

Lesson 44: God Sent John to Teach and Baptize; John Baptized Jesus

Most everyone has heard of John the Baptist. While John was known as “the Baptist,” he was in fact the first prophet called by God since Malachi some 400 years before his own birth.

Now what would you think if you learned that someone had foretold or prophesied your birth and what you would be doing in life about 700 yrs before you were even born? You’d probably say, “No way! There’s no way on earth that someone could predict your life 700 yrs ahead of time. And yet, John’s own coming was foretold over 700 years previously by another prophet. In [Isaiah 40:3-5](#) it states: “A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’”

John arrives on the scene long before we have television or movies, around 2000 yrs before we have smartphones or flatscreen TVs. And when John the Baptist showed up, he was the most exciting person to come to town. They came from all over to see him and hear his message. But people didn’t just come to see him, they took his message to heart and they confessed their sins and repented and then they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Here’s a scene from the Gospel of John film where John the Baptist is being confronted by the religious leaders.

REVIEW questions from Lesson 43

1. What does the name Immanuel mean? It means “God with us.” *Jesus was God, come to earth to live with human beings.*
2. In what country was Jesus born? *In the land of Israel.*
3. In what town in Israel did the prophets say Jesus would be born? *Bethlehem.*
4. Was it right for the wise men to worship Jesus? *Yes, because Jesus was God the Son.*
5. To which country did God tell Joseph to take Jesus in order to escape from Herod? *Egypt.*
6. To which town in Israel did Joseph take Mary and Jesus after they left Egypt? *Nazareth.*
7. Why was Jesus born into the world? *To be the Deliverer of sinners—to save people from the control of Satan, sin, and death.*
8. Although Jesus looked like other children, what great difference was there? *Jesus was God as well as a human being.*
9. Did Jesus ever do anything wrong? *No, Jesus was born sinless, and He never thought, said, or did anything which displeased His Father.*

10. Was anyone else sinless like Jesus? *No, everyone else inherited Adam's sin and disobeys God's laws.*

11. When Jesus is 12 yrs old, he travels with his family to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. On the way home, his parents discover that Jesus is not with their group and they head back to Jerusalem, frantically searching for him. Where do they find Jesus? *In the Temple, conversing with the Jewish leaders and asking them questions.*

12. What does Jesus tell Mary as to why he left them to go to the Temple? *He was doing His father's' business by being in the Temple.*

A. Introduction

How do you get someone's attention? Well you could dress out of sync with everyone else so that you really stood out. On a hot day when people are wearing a t-shirt and shorts, you'd be wearing a heavy winter overcoat. But another way to stand out is to speak the truth to those in power which is what John the Baptist did. When the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to hear what he had to say, he called them a brood of vipers. In other words, he said, "You SNAKES!! Who warned you to flee the coming judgment? And then he told them they were relying on their Jewish lineage for salvation, but they needed to repent and start bearing fruit that showed a radical, authentic change in their lives.

People like John the Baptist don't have a whole lot of friends, but they are the kind of people that God uses to speak His words of truth to us. These men and sometimes women are not people-pleasers. They care more about pleasing God than pleasing man, and that's what you have with John.

Here's another scene of John the Baptist where John is quoting from Isaiah 40. This is from the 2015 film, The Gospel of Luke.

B. John was God's messenger to Israel.

Theme: God communicates with man.

- John, who had been chosen by God to be the prophet to prepare the Jews to receive the Deliverer, was now an adult.

It was now God's time for John to begin teaching the people.

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

Matthew 3:1-2 (ESV)

¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Here on this map is the area of Judea where John the Baptist was baptizing and calling people to repentance. I've placed a RED ARROW pointing to the area of Judea on the map. The Judean desert descends to the Dead Sea.

Some people who claimed to be especially holy lived in the wilderness. Also Jewish people anticipated a new exodus through the wilderness, so many who claimed to be prophets or messiahs gathered followings in wilderness areas. So we see John the Baptist beginning his ministry in the wilderness.

John taught the people that they must repent.

- John meant that the people must change their attitude toward God, about themselves, and about sin.
- He told them to change their minds in preparation for the coming of the promised Savior.

Here are the things they needed to understand and agree with:

- That God is the only true God and that they should serve and worship Him completely.
- That they had sinned against God by disobeying His laws and that they were unable to make themselves acceptable to Him.
- That all sin is against God and that God hates sin and will always punish it by separating the sinner from Himself in the everlasting fire.

