do not do deeds good enough to get into heaven. Jesus clearly tells us that we are sinners. The consequences, of being sinners is that we will spiritually die. We are already spiritually dead and if we do not do something, we will spend eternity in eternal condemnation. Some how we have to change our status before God. We have to stop being sinners. This is not a unique doctrine taught only by Paul, Peter or another



2. Wars of the Jews. Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged. Peabody: Hendrickson. Book 3, Chap. 8, Section 3

Jesus Teaches The Essentials of the Gospel

We are sinners (we commit sins)

John 8:21, 24

Jesus is our God - the "I AM"

John 8:24

We must believe Him

John 8:24

Jesus came from heaven

John 8:23

Jesus would die on the cross

John 8:28

Jesus would return to heaven

John 8:21-23

- Return to life

- Ascend back to heaven

apostle.

Second, Jesus tells us that we must believe in Him in order to not die spiritually. In Romans 3 we are told that Jesus did all of the work required to forgive our sins and declare us to be righteous. God does not require any human effort - good deeds. We only have to believe.

Third, Jesus tells us that we must believe He is God. Many of our English Bibles state that He said, "I am He." But the two Greek words that are translated as "I am He" are *ego eimi*. Those two words literally mean "I AM." The word *ego* makes His statement emphatic. That is, He claimed to be the Jehovah God of the Old Testament. Jesus said that He was and is the "I AM" who spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14. He was and is Jehovah God. In John 8:56, Jesus will say it again. When we arrive at John 8:56 in a future study, it will be obvious by the response of the Jews that they understood He claimed to be God. Fourth, if we do not believe that Jesus is God, then we will experience spiritual death for eternity. That is, we will die in our sins. Jesus' message was clear but the religious leaders did not want to accept it.

Pharisee's Spiritual Insensitivity. It is truly difficult to believe the Pharisees asked the next question after all that Jesus had told them.

So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning? I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." John 8:25 (NASB)

What did they mean by "Who are you?" We wonder if they were being sarcastic or serious. Were they saying, "So, do you really think you are God, you fool?" Or, were they really so misunderstanding that they did not understand?

It would appear that they did not understand. It appears that their hearts were hardened. They were spiritually non-responsive. In Exodus we are told that the pharaoh, who talked to Moses and Aaron, had a hard heart. If we examine Exodus 7:13-14 closely we discover that the symptoms of Pharaoh's hard heart was that he would not listen or respond to God and he was stubborn. Have you ever owned a mule or jackass? Now when the animal refuses to do something, you cannot move him. On some occasions you can pull him and push him trying to get him to do something and he won't move. That is a picture of a hard heart. It will not respond to God. In Exodus 9:34 we are told that a hard heart is sinful behavior. Hebrews 3:13 says that a hard heart is the result of the deceitfulness of sin. In the rest of the scriptures we discover that a hard heart is non-responsive to spiritual things (Mark 6:52; 8:17). The Pharisees had a hard heart resulting in spiritual insensitivity. This is an excellent description of the religious leaders. Sin is dangerous. It blunts your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit of God.

Then Jesus tells the Pharisees,

"I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." They

did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. John 8:26-27 (NASB)

These are curious words. Jesus seems to imply that there are many things that He would like to say about the religious leaders but He won't. Instead He will only speak those things that He hears from God the Father. What He hears He will speak. What great self-control and constraint. He was in total submission to God the Father. It would please God the Father if we were committed to total submission also. That was Jesus' appeal throughout the gospels. In Luke 6:46 we hear these words,

Why do you call Me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? Luke 6:46 (NASB)

In the gospels Jesus is an example of total submission. He shows us what it means to be in total submission. John 8:26 is just one such example. Jesus' ultimate example of total submission occurred on the night before His crucifixion when He told God the Father that He would submit Himself to death on the cross. He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke 22:41-42 captures what happened.

And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Luke 22:41-42 (NASB)

In Hebrews 10:7 we read a prophesy from Psalm 40:7-8 that says Jesus came to do the Father's will and not His own will. So, Jesus not only submitted to God the Father when He died on the cross but He also submitted even in the words that He spoke. In John 7:16 Jesus has already told us that what He taught was also from God the Father. Everything that He did was an act of submission. That should also be how we live our lives - total submission to God the Father.

Jesus Prophesied His Death. Then Jesus indirectly told the religious leaders that He was going to be crucified.

So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." John 8:28-29 (NASB)

Jesus referred to being "lifted up" once again just after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:32-34). Then in John 12:33 the apostle John tells us that Jesus was referring to His crucifixion. This means Jesus not only indirectly told the religious leaders that He was going to be crucified but that they would be responsible for His crucifixion. We discover later they conducted the trial that found Him guilty (John 8:24). They introduced false witnesses in order to support a false accusation (Matthew 26:57-68). Then they sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate and asked that Christ be crucified and they used a different accusation to justify His murder (John 18:28-30). They also motivated the crowd to ask that Jesus be crucified (Mark 15:9-13). Then on the day of Pentecost, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the apostle Peter told a crowd that they had nailed Him to the cross by the means of godless men (Acts 2:23). The godless men were the Romans who had the authority to crucify Him.

So Jesus prophesies that after His death they will know the truth about Him: that He is God and that He has pleased God the Father. The gospels tell us that this actually occurred. The crowd reacted to Jesus' death and the soldiers recognized that He was God.

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts. Luke 23:46-48 (NASB)

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was

torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” Matt. 27:50-54 (NASB)

It was a stunning admonition that they had killed the fleshly body that God inhabited while He was here on earth. Acts 2:24; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20 and Hebrews 13:20 tell us that God the Father never left Christ alone. In fact, He raised Christ from the dead. Jesus says that the Father did this because He always pleased the Father. I suspect that He said that in order to make the point that we should seek to please the Father also.

Christ set the example for us. He did not please Himself even to the point of dying for you and me (Romans 15:3).

For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.” Romans 15:3 (NASB)

Conclusion. God accomplishes His purposes even in confrontations. The next verse reveals that many in the crowd of people who were listening to the discussion between Jesus and the religious leaders had a different opinion of Jesus.

As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. John 8:30 (NASB)

They had heard Jesus say that He was from above and not from here (v. 21-23). He was not of this world. They heard that they were sinners and would die in their sins if they did not believe He was the great I AM or their God (v. 24). They heard Him state that He would die on a cross. He would ascend or return to heaven. Jesus had just communicated the

core truths of the gospel. We are sinners. He is God who came to earth. He came to die for us. He would return to life and ascend back to heaven. Many understood and believed.

Some day we will meet them in heaven because they believed Jesus was who He claimed to be. There will be two groups of people on that day. One group rejected Christ and the other accepted Him. To which group do you belong?