



John 1:19-28 Humble Messengers?

In our celebrity culture it seems strange for anyone to push the spotlight away from self and onto another. Today we discover one life lesson that will help us become humble messengers pointing to our honorable Messiah.

Investigating the Baptist

John 1:19-22 (CSB) ¹⁹ This was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He didn't deny it but confessed: "I am not the Messiah." ²¹ "What then?" they asked him. "Are you Elijah?" "I am not," he said. "Are you the Prophet?" "No," he answered. ²² "Who are you, then?" they asked. "We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?"

John the Baptist was causing quite a fuss among the Jewish people of his day. Some thought he was from God and others thought he was a false teacher. So, **the Jews from Jerusalem** send **priests** and **Levites** to investigate.

All **priests** were from the tribe of Levi and the family tree of Aaron (brother of Moses). The other **Levites** assisted in the temple worship (some were musicians, others served as temple police).¹ * John the Baptist and his father were Levites too.

"Who are you...Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet?"

- The Jewish people were on the lookout for **the Messiah** (*Christ* in Greek), expecting Him soon (Dan. 9:24-26).
- Or could he be **Elijah** returned from heaven: After all, John looked and acted a lot like Elijah had (Mk. 1:6; 2 Ki. 1:8). The Jewish people expected Elijah to return and prepare the way for the Messiah (Mal. 3:1-3 & 4:5-6).

Malachi 3:1 (LEB) "Look! I *am* going to send **my messenger**, and **he will prepare the way before me**. And the Lord whom you *are* seeking will come suddenly to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant, *in* whom you *are* taking pleasure—look!—*he is* about to come," says Yahweh of hosts.

Malachi 4:5-6 (LEB) ⁵ Look! I *am* going to send to you **Elijah** the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh! ⁶ And **he will bring back the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the hearts of the sons to their fathers**, so that I will not come and strike the land *with* a ban."

Although John denied being Elijah returned from heaven, he **did fulfill the prophecies referring to Elijah**.

* see "The Second Coming of...Elijah?" (attached)

Indeed, *John DID fulfill this prophecy as the angel told his father before His birth.*

Luke 1:16-17 (CSB) ¹⁶ He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And **he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children**, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."

Jesus clarifies this for His apostles just before His death.

Matthew 17:10-13 (CSB) ¹⁰ So the disciples asked him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹ "Elijah is coming and will restore everything," he replied. ¹² "But I tell you: **Elijah has already come**, and they didn't recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." ¹³ Then **the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist**.

- The Jewish people also awaited *a prophet like Moses*, whom they called **the prophet**, based on *Deut 18:15*. The apostle Peter later applies this to Jesus (Acts 3:22-23).

YOUR NOTES

John denied being **the Messiah**, denied being the literal **Elijah** returned from heaven, and he denied being **the Prophet**. It's time for John to answer the question. He fulfills **Isaiah 40:3**, written 700 years beforehand.

The Messiah's Messenger

John 1:23 (CSB) ²³ He said, "I am a **voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord**—just as Isaiah the prophet said."

All four gospels connect John the Baptist to fulfilling Isaiah 40:3 (cf. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). Only here, however, does he actually quote the verse himself.² John is paving the path for the Lord!

John is NOT the Messiah, but the Messenger, heralding the arrival of the coming King. We should follow John's humble example and constantly remember...

HE > me

By Whose Authority?

John 1:24-28 (CSB) ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ So they asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you aren't the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?" ²⁶ "I baptize with water," John answered them. "Someone stands among you, but you don't know him. ²⁷ **He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie.**" ²⁸ All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

This is the first mention of the **Pharisees** (but it will not be the last). While John never mentions the Sadducees (more liberal), he often references the Pharisees (more conservative) as Jewish academics and council members who plotted with the chief priests to do away with Jesus (e.g., 7:32, 45; 9:13, 40; 11:47, 57; 18:3).³

"Why then do you baptize if you aren't the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?" These leaders might have accepted baptism of Jews by one of these end-time authority figures, but by whose authority was this man able to **baptize** Jews?

- Jewish people were very familiar with *ceremonial washing*, submerging themselves as a picture of purification.