These are the same things which God wants every one of us to understand about ourselves and to agree with.

Recall:

Remember when we studied the Ten Commandments found in the **Torah which is the first 5 books of the Bible**, written by Moses--How many of us have been able to keep these commandments perfectly? That's right! None of us have.

What does God call it when we break a commandment?

Yes, He calls it sin. How many times do you need to sin in order to break all of the commandments?

James 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

What if you only told one lie? Would that count as sin? Of course it would. All sin separates us from God.

And because God is holy and righteous, He hates our sin. The punishment for sin is death and eternal separation from God.

- **Theme:** God is faithful; He never changes.

John was the one who the prophet Isaiah said would precede the promised Deliverer.

³
Isaiah 40:3-5 (ESV) A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Matthew 3:2-3 (ESV)

² “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

Here’s what that might have looked like—John calling the people to repentance. This clip is from the 1965 Bible epic, “The Greatest Story Ever Told” with Charlton Heston as a very convincing John the Baptist.

C. Many people believed God’s message from John’s preaching

Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.

Matthew 3:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,

⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Notice the red arrow pointing to the Jordan River on the map. The Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee and empties into the Dead Sea.

Many of the Jews believed God’s Word which John told them and went to him to be baptized.

Like other ancient peoples, Jewish people had many symbolic rituals involving water. They washed themselves before festivals and after contact with anything they considered impure. A washing ritual was also performed when a person was initiated into a wilderness sect like the Essenes (who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls). But John’s baptism was different from these ritual washings; it was a once-for-all baptism, like the kind Gentiles experienced when they converted to Judaism. They were bathed or baptized in Mikveh pools of which they are said to be several hundred surrounding the old city of Jerusalem. Here are some pictures of what we’ve found through archaeological excavations.

In John’s day, Jewish people had special ways to practice baptism. Normally a person would strip naked, step down into the baptismal pool, and dunk himself or herself completely under water. But John’s baptisms were different. The persons baptized didn’t perform the rite on themselves, and so presumably did not strip naked.

John had a message for those who came for baptism: water alone could not change them; they needed genuine repentance. This was also true for baptisms of Gentiles coming into Judaism. John preached a special repentance, a turning from sin to God. John expected from his own people, the kind of repentance they expected of Gentiles who converted to Judaism.

- When a person was baptized, it was a sign to everyone that the person agreed with God that he deserved death for his sins, but he was trusting in God to send the Deliverer to save him.

Baptism implies identification.

The word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “baptizo.” One of the ways this word was used was to describe the process of dying cloth. When a piece of cloth was plunged into a vat of dye, it would take on the color of the dye.

Just as the cloth was identified with the dye so that it took on that color, so also the Jews identified with John’s message of repentance. Their baptism was an outward act which illustrated inner repentance and belief in John’s message. They were identifying with the truth God was giving them through John.

The theologian N.T. Wright writes that “Baptism is the starting point of the Christian pilgrimage. We begin our pilgrimage with the death and resurrection of Jesus.”

John 3:5 that says "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God".

This is a reference to water baptism, and the necessity of baptism for salvation. Only he or she who is born of water and spirit, which is baptism in water and Holy Spirit, can enter the Kingdom of God.

D. John’s words to the proud and unrepentant

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

Matthew 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Most of the leaders of the temple were proud.

N.T. Wright gives us this insight:

Imagine massive floods sweeping through the countryside. Ancient cities suddenly find themselves under several feet of water. People aren't expecting it, and now can't quite believe it's happening.

If the authorities have enough warning, they do their best to get people out of their houses to stop them being trapped. They drive round parts of the city announcing that trouble is approaching and that people should leave at once. They make announcements on the local radio and television. Imminent danger needs urgent action.

That's the kind of work John the Baptist was doing. We don't usually think of preachers going around making that kind of announcement. Even politicians don't usually tell us things are getting very urgent - or, if they do, we usually take no notice.

But people believed John, and came to him for a different sort of flooding: baptism, being plunged into the river Jordan.

Let’s take a look at these leaders and consider what the Bible tells us about their attitudes.

- **Scribes**

All that Moses and the prophets had written was now on scrolls. The men who copied the words of God onto these scrolls were called scribes. They were also called “lawyers” and “teachers of the Law,” because they were the men who were supposed to know and be able to explain the real meaning of the words of God.

