

ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTES

John 12:20-50

12:20–50 The Approaching Gentiles and the Messiah's Rejection by the Jews. The present section concludes the first major part of John's Gospel, which narrates Jesus' mission to the Jews. The arrival of some Greeks signals to Jesus that this mission is about to come to an end. But before Jesus can reach out to the Gentiles, he first must die (cf. 10:16; 11:52). His hour is now at hand (12:23–26; see notes on 2:4; 7:30).

12:20 Greeks refers to Gentiles, not necessarily to people from Greece (see note on 7:35). They are "God-fearers," non-Jews who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish festival.

12:21 Bethsaida. See note on Luke 9:10.

12:23 hour. See notes on 2:4 and 7:30.

12:25 Here again Jesus speaks in absolute terms to emphasize a point: **loves his life** means "delights in his life in this world more than in God," and **hates his life in this world** means, by contrast, "thinks so little of his life, and so much of God, that he is willing to sacrifice it all for God." Following Christ entails self-sacrifice, shown supremely at the cross.

12:27 Troubled (Gk. *tarassō*) means "to be stirred up, unsettled"; the word or a related compound is found in the Septuagint in Davidic psalms (such as Ps. 6:3; 42:11).

12:28 This is one of three instances during Jesus' earthly ministry where a heavenly voice attests to his identity (the other two are his baptism and the transfiguration; Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

12:29 crowd ... said that it had thundered. Events of eternal consequence are occurring in the unseen spiritual realm, but when unbelievers see or hear a manifestation of them (even the very voice of God speaking from heaven), they misinterpret them as natural events, showing their spiritual blindness.

12:31 The **ruler of this world** in its present fallen, sinful state is Satan (cf. 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19). **Now**, at the cross, the Devil will **be cast out**, that is, decisively defeated (cf. Luke 10:18; Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus' triumph over Satan in his death and resurrection is the basis for his final triumph in the consummation (Rev. 20:10).

12:32 This most explicit "lifted up" saying in John complements the earlier references in 3:14 (see note) and 8:28, and echoes Isa. 52:13. **All people**, in context, means "all *kinds of* people," that is, both Jews and Gentiles (John 10:16; 11:52; cf. 12:20–21). The drawing, as in 6:44, is effective.

12:33 what kind of death. Cf. 21:19.

12:34 This is the final of several messianic misunderstandings featured in this Gospel (cf. 7:27, 31, 41–42). The people have some inkling here that Jesus is predicting his death. What is probably meant by **the Law** is the entire Hebrew Scriptures, in which there are several passages that speak of the perpetual existence of the Davidic Messiah (2 Sam. 7:13; Ps. 61:6–7; 89:3–4, 35–37; Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:13–14; for later Jewish expectations see 1 Enoch 49:1; 62:14; *Psalms of Solomon* 17:4).

12:35–36 Jesus' answer is indirect; in view of the fact that the **light** will be with people only **for a little while longer**, his crucifixion is near (cf. v. 46; also 7:33; 16:16–19). He urges the people to **believe in the light** (see note on 8:12; see also 9:4 and 11:9–10) while there is still time. On the words **walk while you have the light**, see 9:4–5.

12:36 When Jesus **hid himself from them**, he indicated God's imminent judgment and the completion of his revelatory work to the people of Israel (1:18).

12:37–40 John cites Isa. 53:1 and 6:10 to indicate that the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah was predicted by Scripture and thus serves to confirm (rather than thwart) God's sovereign plan. Isaiah 53:1 refers to the servant of the Lord who was rejected by the people but exalted by God; Isa. 6:10 attributes people's hardening ultimately to God himself (similar to Pharaoh's, see Rom. 9:17–18). The present verses are the first in a series of fulfillment quotations in the second half of John's Gospel. Seen here is John's emphasis on divine sovereignty and human responsibility. On the one hand, the people should have believed and are held guilty for disbelieving ("they still did not believe in him," John 12:37). On the other hand, God blinded their eyes so that they did not have the spiritual ability to believe, and John can even say **they could not believe** (v. 39). (On the need for God to first give people the ability to believe, see 1:13; 6:44.) See note on Eph. 1:11.

12:37 Though he had done so many signs ... they still did not believe indicates the culpability of people who had seen these miracles but still did not believe. The purpose of the miracles was to lead them to faith, and the miracles provided abundant proof of Jesus' deity and messiahship, but people in their hardness of heart still rejected this evidence.

12:41 Isaiah said these things is a strong argument for the entire book of Isaiah being written by one person, the prophet Isaiah (see Introduction to Isaiah: Date). The plural "these things" most likely refers to the two specific passages that John quotes (Isa. 53:1 and Isa. 6:10), but the wider context of both passages is probably also in view. John seems to be claiming that when Isaiah saw the exalted King and the suffering servant, he saw Jesus' glory.

12:42–43 The opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus was not at all monolithic; an increasing number of the leaders themselves had come to faith, for **many even of the authorities believed in him**. However, their **fear of the Pharisees** was still strong, and hence they did not confess Jesus publicly. In v. 43 John penetrates the human heart, showing again that the desire for human commendation kept them from following Jesus in a public way. See notes on 5:44; 9:22. **synagogue**. See note on Luke 4:16.

12:44 Believes not in me means “believes not only, not ultimately, in me.”

12:46 light. See note on 1:4–5.

12:47 I did not come to judge the world refers to Jesus’ first coming, for he will come to judge the world when he returns (see v. 48; 5:22, 27–30).

12:49 Not ... on my own authority indicates again that supreme authority in the Trinity belongs to the Father, and delegated authority to the Son, though they are equal in deity.¹

¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2048–2050.