

John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

John the Baptist Denies Being the Messiah

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

STUDY QUESTIONS**1. Describe John the Baptist in your own words.**

John the Baptist was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age, When Mary the mother of Jesus came to visit her cousin Elizabeth when she was six months along with John, the baby John leaped as Mary entered the room because the Christ Child was there. This evoked songs from both Mary and Elizabeth.

John lived in the wilderness, dressed in rough camel hair clothing, he ate wild locust and honey, did not cut his hair, did not drink alcohol, (Nazarite) He preached from the wilderness, along the Jordan river where he baptized those who heeded his call to repent in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

John prophesied against King Herod for marrying his brother's wife (adultery) and criticized the established religious leadership. John was eventually arrested and later beheaded when Herod's step-daughter/niece danced for he and his guests and was granted a wish – She called for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (to silence John's prophesy against them.)

Jesus noted John's prophetic role, calling him Elijah (the role of Elijah) and stated that there never was or would be a greater prophet than John.

2. What does John (the Apostle) say about John (the Baptist.) (Look at the whole chapter for more info.)

As noted above, John was the one who came ahead of Jesus to point people to him. John is not the "light" he only pointed to the "light" John denies being a reincarnation of any ancient prophet, only one that baptized with water (offered outward sign of repentance) to prepare people to receive baptism from the Messiah with the Holy Spirit. John pointed some of his disciples to Jesus calling him "the Lamb of God."

3. What is “that light” to which John refers in verses 7 and 8?

The light of the world is Jesus. The metaphor suggests that Jesus brings salvation by illuminating the world exposing its sin and offering forgiveness to deal with that sin. The Apostle John offers in his letter “John 1” a further exposition on this theme.

4. Why did the Jewish leaders send priests and Levites to question John about his identity? Who did they think he might be?

John was attracting crowds and they were concerned about his popularity. So, they sent some low-level religious figures to ask him about his identity. By what authority did John do this preaching and baptizing? They questioned his identity because the tradition was the Elijah would come to usher in the age of the Messiah. Essentially they were asking if his proclamation about the coming Messiah was authentic, was he the Elijah figure they were looking for.

5. Who is Elijah and why would they think that John was Elijah? What is John’s response to this question?

Elijah was an Old Testament prophet that worked miracles and demonstrated mighty signs of God’s power. Elijah did not die, he was taken up in a fiery chariot by the angels, so it was believed that he would return to earth at some time. John denied being Elijah.

6. What do the other gospels say about John the Baptist being Elijah?

Matt 11:2-15 ² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴ Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵ Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Matt 17:10-13 The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

¹¹ Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

Mark 9:11-13, ¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” ¹² Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? ¹³ But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

Luke 1:11-17 ¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him:

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

7. Who is this “Prophet” of whom they refer?

This most likely refers to Moses declaring in Deuteronomy 18 that God would raise up a prophet like himself to proclaim God’s will for the people.

8. How does John the Baptist identify himself in verse 23?

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

9. What do the Pharisees ask John?

They ask him why he baptizes if he is not the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet, in other words, by what authority and for what reason do you baptize?

10. What is John’s answer to them?

²⁶ “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” In other words, John notes that his role is preparatory, but the real Messiah is in their midst and they cannot recognize him. John notes that he is nothing compared to the one who is to come.

11. To whom is John referring in verse 26?

He means Jesus, the Messiah.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. John clearly states that he is not the Messiah, nor Elijah or the Prophet, but rather he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’ John the Baptist says his role is to get people ready for the Messiah to come by repenting of their sin. How can we be voices crying in the wilderness today?**
- 2. John’s ministry was clearly effective, large crowds came out and were persuaded by his preaching to repent and be baptized. Why then did the religious leaders question him? What was John’s reaction to these religious leaders when they confronted him? (see Matthew 3:7-10)**
- 3. What is the significance of John the Baptist in the gospel account of Jesus? What difference would it make if there were no mention of him at all?**
- 4. This text from John 1 about John the Baptist is the lectionary text for the third Sunday of Advent which we celebrate by lighting the candle of joy in our Advent ritual. What about this text concerning the confrontation between John and the religious leaders has anything to do with joy?**