Many scribes were very proud because of their learning. They thought they were pleasing to God just because they could remember and explain the meaning of many parts of God’s Word. They didn’t realize that it is more important to God that we believe His Word and obey it.

- **Pharisees**

Some of the other leaders of the Jews were called Pharisees. The Pharisees tried to please God and be accepted by Him by obeying many different rules which they themselves had written. The Pharisees added to God’s Word. The Pharisees believed in life after death and the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed that God punishes sin and that He rewards righteousness.

They did not think that they were sinners like other people. They kept themselves separate from anyone who was not a Pharisee. They were proud and thought that they were good enough to be accepted by God because of all the things that they were doing.

- **Sadducees**

There were other Jewish leaders who were called Sadducees. The Sadducees also went to the temple and claimed to worship God. However, they did not believe many things which God had written in His Word. The Sadducees took away from God’s Word some of the truths which were in it.

For example, the Sadducees did not believe in the existence of angels, nor did they believe in the resurrection of the dead. They rejected everything except the first five books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy.

They were interested in keeping in good standing with the Roman government and making sure that they kept their own position as leaders of the Jews. They did not really trust in God from their hearts.

Many of these religious leaders would not admit that they were sinners.

- They thought that they were good enough for God to accept them.
- Because the Pharisees and Sadducees were so proud, John’s words to them were very strong.

Here’s a powerful scene from John 5 where Jesus has just healed lame man who had been crippled and unable to walk for 38 yrs. Jesus is now addressing the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees. **This clip is from the Gospel of John, part of the Visual Bible Project.**

Explain:

When we talk about being proud of ourselves, we are talking about an attitude that says, “I think my way is best, no matter what God says.”

Pride means selfishness, self-centeredness, and boastfulness. Many people think that they are always right. Even when they know they are wrong, they hate to admit it. They want everyone to think they are great when they really are sinful, like everyone else.

James 4:6 says, “...God resists the proud....”

God sets Himself to fight against people who are proud and who will not agree with Him. But He promises to help and deliver those who agree that they are sinners and who acknowledge that only He can help them.

Matthew 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

John told the Pharisees and the Sadducees that, if they really accepted God’s thoughts about them, as spoken through John, then they must show it by their actions.

Matthew 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Many of the Jews were proud that Abraham was the father of their nation.

They thought that God would accept them because they were the descendants of Abraham.

Compare:

- Some people think that they are automatically accepted by God because of their parents’ faith.
- Or a person may think that because he was raised in a church and has gone through all of the church ceremonies, God will accept him.

No one is accepted by God because of his parents or his church background. God judges everyone individually, not by his family, and not by his works nor by his church affiliation.

John told the Pharisees and Sadducees not to be proud or to trust in the fact that they were Abraham’s children.

- God can do anything He wants to do.
- He could even make children for Abraham out of the stones if He wanted.
- He was telling them bluntly that in themselves they had nothing about which to boast.

E. The Testimony of John the Baptist

Theme: Jesus Christ is God.

John 1:19-28 (ESV)

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)

He answers them starting at v. 25

²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,

²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

But John refused all such titles. A group of priests and Levites - Temple functionaries - came to check him out, sent by the Pharisees who were one of the leading pressure groups of the time. They had their own reasons for wanting to keep tabs on people. If someone was behaving in a strange new way, announcing a message from God, they wanted to know about it. And John was indeed behaving strangely. Israel's scriptures hadn't spoken of a prophet who would come and plunge people into water. Why was he doing it?

John's answer, here and in what follows, is that he is getting people ready for someone else. The one claim he makes apart from his belief that Israel's God has commanded him to baptize people in water - is that he is a 'voice'. Or rather, the voice, the voice spoken of by Isaiah, in the same passage where he speaks of the grass withering but the Word of God standing for ever (40.1-8). John wants us to make the connection with verses 1-18. And what the voice commands is to get the road straightened out. The master is coming; the way must be prepared.

F. John baptized Jesus.

In Luke 3:23 the Bible says that Jesus was now about thirty years old.

Matthew 3:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;

Here's that scene depicted in the mini-series "The Bible" which aired on the History Channel a few years ago.

Jesus was born perfect and he was sinless, therefore he did not need to be baptized for the repentance of any sins. So why was Jesus baptized?