- **Only proselytes** (Gentiles converting to the Jewish faith) would be baptized by another. John taught it wasn't enough to be born Jewish; one must REPENT of sin and prepare to meet the Messiah to belong to God's family.

* *God has NO GRANDCHILDREN - only CHILDREN...who repent of sin and run to Him! Your parents & grandparents don't get you in.*

He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie.

According to rabbinic tradition (in Babylonian Talmud), the rabbi could demand his students willingly serve with the exception of touching his feet.⁴ This was the job of the lowest servant, yet John didn't consider himself worthy to do that! **This speaks not only to the humility of John but also the greatness of Jesus.** John understood that...

HE > me

John was a humble messenger of Jesus...ARE WE?

- John was empowered with the Holy Spirit. We are given the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.

- John wasn't distracted. He was simple, seeking, & living a holy life.

- **Are you DISTRACTED? Identify the distractions.** Open the Scriptures & make time for people who are seeking & sharing Jesus.

- John cared about the souls of others - pleading for people to repent before it was too late.

- **Do YOU care about the souls of others?** PRAY for God to send workers to them. ASK GOD to use YOU! Open your MOUTH to plead with them and persuade them.

YOUR NOTES

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *John 1-11, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 53.

³ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 132.

⁴ Ibid.

The Second Coming of...Elijah?

By Jackie Watts

Rightly interpreting prophecy is tricky. While we understand our own English metaphors like, "It's raining cats and dogs", we don't so quickly understand when other cultures use metaphors that are foreign to us. But what happens when there doesn't seem to be metaphoric language? Thankfully, we have the advantage of being able to view Old Testament prophecy through New Testament interpreters.

One of the most interesting passages that should demonstrate the importance of too quickly & assuredly interpreting Old Testament prophecy, can be found in **Malachi 4:5-6**.

"Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." (Mal. 4:5-6)¹

Orthodox Jews, with this prophecy in mind, leave a place for **Elijah** at their Passover feast, expecting his return. But is this what we should expect? The New Testament demonstrates this would be an incorrect interpretation. First, Zechariah is told of his son's birth. That son, John the Baptist, would fulfill the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6.

¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and **you shall call his name John**. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and **he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.**" (Luke 1:13-17)

At this point some would argue that Malachi doesn't say "someone like Elijah", but says that "Elijah the prophet" would return. Of course, this was how the Jews of Jesus' day thought too. And here's where it gets interesting. Look how Jesus Himself interprets this prophecy.

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ **This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."**...

¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, **he is Elijah who is to come**. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:7-10, 13-15)

Note that Jesus calls John the Baptist "he of whom it is written" referring to who is spoken of in **Malachi 3:1**.

"Behold, **I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me**. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal. 3:1)

¹ All Scripture is taken from English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise stated.

Further, Jesus tells those who are willing to receive what He says, that “he” - John the Baptist” - “he is Elijah who is to come”. In other words, this isn’t something future that must occur, but something that had already come to pass. Indeed, Jesus, “the Lord whom you seek” did “suddenly come into his temple”. To make this claim about John the Baptist even more clear, when coming down the mountain from the transfiguration event, look how Jesus responded to the disciples’ question.

Matthew 17:10-13 ¹⁰ And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” ¹¹ He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you that **Elijah has already come**, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of **John the Baptist**. (see also Mark 9:9-13)

If, according to Jesus, **Elijah has already come** and restored all things, then we must press *our concept* of what “restore all things” means to fit what Jesus intends. John had prepared people for the coming of Jesus, calling people to repent and seek Lamb of God who was soon to take the sins of the world (John 1:29-30). Listening to John’s prompting, many left his ministry to follow the Messiah (John 3:25-30). John’s humility, purity, & obedience to fulfill his calling, led Jesus to say these powerful words.

Matthew 11:11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women **there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist**. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

This means that, according to Jesus, John the Baptist was even greater than Elijah the Prophet. Yet the restoration Jesus was bringing makes the least in the kingdom even more righteous than him. This is one of many reasons why we should be living like Jesus - not Elijah, is returning!