

# 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 12:39-40

**vs39-40:** John says Isaiah was given the answer to that question when the Lord called him to become a prophet (Isa 6:1-13). The Lord told Isaiah that He was sending him to speak to a nation that would not listen to him. In fact his words would only cause their hearts to become harder because they would refuse to repent (Isa 6:9-10). God said the land would be devastated and the people exiled, yet a small portion would remain in the land; and that would be enough to allow His plan of salvation to continue (Isa 6:13). The particular verse of Isaiah that John quotes, on the surface, sounds as if God deliberately meant to prevent people from understanding Isaiah's message. If that were the case, then by that action He would be the cause of their unbelief, and they would be innocent victims of His cruel will. But to interpret it that way is only possible if someone isolates that verse from the rest of the Book of Isaiah. In the first chapter alone, God's desire that the people of Israel repent is expressed in such statements as this: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. Truly the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isa 1:16-20).

## John 12:39-40

**vs39-40 (continued):** And the people's willful rebellion is repeatedly pointed to as the cause of their problem. Listen: "Alas, sinful nation, people weighted down with iniquity, offspring of evil doers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him. Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in [your] rebellion?" (Isa 1:4-5). So when John quotes Isaiah's statement, "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they might not see with their eyes and understand with the heart, and I will heal them" (literal), he is comparing the crowd's resistance to Jesus' message to ancient Israel's resistance to Isaiah's message. He's saying the underlying cause of that resistance is the same: the people's desire to live independently from God's discipline. And he's likely implying that by resisting Jesus, those individuals would become harder to reach in the future. Jesus Himself had referred to that same prophecy earlier in His ministry (Mt 13:12-16).

## John 12:41

**v41:** John says Isaiah spoke these things because he saw Jesus' "glory," and in this case he used the word "glory" to mean Jesus' death and resurrection. That's what Isaiah was describing when he asked, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isa 53:1). Elsewhere in his prophecy he describes the glorious blessings which the Messiah will bring when He comes to set up God's kingdom on earth, but he asked that particular question because he wondered who would believe his description of God's Suffering Servant. He fully realized that the plan of salvation that involved the Messiah's death ran counter to the popular thinking in Israel. Most would gladly welcome a miraculous intervention to deliver them from their enemies, but few, if any, felt the need for a Messiah who would die for their sins.

## John 12:42

**v42:** Isaiah foresaw the rejection Jesus was experiencing, yet even as his prophecy about blinded eyes and hardened hearts (Isa 6:10) was being fulfilled, there was still a large number of people who believed. John says even many of the religious leaders believed in Jesus, but most of them were afraid to openly acknowledge their faith for fear of the Pharisees who had threatened to formally expel from the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus. That meant the person would be excluded from all religious activities, treated like a dead person and allowed to buy only the necessities of life in the market (Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, E.R. Herrick and Co., Vol 2, p.184). For men who were religious leaders, and for their families, to be disfellowshipped from the Jewish community meant their influence would be ended and most would be financially ruined. So the threat worked causing many of them to hide their faith.

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## **John 12:43**

**v43:** John comments on their silence. Though the punishment for confessing Jesus was very severe, he shows no pity for those who chose to remain silent. He says they "loved the glory of men more than the glory of God" (literal). They had been forced to make a painful choice, but John says the pain was not an excuse for silence. The cost of rejecting Jesus was ultimately far greater than the cost of confessing Him, and their silence was a form of rejection. Their status in the religious community had become more important to them than their status with God. Apparently John did not consider hidden faith to be genuine. He had heard his Lord say this: "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33).

## **John 12:43**

**v43 (continued):** In other words, to believe in Jesus requires a person to decide to suffer for their faith, if necessary. Every believer must take up their cross to follow Him (Mt 10:38). This raises a very difficult question: What level of confession is necessary? Surely all believers struggle to know when and how to speak to others about Jesus, but such confusion or shyness is not what John is condemning when he says they loved the "glory of men." His comment is addressed to people who realize Jesus is indeed the Savior, yet pretend they don't believe in Him in order to protect themselves. They knowingly give a false impression to others. Their problem isn't confusion about when to speak or shyness, it's the decision to prioritize their status and safety over the salvation Jesus offers. The silence of those "rulers" who believed in Jesus illustrates Paul's statement in Romans 10:9-10, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Paul says salvation requires not only "believing in the heart," but also "confessing with the mouth."

## **John 12:44-46**

**vs44-46:** To reject Jesus, or deny believing in Him, was far more serious than rejecting or denying an ordinary human teacher or prophet. Human teachers or prophets are men or women whose assignment is to draw us to God, but Jesus was far more than an ordinary human teacher or prophet. He was God's divine Son who had been sent from heaven to become a man. Everything He said and did was initiated by the Father and perfectly expressed the Father's will, so to believe in Jesus was to recognize the Father at work through Him, and to reject or deny Him was to reject and deny the Father. This is what Jesus was explaining when He said, "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me" (vs44-45). He had explained that He had come into the world as "Light" (v46) so that humans could see the full revelation of the heart of God. To see Jesus was to cease to remain in the "darkness" of spiritual confusion or deception. To see Him was to finally know the full truth about God, and to believe in Him was to enter into a relationship in which He would constantly provide such revelation.