Jesus was baptized in order to fulfill the legal requirements to enter into the priesthood. He was priest after the order of Melchizedek. To be consecrated as a priest, you had to be washed with water.

- [Leviticus 8:6](#), "Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, and washed them with water."
- [Numbers 8:7](#), "And thus you shall do to them, for their cleansing: sprinkle purifying water on them, and let them use a razor over their whole body, and wash their clothes, and they shall be clean."

Quite simply, Jesus was baptized so he could enter into the Melchizedek priesthood, so He could be the High Priest and offer Himself as a sacrifice for our [sins](#).

The Holy Spirit came to be with Jesus to enable Him to do every-thing that God the Father had planned for Jesus to do.

G. What God said about Yeshua

Theme: Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah is God.

Matthew 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." God the Father called Yeshua (Jesus) His Son.

This is an allusion to the Hebrew Scriptures in **Psalm 2:7 (ESV)**

⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

A better rendering is "I have brought you forth like a midwife who delivers a child and presents him to the world, for all to see."

Theme: Jesus Christ is holy and righteous. God was fully satisfied with Jesus.

- **Yeshua** (Jesus) was the only man who did everything that pleased God. - God knew that Jesus was absolutely without sin.
- **Yeshua** (Jesus) was completely holy and righteous, perfect in God's sight.

H. John knew that Jesus was the promised Deliverer.

John 1:29-37 (ESV)

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'

³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

- ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.
³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'
³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."
³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,
³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"
³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

John did not know who the Deliverer would be, but when he saw this sign from God, he was sure that Jesus was the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.

I. Conclusion

What about us?

Do we need signs like this one which God gave to John to prove that Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Deliverer?

- No, we do not need miraculous signs.
- We have the Word of God, the Bible.

Are we like the religious leaders who thought their good works and their religious background were enough to make them acceptable to God?

- Every one of us needs a Savior.
- And God has given only one: Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.
- He is the only Savior for the whole world, and the only Savior for you and for me.

QUESTIONS for REVIEW:

1. What did John tell the people? *John told the people to repent and be baptized.*
2. What does it mean to repent? *Repentance is a change of mind about ourselves, our sin, and God. It means we agree with God that we are sinners, that we have disobeyed His laws, and that we are unable to make ourselves acceptable to God.*
3. Whom was John getting the people ready to receive? *The promised Deliverer, the Savior of men.*
4. Who were the scribes?
 - a. *They were the Jewish religious leaders who made the hand-written copies of the Old Testament.*
 - b. *They were very proud of their learning.*
 - c. *They didn't realize that it is not only important to know God's Word but also to believe and obey it.*
5. Who were the Pharisees?
 - a. *They were some of the religious leaders of the Jews.*
 - b. *They tried to obey many rules of their own which they thought would make them acceptable to God.*
 - c. *The Pharisees were proud and thought that God accepted them because of their own goodness.*

6. Who were the Sadducees?

- a. They, like the Pharisees, were religious leaders of the Jews.*
- b. They did not accept that all of the Old Testament was the Word of God.*
- c. The Sadducees were more interested in retaining their acceptance with the Roman rulers and their position as rulers over the Jews than they were in pleasing God.*

7. Why didn't the priests and other religious leaders accept John's teaching?

- a. They thought they were acceptable to God because of the things which they did.*
- b. They thought God would accept them because they were the descendants of Abraham.*

8. What does Baptism do? *Baptism is the start of our Christian life. In baptism, we participate in the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua, Jesus Christ, as we bury our old nature and our old life. Paul says that we are buried with Jesus in baptism, and raised up with Him to walk in a new life.*

9. Does Baptism save you? *No, we are saved by placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and receiving Him into our lives as Lord and Savior. But, along with doing that, we are to be baptized INTO Jesus, so that we take on His identity and we bury our old nature, our old life. The question really is: Can you be truly saved and trusting Jesus as your Lord if you refuse baptism or don't want to be baptized?*

10. Why was Jesus baptized? *To fulfill the legal requirements for the priesthood. Jesus was baptized as our High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek.*

11. What did God the Father say when Jesus was baptized?

- a. God the Father said He was completely pleased with Jesus.*
- b. God the Father commanded the disciples to listen to Jesus.*
- c. He called Jesus His Son.*

Next Lesson 45: Jesus, When Tempted, Resisted and Rebuked Satan