

# JOHN THE BAPTIZER

Luke 3:15-20, 7:18-30 / Matthew 14:1-13

"Yeshua" §§58 & 73

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Today we will be picking back up with a look at John the Baptizer and what took place after he ushered Jesus into public ministry. His name has not been mentioned in months, but despite his relatively small coverage in the Gospel accounts, we will see in our study that John played a role in God's story unlike and *even greater* than anyone who had come before him. In order to get the whole context we have to do a little looking back.

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→	John The Baptizer
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## JOHN'S MESSAGE AND IMPRISONMENT (LUKE 3:15-20)

John came out of the wilderness, looking and talking like a true Old Testament prophet. Robed in a garment of camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey and calling the nation of Israel to repent and be baptized. His message and presence was so powerful that the people wondered if he was the prophesied Messiah. But John knew his role, he had been selected by God to usher in the Messiah, in fulfillment of Malachai 3:1. He spoke with authority and without fear, but his prophetic messages didn't away receive a warm welcome. This was the case with Herod Antipas, who ruled in that area, particularly after he divorced his previous wife and married Herodias, who was both Herod's half brother's wife, as well as his niece! This obviously was a disgrace and an abomination to God, and in true prophetic form, John made known God's disapproval. Herod was an evil man, and further added to his resume of wickedness, the arrest and imprisonment of John.

## JOHN'S DOUBTS (LUKE 7:18-20)

While he is stuck in prison, John continues to hear reports about Jesus. You can imagine John's excitement over hearing the story of Jesus cleansing the temple and Jesus' rising conflict with the Jewish religious leaders. John knew very well the prophecies of Malachi regarding the Messiah. (See Malachi 3:1-5) John fully expected Jesus to come in with judgment and fire, and reform Judaism and restore the temple system. John expect a violent overthrow resulting in the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. However, as we have studied, on the "day of rejection" (Matthew 12) Jesus inaugurated a new "mystery" kingdom, deviating from the prophecies of Malachi. He was rejected by the Jewish leaders, and so Jesus put on hold his mission to purify and reform Judaism. That day would indeed come, but it was not going to happen at this point. Jesus had transitioned from trying to reform and restore Judaism through a violent purge, to prepare his disciples for the violence that they would receive as they took this message of the new kingdom out into the Jewish cities.

This transition in the ministry and message of Jesus takes John by great surprise. This is certainly not what was prophesied by Malachi, and most certainly not what John expects of the Messiah. It is in fact, so opposed to what John expects, that he actually questions whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. The fact that John had moved from unbridled confidence in Jesus being the Messiah, to a place of doubt and questioning, helps us to realize just how dramatic a shift took place in Jesus' ministry on the day of rejection. Had the leaders received Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus would have indeed reformed and purified God's chosen people and established his Messianic kingdom, but due to their outright rejection of his Messiahship, and their blasphemy of the Holy Spirit of God, Jesus' mission took a startling turn. In response to the reports of Jesus' ministry shift, John sends two of his disciples to go and ask Jesus directly if he is indeed the Messiah, or if they should "look for another".

## **JESUS RESPONDS TO JOHN'S DOUBTS (LUKE 7:21-23)**

Jesus responds to John's doubts by performing a number of miracles in front of these messengers, and then quoting a number of prophetic passages from Isaiah, both to put to rest John's doubts about his Messiahship, but also to give John a warning. (See Isaiah 35:5-6, 61:1-2, 26:19) Jesus shows and tells these messengers of John that he is indeed the Messiah and is fulfilling many of the prophecies regarding the Messiah. Jesus concludes his response with a prophetic warning to John. "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Jesus picks up another image from Isaiah, the "stone of offence and rock of stumbling" (Isaiah 8:14-15). Jesus is reminding John that when the Messiah comes there will be many who will stumble and be broken over him. In this reminder is an encouragement to John to consider the miracles and the message of Jesus and to believe in him as the Messiah, rather than join those who stumble over Jesus because of the things he is doing OR not doing. Jesus is encouraging John to overcome his unfulfilled expectations and have full confidence because of what Jesus is saying and doing.

## **JESUS HONORS JOHN (LUKE 7:24-35)**

When the disciples have left to take this reply back to the imprisoned John, Jesus turns to the listening crowds and honors John. Any questions about the importance of John that may have arisen from his doubts are quickly put to rest. Jesus makes it clear that there has never been a man born who is greater than John the Baptizer (v28). This is not because of the greatness of his works (he didn't do any miracles) nor because of the results of his preaching, but rather, his elevated status came directly from the role he played in relation to Jesus, the Messiah.

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets. He looked like them and sounded like them and people recognized that he was indeed a prophet from God. One powerful difference between John and ALL the other prophets who came before him, was that all the other prophets were "mouthpieces of God", being used by God to bring His word to Kings, Rulers and nations. Whereas John the Baptist was the prophet who introduced people to the Living Word of God, the Word made flesh, namely Jesus the Messiah. John's greatness surpassed all others because he introduced the world to its Creator and Rescuer.

## **JOHN'S DEATH (MATTHEW 14:1-12 / MARK 6:14-29)**

We never find out how John received this response of Jesus, though we have every reason to believe he was convinced of the validity of Jesus' Messiahship, despite his own difficulty in understanding the shift in Jesus' ministry and it's temporary departure from the prophecies in Malachi. We never find out much more about John at all, because his disapproval of the marriage of Herod to his sister-in-law & niece ended up getting him killed. Herod seems to have had an odd relationship with John. Herod didn't like him but knew he was righteous and holy; he wanted to kill him, but was afraid of the people, so he kept John alive and would gladly talk with him, though not sure what to do with him. Herodias on the other hand hated John and was not afraid to have him killed, and finally she found an opportunity to have him beheaded as a result of her husband's drunken lust and pride. John, the herald of the Messiah, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), fulfilled his role in preparing the way for the Lord. He led the way for Jesus' ministry, and his terrible death at the hands of the wicked, is a foreshadowing of the path the Messiah will eventually walk as well.