

Daily Bible Study Commentary by Pastor Steve

We're excited to have you digging deeper into the Word. The best way to use this study guide is to read the Bible verse(s) first, then Pastor Steve's commentary. God bless you.

John 11:5-6

vs5-6: Using the Greek word for "love" (agape) which refers to the kind of selfless love that motivated God to send His only-begotten Son to die for us (Jn 3:16), John informs us that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus (probably listed from oldest to youngest) with this type of love. He points to this love to explain why Jesus delayed for two days at the Jordan River before leaving for Bethany. We might have expected His love to cause Him to rush to Lazarus' side as soon as possible. But He didn't, and John says He delayed because He loved them. Those days of waiting must have tested the sister's faith (George Reith, St. John's Gospel, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, ca 1891, Vol 2, p.52). They were forced to trust Jesus more deeply than they had ever trusted Him. The process, though painful, matured their faith, and when the miracle finally took place it was unlike anything any human being had ever received. Those two women would be standing nearby, watching when Jesus called forth their brother, four days dead, out of the grave. The testing of their faith and the miracle itself were both great gifts of His love; He gave them a trial they would never forget and a wonder people would remember forever.

John 11:7-10

vs7-8: When He felt it was time to leave, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let's go into Judea again" (literal). Bethany, a small town located in the region called "Judea," was only two miles east of Jerusalem, so the disciples resisted. They asked Him why He would choose to go back to a place where He had nearly been executed only two or three months earlier. Surely the religious leaders would hear that He was nearby and have Him arrested. **vs9-10:** Jesus replied, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If someone walks in the day he does not stumble (strike the foot against something and fall) because he sees the light of this world (the sun). But if someone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him" (literal).

John 11:9-10

vs9-10 (continued): This illustration simply means that there is no danger of walking on a path as long as a person can see where they are stepping. A path that might be dangerous at night becomes safe when lighted by the sun. At first glance this statement might not seem to apply to the situation they were facing, but the last few words reveal its spiritual meaning. The "night" Jesus spoke about was spiritual darkness. A person stumbles because the light is not in them. There is an absence of revelation from God. That person is walking without God's "light" to illumine their path. But Jesus was not walking in darkness; He was constantly being guided by God's Holy Spirit, so He was telling His disciples that wherever the Spirit led them there would be no "stumbling." As dangerous as returning to Bethany might seem, the Father was leading Jesus and had shown Him the path ahead. Yes, a "night" was coming in which He would be arrested, but that moment had not yet arrived. For now they were safe; they were in the "daylight" of God's plan.

John 11:11-12

vs11-12: After assuring His disciples that the Spirit was leading them to Bethany, Jesus said, "Lazarus, our friend, has fallen asleep (entered a state of rest), but I am going so that I may awaken him" (literal). Still not convinced that it was safe to be in a town so close to Jerusalem, the disciples replied, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep he will be healed (saved)" (literal). They were telling Jesus that if Lazarus was sleeping (or resting), he must be recovering from his illness, which meant Jesus no longer needed to go there to pray for him. They had good reason to think this because they had watched Jesus heal a royal official's son in the city of Cana without being near the boy (Jn 4:46-54). He had merely told the boy's father, "Go, your son lives," and the child who was at the point of death, miles away, began to recover. Maybe that type of miracle had happened again.

John 11:13-14

vs13-14: To prevent his readers from being confused by Jesus' statement that Lazarus was "asleep," John explains that Jesus used the word "sleep" to refer to physical death. This was not the only time Jesus applied that word to someone who had already died. He told a crowd outside the home of a synagogue official, "The girl has not died, but is asleep" (Mt 9:24; Mk 5:39; Lk 8:52). Apparently He viewed the continued existence of the human spirit after death to be so real (Mt 22:31-32) that a person's spirit could cross the line between life and death in two directions: Someone might die and come back to life, just as someone might go to sleep and then awaken. Jesus was able to speak of Lazarus, though dead, as being asleep because as surely as if he had fallen asleep he was going to wake up again. But to erase any confusion, He said plainly, "Lazarus died!" (literal).

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John 11:15

v15: Having bluntly announced, "Lazarus died!" Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that He was going to Bethany to "awaken" (v11) him, meaning He was going to bring him back to life. He said, "And I rejoice that I was not there because of what this event will produce inside of you; it will cause you to believe in Me even more, but come, let us go to him" (paraphrase). If the miracle He would do in Bethany was a gift of love to Martha, Mary and Lazarus (v5), it was a gift of faith to His disciples. Many times during their travels together He had assured them that because they believed in Him He would give them eternal life (Jn 6:40). He said the Father had given Him authority to raise the dead (Jn 5:21), that "an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth" (Jn 5:28-29). And now they were going to see with their own eyes that this promise was true. They would watch Him do what He said He could do, and it gave Him joy to think about how their faith would be strengthened.

John 11:16

v16: Beginning here and appearing occasionally through the rest of this gospel, John allows us to observe a very skeptical disciple as he grows in faith. That disciple's name is "Thomas" (Jn 14:5; 20:24-25, 27-28; 21:2). His name comes from an Aramaic word meaning "twin." John includes the Greek equivalent of that name, "Didymus" ("twin"), probably so his readers will realize that Thomas is the twin brother of another disciple. Since he is usually placed beside Matthew in lists of the disciples (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15), he may be Matthew's twin (J.D. Douglas, ed., The New Bible Dictionary, Eerdmans, reprint 1971, p.1273). As we encounter these quotations from Thomas we will find that each one contains an element of unbelief or confusion until we arrive at his final declaration made to the resurrected Jesus, in which he bursts out, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). John seems to be using Thomas' example to us that even the most skeptical disciple was finally won over to a complete faith in Christ. If any reader assumes that these disciples believed in Jesus only because they were superstitious or easily deceived, John points to Thomas to prove otherwise. Even stubborn Thomas had to yield to the overwhelming truth of the resurrection.

John 11:16-17

v16 (continued): When Jesus proposed to lead the disciples back to Bethany, Thomas gloomily said to the others, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him" (literal). His words lack faith. Jesus had just told them that God was guiding them, so they would be protected (vs9-10); but obviously Thomas didn't believe that. Yet we have to admire his courage and devotion to Jesus. He loved Him and was willing to die with Him. **v17:** By the time they arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been buried for four days. Jewish custom required that a body be buried as soon as possible after death (Miriam Feinberg Vamosh, Daily Life at the Time of Jesus, Palphot Ltd., Herzlia, Israel, pp.72-73).

John 11:17

v17 (continued): The body would have been washed and then covered with myrrh (a fragrant sap from a tree that grows in Arabia and Africa) and aloes (the crushed leaves and juice from a desert succulent that has healing qualities for the skin) (Jn 19:39). Other spices such as myrtle and hyssop may have been added, and then the body was wrapped with long bandage-like strips of cloth, with spices being added into the folds of the cloth. A special cloth was tied over the face (Alfred Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, E.R. Herrick and Co., New York, CA 1890, Vol.2, p.318; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Eerdmans, second printing, 1973, p.826). John mentions that Lazarus was buried in a "tomb" (lit: a memorial), and later we discover this tomb was a cave (v38). This indicates that the family was wealthy and could afford to purchase the land where the cave was located and have shelves and niches carved into its walls. The poor buried their dead in the ground, about six feet deep (Miriam Feinberg Vamosh, Daily Life at the Time of Jesus, Palphot Ltd., Herzlia, Israel, p.73).